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Digital Object Identifier: <https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2020.304>

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COMPLEX ECOLOGIES AND UNRULY BODIES IN ROSA MONTERO'S
SPECULATIVE FICTION

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
Kiersty Lemon-Rogers

Lexington, KY

Director: Dr. Carmen Moreno-Nuño, Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies

Lexington, KY

2020

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

COMPLEX ECOLOGIES AND UNRULY BODIES IN ROSA MONTERO'S SPECULATIVE FICTION

Rosa Montero's work stands out for its compassionate and rich view of humanity. My study is a comparative analysis of Montero's six Speculative Fiction (SF) novels and four volumes of her collected columns, selected for the proximity of their publication to the SF novels. Montero expresses her ethos directly through her weekly columns in *El País* and through her novels, which have the potential to attract a different readership than her journalism. Her SF novels, in particular, allow Montero to address contemporary problems in settings that allow readers to suspend their disbelief and connect with her narrative, rather than rejecting her work because of her sociopolitical stances. These six SF texts make up forty percent of the novels Montero has published for adults and they merit a comprehensive thematic study. Montero's SF work should be recognized as a serious literary and social contribution given the ethical stances she takes through this genre. Montero employs both her journalism and her SF work to communicate serious concerns about contemporary Spanish and global issues to a wider audience than she might reach through either genre alone. Her concerns include ecological stewardship as well as class, race, and gender inequities in Spanish and global society. In my cross-genre analysis of her work, I examine how Montero uses both genres to communicate her concerns and address key problems from different angles, which allows me to form a more complete picture of her body of work. Montero's SF work, like Spanish SF in general, has been understudied and should be recognized as a serious literary and social contribution, especially given the ethical stances she takes through this genre.

KEYWORDS: Speculative Fiction, Journalism, Comparative Analysis, Rosa Montero, Spanish Contemporary Literature

Kiersty Lemon-Rogers
29 June 2020

COMPLEX ECOLOGIES AND UNRULY BODIES IN ROSA MONTERO'S
SPECULATIVE FICTION

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To Jacob and Stella (and the cats, Tesla and Eleven)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While my dissertation is an individual project, I have benefitted from the guidance and mentorship of various individuals. First, my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Carmen Moreno-Nuño, has provided timely and insightful guidance throughout my research and writing process. Her scholarship is an example of the work I aspire to emulate. I also wish to express gratitude for the supportive members of my committee. I thank Dr. Monica Díaz and Dr. Moisés Castillo, as well as Dr. Patricia Ehrkamp, for their participation on my Dissertation Committee. I also wish to thank the Outside Examiner, Dr. Jennifer Hunt. The clear comments and insightful suggestions I received during my prospectus presentation, throughout the writing process, and in my defense have helped me improve this dissertation.

In addition to the formal academic help I received from the above individuals, I have benefitted from the mentorship of Dr. Dale Pratt of Brigham Young University, whose class on Spanish Contemporary Science Fiction introduced me to Montero's work and who was my advisor and thesis committee chair when I completed my MA. I am also grateful to Dr. Dale Knickerbocker, currently the President of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, for his insights and support as I have participated in ICFA, the IAFA conference, beginning in 2014. I am grateful to Dr. Kathryn Allan for her scholarship on disability in SF and for her help in finding more disabilities studies sources after I met her at ICFA.

I am grateful to Marissa Pielstick Kunkee and Kristy Eagar for their personal support and their help in writing throughout the last several years. Both have helped me refine my ideas and communicate them more clearly. I also thank Naomi Kritzer for her help in parsing some of the harmful tropes that I was previously unfamiliar with. Finally, I could not have completed my doctoral studies or my dissertation without the continued support of my spouse, Jacob Lemon-Rogers. Words are not enough to express my gratitude for the work he has done and the sacrifices he has made in the last five years.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

All Spanish to English translations in this dissertation are mine. Some of Montero's novels exist in English. However, due to pandemic quarantine restrictions, the campus libraries are currently inaccessible, and the libraries I have access to do not own any of the translations in digital format. Due to university budget constraints, they are unable to purchase additional materials at this time, and my personal budget also does not allow for that expenditure. Additionally, none of the volumes of Montero's collected columns exist in English translation. These factors led to my decision to translate the quotes myself. I have focused on conveying the meaning of the quotes. In some cases, this has meant making minor adjustments to idiomatic phrasing or including two translations of some words where the original text conveys more meaning than a single English word. I have marked the translations with brackets: []. They appear immediately after the Spanish quotes for ease of reference.

Introduction¹

Climate change was not a subject I saw as a real concern as a teenager. The first time I took it seriously was when I read *Lionboy* (2003), the first book in a Speculative Fiction (SF) series by Zizou Corder that plays with the devastating consequences of the Anthropocene as the backdrop for a narrative about an Afro-British boy who can talk to cats. Although I thought the author was silly for believing in climate change (but not for the talking cats), I kept reading because I enjoyed the adventure and wanted to find out what happened next. This was my first real introduction to the threat that climate change poses. Now I see this as an example of how as readers of SF suspend their disbelief, they can accept things they would otherwise reject. Structuralist theorist Tzvetan Todorov writes that the function of the supernatural is to exempt the text from the action of the law and thereby to transgress that law” (159). For me, the law from which my reading of *Lionboy* was exempt was “climate change isn’t real” and the fantastic elements of the text allowed me to suspend my automatic denial of the novel’s setting, allowing the text to cross over my mental barrier. I thus see what Todorov terms the transgression of the law as the crossing of a boundary, and I read SF as a boundary-transgressing genre which permits authors to pose contemporary problems in new ways. Rosa Montero is such an author. Her work, like *Lionboy*, has been important to my personal education, expanding my worldview. This has also become the subject of analysis in my dissertation. Montero

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expresses her ethos directly through her weekly columns in *El País* and through her novels, which have the potential to attract a broader readership than her journalism. SF novels allow Montero to address contemporary problems in settings that permit readers to suspend their disbelief and connect with her narrative, rather than rejecting her work because of her sociopolitical stances.

This dissertation is a comparative analysis of Rosa Montero's Speculative Fiction (SF) novels and a selection of her weekly columns for *El País Semanal*, a supplement to the Madrid-based newspaper *El País*. While Rosa Montero is widely acknowledged as a key Spanish author and has received national and international recognition for her body of work, to date no scholar has studied her six Speculative Fiction novels for adults together. While some of the six novels I analyze have appeared as the object of study in articles or in comparison with one or more of Montero's non-SF novels, they remain unexamined as examples of the SF genre. Her work in this genre represents a large portion of her significant contribution to Spanish literature and the lack of a study that examines Montero's SF novels together as Speculative Fiction literature presents a serious gap in the field of international SF scholarship.

A study of Montero's SF work is additionally important because the contributions of women Speculative Fiction authors have often gone unacknowledged, despite the vital impact women have had on the very existence of SF genres, from Mary Shelley onward. Patricia García and Teresa López Pellisa write that

as researchers of the fantastic, we have often encountered colleagues who are unaware that there is a tradition of high-quality Hispanic women writers of the fantastic. This dismissal of female authors, whether intentional or not, does a great

disservice to a great deal of outstanding Spanish-speaking women writers who have experimented with the fantastic since the nineteenth century. (García and López 16)

Montero has been recognized as a significant Spanish author and a significant woman author; however, her contributions as an author of Speculative Fiction have not been studied. This dissertation is an attempt to begin such a study.

While Speculative Fiction scholarship has grown in the past several years, the genres which SF encompasses remain understudied outside of a relatively small community of scholars. I believe this lack of attention to SF in general has contributed to a lack of attention to Montero's SF in particular. To highlight the relevance and importance of Montero's SF novels to Spanish literature, I have chosen to compare the themes Montero addresses in these novels with the sociopolitical themes she presents throughout her columns for *El País Semanal*. These themes include Montero's concern for the impact of human-caused climate change on the Earth and on marginalized groups and individuals who live here, the problems of sexism and classism which perpetuate systemic violence, and the harmful impact of oppressive systems on the vulnerable.

Chapter one: Speculative Fiction as Literature and How to Study it within the Spanish Cultural Context

Montero is not the only *madrileña* author to write across multiple genres while working as a journalist, but her work in every genre stands out for its compassionate and rich view of humanity. My study is a comparative analysis of Montero's six Speculative Fiction (SF) novels and four volumes of her collected columns, selected for the proximity of their publication to the SF novels. These six SF texts make up forty percent of the novels Montero has published for adults and they merit a comprehensive thematic study. Montero's SF work should be recognized as a serious literary and social contribution equal to her non-SF novels, given the ethical stances she takes through this genre. Montero employs both her journalism and her SF work to communicate serious concerns about contemporary Spanish and global issues to a wider audience than she might reach through either genre alone. Her concerns include ecological stewardship as well as class, race, and gender inequities in Spanish and global society. In my cross-genre analysis of her work, I examine how Montero uses both genres to communicate her concerns and address key problems from different angles, which allows me to form a more complete picture of her body of work.

Theoretical approach

In my analysis of Montero's Speculative Fiction (SF) novels in conversation with her columns, I have chosen to employ the theoretical frame of the Capitalocene, a term which Andreas Malm suggested in his 2016 text *Fossil Capital* as a more accurate term for our present geologic period (391). Montero's work critiques the systemic problems of oppressive systems that form a part of capitalist state apparatuses. Montero's SF novels

(with the exception of *Historia del Rey Transparente*, set in the Middle Ages) take place during the era in which capitalism and its mechanisms have already left their mark and during which they continue to make a profound impact on the geological function of the planet. While *Temblor* is set after an apocalypse and its economy has reverted to a kind of mercantilism, the setting for the novel has been shaped by nuclear fallout, which has its origins in capitalist- and command economy-funded projects. For this reason, the Capitalocene concept is an apt analytical framework for those novels, which I will analyze in chapters three and four, which are arranged thematically. Chapter two will address the same themes in *Historia del Rey Transparente* which I analyze in Montero's other SF novels, but because its setting requires a different analytical frame and, therefore, its own chapter. In this present chapter, chapter one, I turn to scholars of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and the Fantastic to define the genre of Speculative Fiction and delineate the scope of my dissertation. I draw on the work of Tzvetan Todorov, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, and Rosemary Jackson. I also refer to the work of Sara Brenneis to set up the cross-genre analysis methodology.

In chapter two, I analyze the effects of feudalism on the environment and on the bodies of non-normative people. *Historia del Rey Transparente (Historia)*, as it is set in the Middle Ages long before the emergence of capitalism, I turn to the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is the geological age in which humanity and its creations have had a geological effect on the Earth (Steffen et al 843). In this chapter, I analyze the way Montero's writing in this novel recounts the impact of human-created phenomena on the earth prior to the emergence of Capitalism. As I said above, this setting is why I cannot employ the theoretical frame of the Capitalocene here as I do in the following chapters. It

does, however, make sense to analyze *Historia* within the frame of the Anthropocene as feudal Europe was already experience the geological impact of humanity's interventions, such as clear-cutting forests. In my analysis, I read the novel in conversation with Montero's columns which express her ecological and social concerns. In the first section, I draw on environmental scholars such as Rob Nixon, whose concept of slow violence is vital for my understanding of the impact environmental conditions on the health and lives of the marginalized. Additionally, Deborah P Dixon's *Feminist Geopolitics: Material States* informs my reading of the human geography which Montero draws on and creates in her historical fantasy. In the second section of this chapter, Rosemary Garland-Thompson's term *misfitting* is key to an understanding of the unevenly distributed impact of oppressive systems on marginalized bodies. Likewise, Jasbir Puar's combination of queer studies, biopolitics, and disability studies work in *The Right to Maim* engages with the disabling and debilitating effects of oppressive systems. I also draw on the above theorists in chapters three and four as I analyze the same themes in Montero's other SF novels.

In chapters three and four, I turn to the Capitalocene, which emphasizes Capitalism's role in the collective impact which humans have on the planet. In chapter three, as in the first section of chapter two, I study Montero's ecological concerns in her SF and journalism and the human geographies she creates and explores in in *Temblor* and the three Bruna Husky novels. Dixon's *Feminist Geopolitics* again contributes to my analysis of the dystopian, apocalyptic, and quotidian settings of the novels. As the Bruna Husky novels largely take place in urban environments, Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre's writing on cities, nature, and urbanism helps frame my analysis of those sites

as they appear in this trilogy. Nixon's concept of slow violence again works to shed light on the impact of environmental factors on Montero's marginalized characters. This chapter engages with the relationships between people and the spaces they inhabit.

In Chapter four, I study Montero's critique of oppressive hierarchical systems' effect on marginalized bodies in *Temblor*, *Bella y oscura*, and the Bruna Husky trilogy. Montero is also highly critical of capitalist systems, command economies, religious hierarchies, feudalism, and patriarchal hierarchies. In *Temblor*, although the economy seems to employ both barter and currency, the settings and hierarchies of her novels are primarily shaped by capitalist systems and in this chapter, then, I focus on the problems inherent to social, health, and government systems and the material ways these systems debilitate and disable their most vulnerable inhabitants. I draw on geographer Jenna Loyd's *Health Rights are Civil Rights* in my analysis of how systemic violence becomes visible in the lack or availability of healthcare resources. I also return to Puar's work in *The Right to Maim* which aids my analysis of the debilitating nature of oppressive systems represented in Montero's work. Garland-Thomson's concept of *misfitting* is again vital to my analysis of how individual bodies interact with those systems. Scholar Kathryn Allan's work with integrating disabilities studies and science fiction also comes into play in this chapter as I work to analyze the representation of disabled characters in Montero's SF. Within the framework of the Capitalocene, I analyze the way Montero recounts the violence which systems enact on human bodies, how Montero's disabled characters have to interact differently with oppressive systems than their abled counterparts, and the varying axes of marginalization which Montero's characters face.

Comparative Analysis and Close Reading of Genres in Dialogue

My methodology is comparative analysis and a close reading of Montero's SF novels in dialogue with her columns for *El País Semanal*. I take some cues from Sara J. Brenneis. In her work *Genre Fusion*, Brenneis addresses the critical absence of studies that treat works of history and works of fiction by the same author as a single body of work. She proposes genre fusion as a remedy to this problem: "Genre fusion interprets historiographic texts in contemporary Spain alongside their intersections with historical fiction, thus bringing a new perspective to contemporary Hispanism" (18). Brenneis's genre fusion is not to be confused with genre hybridity, which melds genres together within a single work. Montero's *La loca de la casa* is a work of genre hybridity, combining autobiography with fictional elements and philosophical musings on several issues. As an autobiographical fiction, without the fantastical elements found in the SF novels, it expresses Montero's views on the importance of memory and history, as well as playing with the fallibility of the human ability to remember and the human capacity to craft narratives about ourselves, themes that also figure prominently in her SF works. Brenneis's fusion is the result of a comparative analysis of historical and fictional texts by authors such as Javier Marías and Carmen Martín Gaité.

While Sara Brenneis analyzes the separation and the fusion of historiography and historical fiction, I explore the intersections of SF and journalism. I understand that the perceived gap between SF and journalism may be quite a bit larger than that between historical fiction and journalism, given the vast differences in style, genre, and reception between journalism and SF. Some might even argue that SF has no basis for comparison with journalism. Nonetheless, I argue that SF as a genre has always had close ties to

sociopolitical concerns and that the many intersections between Montero's SF and her journalism form a strong basis for comparison and analysis. The methodology Brenneis uses in *Genre Fusion* as she traces the connections between Javier Marías's historical fiction and his columns for *El País Semanal* serve as a model for what I have set out to do in my project. Like Montero, Javier Marías writes for *El País* while also writing fiction. In her fifth chapter, Brenneis reads Marías's publications as a single body of work and highlights the themes and events that his historical fiction and journalism allow Marías to approach from different perspectives. In my analysis of Montero's work, I echo Brenneis's methodology as I trace common themes between Montero's columns and her Speculative Fiction. Brenneis uses comparative analysis to interpret "historiographic texts in contemporary Spain alongside their intersections with historical fiction, thus bringing a new perspective to contemporary Hispanism" (18). I use this method to examine how Montero uses SF and essay to address her concerns about sociopolitical issues. A comparative analysis of Montero's journalism and her SF allows me to examine her sociopolitical concerns and how she expresses them. I argue that Montero, precisely because of the perceived gap between SF and journalism, has access to even more different angles and perspectives than are available to Marías in his more closely related genres. I want to view Montero's separate genres in dialogue, to form a more complete picture of how she represents her socio-political concerns directly in her columns and as part of a larger narrative in her works of Speculative Fiction.

I use the term Speculative Fiction (SF) to refer to an umbrella genre encompassing works with futuristic, supernatural, fantastic, and other "unrealistic" elements.²

² <http://www.newlexicons.com/blog/2016/12/7/what-is-speculative-fiction>

Deliberately broad, SF “offers a blanket term for the supergenres of fantasy, science fiction, and other non-mimetic genres that may or may not be derivatives of these two” (Oziewicz). I divide SF into the also broad genres of Fantasy and Science Fiction, which are within the scope of my current project, along with Horror and its various subgenres, which fall outside that scope. Works of Science Fiction frequently include technological and futuristic elements such as technologically powered travel through space or time while works of Fantasy generally draw on supernatural elements such as magic or gods. Montero's SF works explicitly employ outside-of-reality settings, characters, and/or technologies. Beyond these admittedly fluid distinctions, I further differentiate the genres of Speculative Fiction, Fantasy, and Science Fiction from the literary *mode* known as *the Fantastic*, which is not a genre, but a manner, mood, or method of writing. Montero's SF works fall into the supergenres of Fantasy or Science Fiction, but they also employ elements of the Fantastic. Tzvetan Todorov writes, in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, that the Fantastic must necessarily induce a sense of hesitation in the reader about the reality of the events in the narrative, and thus “by the *hesitation* it engenders, the fantastic questions precisely the existence of an irreducible opposition between real and unreal” (Todorov 167, emphasis added). This questioning breaks down the barrier between reality and fiction, reader and text. Contemporary science fiction scholar Istvan Csicsery-Ronay writes about the function of the Fantastic mode's hesitation in science fiction, which he argues

is not a genre of aesthetic entertainment only, but *a complex hesitation* about the relationship between imaginary conceptions and historical reality unfolding into the future. S[cience] F[iction] orients itself within a concept of history that holds that science and technology actively participate in the creation of reality, implanting

human uncertainty into the natural/nonhuman world. (Csicsery-Ronay 4, emphasis added)

The uncertainty of the Fantastic allows it to cross boundaries that restrict other literary modes. Scholar Rosemary Jackson, building on Tzvetan Todorov's work, approaches the Fantastic as a mode of production, a way of writing that can appear across a variety of genres. In *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Jackson writes that the Fantastic is a dialogical mode, that

Unlike the marvelous or the mimetic, the fantastic is a mode of writing which *enters into a dialogue with the 'real' and incorporates that dialogue as part of its essential structure*. To return to Bakhtin's phrase, fantasy is 'dialogical', interrogating single or unitary ways of seeing. The issue of the narrative's internal reality is always relevant to the fantastic, with the result that the 'real' is a notion which is under constant interrogation. (Jackson 33, emphasis original)

The Fantastic, as a dialogical mode, is meta-literary. It is literary mode which ponders the nature of literature. Todorov can be read to argue this point in his work on the Fantastic, one of the earliest texts to treat Fantastic literature as a serious object of academic study. Todorov writes that the Fantastic exists not on the periphery of the literary canon, but as central to the very idea of literature:

on the one hand, it represents the quintessence of literature, insofar as the questioning of the limit between real and unreal, proper to all literature, is its explicit center. On the other hand, though, it is only a propaedeutics to literature: by combating the metaphysics of everyday language, it gives that language life; it must start from language, even if only to reject it. (Todorov 168)

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “propaedeutics” as “The body of principles or rules introductory to any art, science, or subject of special study; preliminary learning; an instance of this” (OED). Todorov’s Fantastic, then, is not only central to literature’s nature, but also that it serves as a gateway, an introduction to the rest of literature. Earlier in his text, Todorov writes that “the fantastic permits us to cross certain frontiers that are inaccessible so long as we have no recourse to it” (Todorov 158). It is the Fantastic’s liminal, ambiguous nature, both central and peripheral to literature as a whole, that allows it to be a gateway across otherwise uncrossable boundaries. As a mode of writing, the Fantastic is not tied to any particular genre. Brenneis, in her chapter on Carmen Martín Gaité’s work, necessarily mentions the Fantastic mode and examines it in light of Todorov, whose work *The Fantastic* makes a cameo appearance in Martín Gaité’s narrative. Partly due to Jackson’s work, the concept of the Fantastic as a mode has become more commonly accepted in studies of fantasy and of science fiction since the 1980s (Hollinger “Genre vs Mood” *Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction*). Although the Fantastic is a mode of literary production which cuts across genre boundaries, it can appear in any genre, and is particularly prevalent in Speculative Fiction, non-mimetic, works. Patricia García and Teresa López Pellisa provide an excellent explanation of the Fantastic and its history in Spanish-language literature in their *Fantastic Short Stories by Women Authors from Spain and Latin America: A Critical Anthology*. (2019). Their introduction also highlights the importance of women writers who employ that mode and provides an excellent history which remedies the all-too-common exclusion of women’s contribution to Fantastic literature from literary histories. The Fantastic mode of writing allows authors to invite their readers to suspend their disbelief and thus allows their work to move across mental

boundaries that would otherwise be far less permeable, as my anecdotal experience with *Lionboy* did for me.

Carmen Martín Gaité also drew upon Todorov when she included *The Fantastic* in *El cuarto de atrás*, which contains many Fantastic elements including the Isla de Bergai, a mythical place invented by the author and one of her childhood friends, as well as the hesitation and doubt surrounding the reality of Martín Gaité's narrative. In *Agua Pasada*, a collection of articles and essays, Martín Gaité writes, “[lo ficticio] cobra otro tipo de realidad, no regida por las mismas leyes que tienen vigencia para lo que se ve y se palpa. Lo fantástico, es decir lo inventado, trasciende estas leyes e instala su discurso en otro plano [the fictitious takes on another type of reality, not governed by the same laws that have power over that which one can see and feel. The fantastic, that is, the invented, transcends these laws and installs its discourse in another plane] (*Agua pasada* 157)” (quoted in Brenneis 99). The connection that Martín Gaité traces here between reality and fiction follows Todorov’s argument that the Fantastic and the Real are connected. I note that Todorov’s definition of the Fantastic is quite limited, specifically to the instances in which the hesitation he describes remains unresolved, but his more lasting contribution is the connection and the blurry boundary between the Fantastic and the Real, as well as the significance of the Fantastic as a part of literature.

SF allows authors more freedom in worldbuilding and it offers them the opportunity to use unfamiliar settings which separate their narratives from the era in which they write, creating a distancing effect for the audience. This critical distance can aid a suspension of disbelief, which then permits an author to criticize contemporary problems sharply while not appearing to criticize their audience directly. I argue that as authors write in the

Fantastic mode, they can express ideas that readers might find it harder to accept if they were written in a realistic mode. Csicsery-Ronay writes:

So it is that, encountering problems issuing from the social implications of science, and viewing dramatic technohistorical scenes in real life, we displace them into a virtual imaginary space, an alternate present or future that we can reflect on, where we can test our delight, anxiety, or grief, or simply play, without having to renounce our momentary sense of identity, social place, and the world. We transform our experience into S[cience] F[iction], if only for a moment. (Csicsery-Ronay 5)

Transforming contemporary experience into science fiction, fantasy, or horror can be an important rhetorical device to win the audience's agreement. For example, it is unfortunately true that many white readers will agree that fictional humans should treat androids and aliens as equals while ignoring the ways that they, the white readers, mistreat Black and Brown fellow citizens and immigrants in real life. Ideally, compassion for fictional beings would lead such racially privileged readers to treat marginalized people with more compassion, but experience with SF fans has shown that this is not often the case, as evidenced by the more toxic fandom spaces, including such groups as the Sad Puppies, the Rabid Puppies, the inhabitants of 4chan and other denizens of the Internet who created and backed GamerGate and ComicsGate. Nonetheless, it is far more likely that such readers will pick up one of Montero's novels than read her newspaper columns. This is not the audience that can be convinced to care about people they already dehumanize, as they tend to decry anything that smells of "political correctness," and social justice work is dismissed as people "trying to save themselves—from a life of cubicle-ratting or marginal freelance work [by] getting attention for themselves in a way which they think ...

will get them a cushier career than they would have enjoyed otherwise” (Sterzinger “Why are social justice ...”). The United States alt-right and white supremacist movements flourished online and manifested themselves in fandom spaces before going mainstream. The alt-right continues to have plenty to say about SF properties, especially the most popular franchises like *Star Wars*.³ For more open-minded and less reactionary audiences, there is a stronger possibility that Speculative Fiction will serve a pedagogical purpose in addition to providing entertainment. These are the readers for whom SF can serve as a gateway to further reading and thinking on a variety of subjects.

Black/Indigenous/People of Color (BIPOC) of all genders and white people other than white cis men have been both under-recognized and under-published as authors and underrepresented or misrepresented as stereotypical characters in many works of SF as in real life. In the Golden Age of United States Science Fiction, ranging from the 1930s to the 1950s, many of the most published authors were white men. Women authors like Andre (Alice) Norton used male-sounding pen names to sell their books, and Norton's novels, like Isaac Asimov's, Robert Heinlein's, and Philip K. Dick's, contain more men than women characters. However, this does not mean that women were not writing SF. Mary Shelley invented science fiction with *Frankenstein*, and many key figures of USA SF are women, from Ursula K. Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Joanna Russ, James Tiptree Jr, and are three important figures of US SF and there are many others. Spain also has a rich contemporary history of SF, and women have contributed significantly to the genre, among them Lola

3 “Members of the alt-right's anger over The Last Jedi has been stoked by the leading voices of the reactionary nationalist movement. Rants about the movie from InfoWars broadcaster Alex Jones (who called it “a social justice warrior mess” and a “giant social engineering experiment”) and white nationalist Stefan Molyneux have racked up hundreds of thousands of views and gone viral on Twitter.” (Zakarin “How the alt-right hijacked...”)

Robles, Conchi Regueiro, Carmen Martín Gaité, Laura Gallego, Cristina Fernández Cubas, and others who I will mention later in this chapter. In the US context, while conservative blogger Vox Day⁴ (the online persona of Theodore Beale) and reactionary cultural groups and movements like the Sad Puppies,⁵ the Rabid Puppies,⁶ GamerGate,⁷ and ComicsGate⁸ campaign for a return to “traditional” SF with more “hard science”, more masculinist power fantasies, more white supremacy, and no “SJWs”⁹ (social justice warriors), recent publication trends and SF awards have pushed back¹⁰ and made it clear that there is a place for diverse authors and characters. SF’s flexibility gives authors the option of creating worlds in which women, people of color, disabled people, and other marginalized groups have a variety of roles. Montero takes great advantage of this flexibility, particularly regarding women. Not only are all her SF main characters so far women or girls, but her named female characters play a wide variety of roles, supporting and antagonistic, which represents a far more realistic vision of women than narratives which fail the Bechdel test.

4 Day argues that women should not have the right to vote, equating them to minors, felons, and non-citizens, and that people of African descent are “savages”. He uses a rhetorical style similar to that of Donald Trump, with a more “polished” style (he uses more standard punctuation and spelling), but a similar disregard for truth (“Contra Suffrage”, “A Black Female Fantasist”).. His book SJWs always lie: taking down the thought police contains a forward by alt-right spokesperson Milo Yiannopoulos.

5 A right-wing group founded by Larry Correia, who writes “I launched the Sad Puppies campaign with the idea that if I could get authors with the wrong politics onto the Hugo ballot, I could prove to the world that the Hugos were in fact what you are all now admitting that they are” (“A Response to George R. R. Martin”).

6 A separate but related group, led by Vox Day. See “Hugo award nominees withdraw amid ‘Puppygate’ storm” (TheGuardian.com).

7 See “What Is Gamergate, and Why? An Explainer for Non-Geeks” by Jay Hathaway on Gawker.com

8 See “Comicsgate: Alt-right fan boys go after women in world of comics” by Leonard Pitts Jr for the Miami Herald.

9 Correia writes, “We use the term SJW because it is far easier than typing out Perpetually Outraged, Searching For Offense, Quick to Accuse Racism/Sexism/Homophobia/Privilege/Patriarchy, Holier Than Thou, Politics Before Fun, Unholy Cross Between Communists and Puritans, Twitter Lynch Mob Forming, Career Sabotaging, Social Justice Crusaders” (“A Response to George R. R. Martin”).

10 See “Oh No, the Puppies Are Back for the 2016 Hugo Awards—and As Angry As Ever” (Slate.com).

Her novels are full of social justice themes including climate change, diversity and inequity, and the impact of oppressive societies on marginalized bodies.

Montero's background

Rosa Montero was born in 1951 in Madrid, where she has spent most of her life. Her father was a bullfighter and her mother a housewife. She has one sister, her twin Martina. She married journalist Pablo Lizcano, who died of cancer in 2009 after their relationship of 20 years. Montero finished a degree in Journalism in 1975 at the Escuela Superior de Periodismo, having finished four courses in Psychology in 1972 at the Universidad Complutense, both in Madrid. She currently writes a weekly column for *El País*, the newspaper she has worked for since 1977. She has also written for *El Clarín* of Argentina and *El Mercurio* of Chile and collaborated in other publications internationally. Over her career as a journalist, Montero has performed over 2000 interviews. Her career has also extended to film, television, and stage, as she has written for all three. She has also acted on stage as part of independent theater groups such as Canon and Tábano.

Montero published her first novel, *Crónica del desamor*, in 1979 when she was 28. In the years since then, she has published 14 more novels, a book of stories, two biographical works, and four children's books. Her literary production has received international academic attention, with a number of books, dissertations, articles and conference presentations dedicated to her work. Her numerous literary accolades demonstrate her significance to contemporary Spanish literature. *La hija del caníbal* won two prizes in 1997: the Premio Primavera de Novela and the Círculo de Críticos de Chile. *La loca de la casa* (2003) received the Premio Grinzane Cavour for the best foreign book published in Italy in 2005 and the Premio "Roman Primeur" de Saint-Emilion in France in

2006. She was honored with the Qué leer award for the best book of the year in 2004 for *La loca de la casa* and again in 2005 for *Historia del Rey Transparente*, which also received the Premio Mandarache in 2007. For *Instrucciones para salvar el mundo* (2008), she received the French Reader's Prize from the Festival of European Literatures of Cognac in 2011. The graphic novel version of *Lágrimas en la lluvia* received the Premio al Mejor Cómic 2011 by popular vote from the Salón Internacional del Cómic de Barcelona. Finally, *La ridícula idea de no volver a verte* received the Premio de la Crítica de Madrid in 2014 and the Prix du Livre Robinsonnais in 2016 from la Bibliothèque du Plessis Robinson, France. Her most recent work is *La Carne*, published in 2016. For her cumulative work, Montero received the prestigious Premio Nacional de las Letras in 2017.

Though her works span a variety of literary genres, Montero's novels tend to deal with similar themes. She writes of the creation of families of choice, focusing on protagonists who begin in isolation, preferring a solitary existence, and who gather friends and companions along their journey. Montero tends to draw her protagonists and their friends from people living on the margins of society, which in her work relates to the theme of monstrosity versus normality. According to Montero, normality does not exist in practice, since no one can conform precisely to any norm:

te das cuenta que lo normal no viene de lo más abundante sino de lo normativo, de la norma, de la ley, o sea que lo normal es como un marco legal, obligatorio, pero que en realidad no existe. [you realize that normal doesn't come from the most abundant but from the normative, from the norm, from the law, that is, normal is a legal, obligatory frame, but in reality it does not exist]" (Lemon-Rogers 132).

In Montero's usage, monsters are all of us, people who fall outside the norms of society to some degree or another, and it lacks a pejorative connotation as I use it here. Montero's work includes many characters with physical disabilities, and she has written that she is particularly drawn towards characters who are little people. For example, *Temblor* and *Bella y oscura* both have important characters who are Little People, and Montero writes that each of her novels up until *La loca de la casa*, have at least one Little Person: "descubrí que mis textos estaban llenos de enanos [I discovered that my texts were full of Little People]" (*Loca* 67). She also writes characters with other disabilities, either from birth or from events later in life, such as losing limbs or growing extra eyes or hands via mutation. Montero has written about mental illness as well, though her characters may not have any specific diagnosis. Bruna Husky, for example, regularly sees a psychologist. The mental capacity to remember also plays an important role in much of Montero's work. Childhood recollections as part of identity formation show up strongly in the Bruna Husky novels, as well as in *Bella y oscura*, and institutional, societal, and other collective memory plays a key role in *Temblor*, *Historia del Rey Transparente*, and the Bruna Husky novels. The importance of narrative and of stories for the human psyche is another key theme. For example, in her children's series about Bárbara, the third book includes an antique book, the *Bestiary*, which provides knowledge and allows Bárbara and her friends to confront the terrifying Doctor Colmillos. In another volume for children, *El nido de los sueños*, Gabi invents and travels to her own secret world. Adventure and mystery appear as plot points in many works, as well. In *El corazón del tártaro*, the mystery of who pursues Sofia Zarzamala hangs over her head as she flees from the unknown threat.

As with many writers, themes from Montero's own life also echo throughout her work. For example, Pablo Lizcano, her late husband, passed away due to cancer, and she captures the pain of losing a loved one to a similar disease in *Lágrimas en la Lluvia*. Her work often deals with death, specifically the fear of one's own death and the pain of losing loved ones to death. *La ridícula idea de no volver a verte*, based on Marie Curie's diary and published shortly after Lizcano's death, plays with the idea of a good death and a good life. *Instrucciones para salvar el mundo* also contains a character who suffers after the loss of his wife. In *La loca de la casa*, her most autobiographical work, there are some interesting thematic resonances with her other novels, especially her playful treatment of memory, which at the same time makes serious points about the importance of remembrance. Montero has a habit of using the last names of friends, acquaintances, and other authors for some of her characters. She celebrates the light behind the darkness of life, as she says in an interview after she received the Premio Nacional de las Letras in 2017.¹¹ She writes about survivors, which relates to her experience with tuberculosis, which she contracted at age five, among other events. Hope in times of solitude and despair is another prominent theme in her work. On a related note, the complexities of romantic relationships echo throughout her novels. For example, in *La carne* the protagonist hires an escort to accompany her to an event to make her ex jealous. In *La ridícula idea de no volver a verte*, Montero writes about love, sex, loss, and relationships between men and women. *Amantes y enemigos* collects stories that center on the theme of falling in and out of love. *Crónica del desamor* follows the aftermath of a breakup in the life of journalist Ana. Montero weaves the themes in her novels skillfully together with each new plotline.

11 Rosa Montero, Premio Nacional de las Letras 14 nov 2017. RTVE.es

Literature review

In addition to Montero's numerous literary awards, academics have also recognized Montero's work as a significant part of contemporary Spanish literature. This section of the chapter gives an overview of the work that scholars have completed to date. Alicia Ramos-Mesonero's bibliography, published on Montero's official website at rosamontero.es serves as a starting point for me in determining what ground others have already covered. Javier Escudero has written on destruction and renovation in *Temblor* and on the liminal space between splendor and death in *Bella y oscura*. Both articles were published in 1999. Escudero also published a book in 2005 on the ethics of hope in Montero's narrative: *La narrativa de Rosa Montero. Hacia una ética de la esperanza*. Counting Escudero's book, there are ten books listed in the bibliography. The other nine are *La primera narrativa de Rosa Montero* by Emilio de Miguel Martínez, *Contemporary Feminist Fiction in Spain: The Works of Montserrat Roig and Rosa Montero* by Catherine Davies, *Rosa Montero's Odyssey* by Alma Amell, *The Search for Identity in the Narrative of Rosa Montero* by Vanessa Knights, *Poder y género en la narrativa de Rosa Montero* by Haydée Ahumada Peña, *Synergy and Subversion in the Second Stage Novels of Rosa Montero* by Mary C. Harges, *Estudio del personaje en la novela* by Inmaculada Torres Rivas, *Literatura y errabundia (Javier Marías, Antonio Muñoz Molina y Rosa Montero)* by Alexis Grohmann, and *La incógnita desvelada. Ensayos sobre la obra de Rosa Montero* by Alicia Ramos Mesonero. These volumes deal with topics such as identity, power and gender, Montero's narrative, her work in comparison with that of other writers, and contemporary Spanish women authors. Other books which include an analysis of some of Montero's novels include *La novela española de los noventa: Alternativas éticas a la*

postmodernidad by Peregrina Pereiro and *La tarea política: narrativa y ética en la España posmoderna* by Txetxu Aguado.

There are also a number of dissertations on Montero's work. For example, Aintzane Cabanes-Martínez wrote "The Identity Imposition during Francoism and the Transition in Rosa Montero's Novels". Grace Martin's recent work, "For the Love of Robots: Posthumanism in Latin American Science Fiction Between 1960-1999", includes Montero's *Lágrimas en la lluvia*. Carmen Bárcenas Bautista focuses on "Spanish Women and the Deconstruction of the Misogynist Discourse in "Absent Love", "The Delta Function", and "I Will Treat You as a Queen" by Rosa Montero." Cristina Carrasco discusses Montero's *La loca de la casa* in "Autobiographical Metafictions in Contemporary Spanish Literature." Kristin Kiely wrote "Female Subjective Strategies in Post-Franco Spain as Presented by Rosa Montero and Lucía Etxebarria." Azucena Mollejo-Hernández's specialization is on short stories in her work, "El cuento español de 1970 a 2000 en la obra de Francisco Umbral, Rosa Montero, Almudena Grandes y Javier Marías." Timothy Reed's "Mass Culture in Four Spanish Novels 1982-1994" studies novels by Montero, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Eduardo Mendicutti, and José Ángel Mañas. María Vázquez Castro works with women's life writing in "El discurso autobiográfico femenino en la nueva novela española." Wa-Kí Fraser de Zambrano's "El discurso colonial/postcolonial y el erotismo en las novelas de dos escritoras: reedición del encuentro, conquista y colonización de américa" analyzes Griselda Gambaro's novel *Lo impenetrable* and Montero's *Te trataré como a una reina*. These dissertations consider such topics as collective memory, feminist issues in Montero's work, postmodernism, and

post-Franco Spain. Only one of these works, Grace Martin's, deals with Montero's SF, and that deals with one of the science fiction novels.

Articles regarding Rosa Montero's work approach similar themes to the books and the dissertations. They also include topics such as posthumanism and cyborg identities in Montero's science fiction works. The 2017 issue of *Alambique* dedicates most of its pages to articles about *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, including "Vidas virtuales, memorias postizas: teorías de la identidad personal en Lágrimas en la lluvia" by Dale J. Pratt, Todd Mack, and "El universo posthumano de *Lágrimas en la lluvia*: memoria artificial, identidad, historia y ficción" by Juan Carlos Martín Galván. They deal with identity and memory, art, and posthumanity in the novel, respectively, and are accompanied by comments from Montero herself. "Posthumanism in Rosa Montero's *Lágrimas en la lluvia* and *El peso del corazón*" by Iana Konstantinova examines posthumanism in the first two Bruna Husky novels with an ecocritical approach. The significant amount of scholarship in articles and books to date, not to mention conferences, has been significant, but has only begun to scratch the surface of an examination of Montero's Science Fiction and Fantasy novels as works of Speculative Fiction. There has yet been no study of these six novels as a group, and their thematic and genre commonalities merit such a study.

SF in Spain

Montero's Speculative Fiction (SF) work is part of a national tradition of SF, which has deep roots in Spanish literary production. The Fantastic mode in Spanish literature extends at least as far back as the Early Modern period, to episodes such as Don Quixote's trip into the cave of Montesinos and his and Sancho Panza's flight on Clavileño, Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares*, the prophecy regarding Segismundo's monstrosity in *La*

vida es sueño, the use of white magic in the plays of José de Cañizares, and Maria de Zayas's *El jardín engañoso* and her *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*, to give just a few examples. David Castillo's *Baroque Horrors: Roots of the Fantastic in the Age of Curiosities* provides an insightful analysis of the Fantastic in this era. The genre of science fiction, as a separate entity from fantasy, begins to take shape in Spain midway through the 19th century, with works such as *Viaje somniaéreo a la Luna, o Zulema y Lambert* (1832) by Joaquín del Castillo and *Lunigrafía: o sea, noticias curiosas sobre las producciones, lengua, religión, leyes, usos y costumbres de los lunícolas* (1855-1858) by Miguel Estorch y Siqués. *El anacrópete* (1887) by Enrique Gaspar y Rimbau anticipates H.G. Wells's time machine by eight years.

In the 20th century, after the Spanish Civil war, novels "de a duro" began to appear, similar to the pulp books published in the United States twenty years earlier. The earliest Science Fiction that recognized itself as such began to arrive in Spain via Argentina. Francisco Porrúa established the publishing house Minotauro in 1955 and principally published translated works of English-speaking authors from the Golden Age of Science Fiction. Today it publishes works of SF written in Spanish. *Nueva Dimensión*, a magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy, marks the transition from adventure novels to SF that explores the question "what if...?" The 1990s saw a proliferation of SF in Spain, including a wide variety of fanzines, magazines, and novels. Montero's *Temblor*, published in 1990, forms part of this explosion. HispaCon, an SF convention established in 1969, began to publish an annual journal in 1991. The popularity of SF genre and fandom has continued to the present day. This brief overview, of course, leaves aside the many SF films, comics, plays, and fanworks that merit further study as well.

Despite SF literature's history in Spain, the genre has been undervalued in academia and merits further research, as Yolanda Molina-Gavilán points out in *Ciencia Ficción en Español: Una Mitología Moderna ante el Cambio*. Like the English-speaking literary world, Spain's academy, and, to a lesser degree, the publishing market, tends to consider genre fiction as less important than more literary works. Montero, for example, has been well-received in the mainstream literary world, and her ventures into SF have been marketed not necessarily as science fiction or fantasy but as thrillers or other categories. Many authors, especially those who dedicate themselves exclusively to SF, have day jobs to support their writing careers. Ricardo Ruiz Garzón, a journalist, wrote a column from 2014 to 2016 called *Avisos para navegantes* for *El País* and has also published collections of his short stories, children's books, and novels. Fernando J. López del Oso, a biologist and author, has published four books to date, including *Yeti* in 2011. Clara Tahoces has published more than a dozen books in the SF genre and served as Editor-in-Chief of *Más allá de la ciencia*, an eclectic magazine on themes ranging from the occult to archeology, established by Fernando Jiménez del Oso. Juan Miguel Aguilera first trained as an industrial designer but began writing in collaboration with Javier Redel and later Ricardo Lázaro. Aguilera has also published solo works and has designed the covers of various science fiction books. He has won the Premio Ignotus several times, along with the Premio Juli Verne, the latter presented by the Cercle de les Arts i de les Lletres d'Andorra. Elia Barceló also won the Premio Ignotus, in 1991, and works as a professor of Hispanic Literatures in Austria. She is considered one of the most important women science fiction writers in the Spanish language, along with Angelica Gorodischer of Argentina and Daina Chaviano of Cuba. Emilio Bueso writes westerns, horror, *realismo sucio*, and *novela negra*

in addition to science fiction. He has been a finalist more than once for the Premio Ignotus and has won the Premio Noche for both short story and novel, among other awards. Laura Gallego writes for young adults, specializing in fantasy literature. She won the 2012 Premio Nacional de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil for her epic fantasy *Dónde los árboles cantan*. Rodolfo Martínez is a computer programmer and SF author with four published series. He received the Ignotus in 1996 for *La sonrisa del gato*. José María Merino is best known for his novels and short stories but is also a poet and travel writer. He took up a seat in the Real Academia Española in April 2009. Gabriela Bustelo works as a philologist and translator in addition to writing fiction. Her works include *Veo, veo* (1996), *Planeta hembra* (2001), and *Tolerancia* (2011). Javier Negrete is most recognized for his works of fantasy and is also a professor of Greek. He won the Ignotus in 1994. Juan Jacinto Muñoz Rengel writes novels, stories, microfiction and has taught creative writing since 2006. He won the 2010 Ignotus for the best collection of short stories of the year. Lola Robles specializes in Science Fiction and identifies as feminist, pacifist, and queer. Her most recent novel is *Yabará* (2017) and in 2016 she wrote a book of essays: *En regiones extrañas: un mapa de la ciencia ficción, lo fantástico y lo maravilloso*. Robles collaborated with Conchi Regueiro, who writes science fiction in both Spanish and Gallego, to create the anthologies *Historias del Crazy Bar y otros relatos de lo imposible* (2012) and *Visiones*. Félix J. Palma's best-known SF work is his steampunk time travel series, The Victorian trilogy: *The Map of Time*, *The Map of the Sky*, and *The Map of Chaos*. Marc Pastor studied criminology and crime policy and works as a crime scene investigator. He has published four novels in which he combines the adventure novel with the gothic and science fiction. Susana Vallejo studied publicity and public relations and has published a variety of novels

for young adults, including the *Porta Coeli* series. Finally, León Arsenal, like Rosa Montero, has worked in a great variety of genres. His many publications include the science fiction story collection *Besos de Alacrán*. Each of these authors forms a part of the plentiful contemporary landscape of Spanish SF, as does Montero. These works and authors merit much more academic attention than they have yet received.

Brief summary of primary texts

This section contains an overview of my primary texts, which consist of the six novels and the four volumes of collected columns. These books engage questions of displacement, women's and girls' agency, economic inequity, human damage to ecology, monstrosity, and otherness, among others. I hope that this section will help orient the reader with a synopsis of each book. I begin with the novels in order of publication. *Temblores* (1990) tells the story of Agua Fría. She lives in a dystopian world in which memory is closely guarded. Only a privileged few live on through ritual remembering after their deaths, and places and people who lack this remembering literally fade from existence, trapped in a fog of forgetfulness. Within the novel, religious rituals of mourning, knowing, and remembrance both oppress and offer comfort, while castes divide access to knowledge, and separate communities provide examples of equally problematic inequalities. In this novel, Montero reflects upon the nature of history and memory in a dystopian control society, while commenting upon non-fictional problems of the precariat, questioning whose lives deserve mourning and remembrance and who has a right to learn and know the truth. Only the highest class has access to history and truth and those who persist in remembering and voicing anything but the alternate facts provided by those in authority receive strict punishments. Agua Fría embarks on a quest to stop the world from fading

away entirely and must confront her internalized biases. Set in the late twentieth century, *Bella y oscura* (1993) relates a young girl's childhood memories and her coming-of-age. Baba moves to a poor neighborhood with her uncle, aunt, cousin, grandmother, and a Little Person named Airelai. The story flows between realistic, esperpentic, and dreamlike descriptions of the neighborhood, exposing the sharp contrast between day and night in the streets of the neighborhood and the ugly and the beautiful of the family. The reader sees through Baba's first-person limited perspective as she survives on the hope that her father will return and the magical stories Airelai tells her and her cousin Chico. Baba's hopes are dashed as her father returns, kills her uncle, and dies in a plane crash. In *Historia del Rey Transparente* (2005), set in the Middle Ages, Montero examines the horrors of war and the relationships that are formed and broken by larger political forces that ignore the needs of marginalized individuals. Leola, a serf in southern France, finds herself alone after her fiancé, her father, and her brother are conscripted to fight in a war for the local lord. She dresses herself as a man and goes in search of them, but her search instead leads her to learn to fight. Leola makes a new life as a mercenary. She and her companion Nyneve share the hope of finding Avalon, a peaceful isle inhabited by women, free from the crises that surround them. They join a group of Cathar "heretics" and fight a losing war against the Catholic church. Rather than be defeated, both Nyneve and Leola choose to drink a potion that they believe will take them to Avalon, leaving their bodies behind. Their successful arrival in Avalon is never confirmed.

The Bruna Husky series consists of *Lágrimas en la lluvia* (2011), *El peso del corazón* (2015), and *Los tiempos del odio* (2018). Like *Temblor*, this trilogy takes place in the future, but whereas in *Temblor* much knowledge has been lost and society has been

completely remade, Montero's twenty-second century has recognizable landmarks. The accumulated slow violence of class and species discrimination, ecological exploitation and neglect, together with the more spectacular violence of a series of wars has brought about some sociological reforms, including a ban on nuclear weapons and power plants, but vast economic inequality remains. In the first novel, *Bruna*, an android detective, investigates a string of android murder-suicides and reveals a plot to exterminate all androids by manipulating public opinion. In the second novel, she investigates the disappearance of a rich man's remains and uncovers the theft of nuclear waste. In the third novel, she begins a search for her kidnapped lover and discovers the existence of a group of powerful people who have fomented a war for their own financial gain. As she investigates these cases, she also champions social justice among her friends and acquaintances, marginalized like her.

To move to the volumes of Montero's collected columns, the four I have chosen are a selection from the ten published collections of Montero's weekly columns for *El País*. Given the vast quantity of her weekly publications, it is more practical to refer to a few of these published collections than to sift through the paper's archives. The majority of the columns I refer to in my analysis come from these four volumes, which I chose based on the proximity of their dates of publication to those of the SF novels. I put these columns into conversation with Montero's SF texts. *La vida desnuda* (1994) collects columns on love, sex, gender roles, and social inequity from 1983 to 1994. The book is divided into thematic sections and the columns in each section appear in chronological. *Estampas bostonianas y otros viajes* (2002) collects Montero's travel columns from 1979 to 1998. She writes with a sense of place, a compassionate view for the places she visits and describes, similar to how she crafts the worlds in which her novels are set. This also ties to

her love for the environment. The columns describe Iraq, Boston, Australia, the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (home to the Inuit), the Sahara, China, and Alaska, in that order. That is also the order in which the columns were originally written. *El amor de mi vida* (2011) contains a series of essays on literature, collected from *El País Semanal* in 1998 and *Babelia*, the cultural supplement to *El País*, in 2015. It is a love letter to literature, containing a collection of Montero's essays on a variety of books. *Nosotras* (2018) is a re-release and expansion of *Historias de mujeres* (1995) and contains a collection of Montero's biographical writing about women's lives and experiences, along with an introduction calling for readers to recognize and reject internalized sexism. Montero's feminist approach here carries over into her choice of women and girl protagonists throughout her SF novels. Finally, while most of the columns I cite come from the books, I have also turned to a selection of columns from recent years on *El País's* online archives. These provide Montero's thoughts on topics such as ecological reform, global politics, and mental health. Montero weaves her concern for the issues she addresses in her journalism throughout her SF novels as well, and the two genres in conversation provide a more complete sense of her perspectives.

Chapter overview

This final section provides an overview of the upcoming chapters to further guide the reader. Chapter two discusses the themes of ecology and nonnormative bodies in oppressive environments within Chapter three examines Montero's use of dystopian, apocalyptic, and quotidian settings to speak about the individual relationship with the environment as she implicitly argues for better stewardship of the planet through both her SF and her newspaper columns. Chapter four focuses on the bodily material impact of

societal inequities shown in Montero's columns and SF novels. I look at the way Montero addresses healthcare in her columns and her SF texts, how healthcare and other resources are allocated to the most vulnerable members of societies and what barriers are in place to access needed care within her fictional societies. Finally, chapter five examines the shortcomings of Montero's progressive stances and emphasizes the need for active and continual work to dismantle the bigoted ideologies that permeate Capitalocene society. I conclude chapter five by pointing to the cause for hope within Montero's dystopian worlds. That is, her characters practice alternative modes of establishing social relationships, which are a survival strategy for the problems Montero describes in her texts. Additionally, the way she focuses on societal problems in her columns is one part of the actions we must take to prevent the future settings she creates in her fiction from becoming real. While she may not offer specific solutions to the problems, she draws attention to them which is the first step to solving them.

Through this and the following chapters, I put Montero's SF novels into conversation with her columns to demonstrate that SF is central to Spanish literature, not merely a peripheral genre, and that it provides the means for authors to treat themes that are central to national problems. The next chapters focus on particular ways that Montero employs both her periodical work and her SF work to communicate serious concerns about contemporary Spanish and global issues. Specifically, I focus on her concern with human interactions with ecology and with the varied material impact of societal inequities on the body. Montero's SF work, like Spanish SF in general, has been understudied and should be recognized as a serious literary and social contribution, especially given the ethical positions she takes through this genre.

Chapter two: Feudal ecologies and non-normative bodies

The setting of *Historia del Rey Transparente* is far earlier than any of Montero's other Speculative Fiction (SF) novels. While the others are contemporary or future settings, this is a historical fantasy, which takes place in the Middle Ages. Compressing events from in late twelfth century to early thirteenth century France into a period of about three decades, the novel's narration deals with the early stages of the change from feudal to a city-based mercantilist economy. These socioeconomic changes shape the way people interact with the land itself. Those without ties to geographical sites such as cities and feudal lands are effectively homeless. Montero's narration in *Historia del Rey Transparente* is a first-person limited view from the perspective of her protagonist, Leola. Leola cross dresses in order to protect herself and access spaces that are otherwise denied to her. This aspect of her narrative is in the spirit of the historical phenomenon and fictional trope of women who dressed as men,¹² including the historical Monja Alférez, Catalina de Erauso, as well as the fictional figures Rosaura of Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño*, Jacinta of María de Zayas' *Desengaños amorosos*, and Doña Leonor/Don Leonardo of Ana Caro's *Amor, agravio y mujer*. A masculine costume often confers power upon disempowered women in theater, narrative, and history. Similarly, alternate histories may reconfer power on historically marginalized groups. This is especially the case with own voices works by BIPOC¹³ and disabled authors, for example. In Montero's case she writes from a woman's perspective to create Leola's tale. Leola is one of the defeated in the

¹² Some of the people who history refers to as cross-dressing women may well have identified as trans men in today's terminology.

¹³ Black, Indigenous, People of Color

conflict of the Cathar crusade, and in *Historia del Rey Transparente* Montero creates a record of Leola's remarkable life from Leola's point of view. As in all of Montero's SF novels, the choice of protagonist and the narration of events from a marginalized perspective emphasizes the importance of the unheard voices throughout history and the loss that their silencing has caused. In this chapter, I explore the impact of human organizations on the environment as well as the individual bodily impact which oppressive systems have on the characters of *Historia del Rey Transparente*.

Alternate history is one form of SF and may take the form of a dramatic retelling as in the case of this novel or of parody, among other possibilities. One strain of parodic alternate history is the phenomenon of Zombified retellings of literature and film. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) by Seth Grahame-Smith is one of these. Spain's Editorial Dolmen includes in their catalogue the "Linea Z," a series of original stories and "zombified" classics such as *Quijote Z* by Hazael González, in which (a fictionalized) Cervantes receives the inspiration to write his classic novel from his own encounter with the undead at the battle of Lepanto. In their book *Zombie Talk: Culture, History and Politics*, David Castillo, David Schmid, David A. Reilly and John Edgar Browning address this global genre, which is connected to Hispanic SF by its Afro-Caribbean roots and by the rise in popularity of zombie literature in Spain and throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Such speculative retellings of history serve the same purpose as futuristic SF: they allow the author to comment on the here and now and to explore multiple possibilities. This is one of the main reasons that SF is a vital part of Spanish and global literatures.

While the Capitalocene works as an analytical frame to examine the systemic problems described in Montero's other work, because of the feudal and mercantilist setting

of *Historia del Rey Transparente*, the Capitalocene is not the right lens through which to study this novel. Therefore, in my analysis throughout this chapter, I turn to a more appropriate theoretical framework: the Anthropocene, which in the framing of many of its proponents easily encompasses the Middle Ages as well as the present day. Coined independently by both biologist Eugene Stoermer and chemist Paul Crutzen, the term Anthropocene has since come to define the era in which we now live. In a 2011 review paper, Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen and John McNeill clarify the implications of the term Anthropocene, writing that it

suggests:(i) that the Earth is now moving out of its current geological epoch, called the Holocene and (ii) that human activity is largely responsible for this exit from the Holocene, that is, that humankind has become a global geological force in its own right. Since its introduction, the term Anthropocene has become widely accepted in the global change research community, and is now occasionally mentioned in articles in popular media on climate change or other global environmental issues. However, the term remains an informal one. This situation may change as an Anthropocene Working Group has recently been formed as part of the Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy to consider whether the term should be formally recognized as a new epoch in the Earth's history. (843)

Though it has yet to be formally adopted by geologists, both STEM fields and the Humanities have begun to use the Anthropocene concept. Particularly in the interdisciplinary fields of Environmental Humanities and Ecocriticism, the concept of the Anthropocene has proven useful in examining ecology concerns in literature. In studies of Spanish literature, contemporary scholars such as Luis I. Prádanos García have used this

framework to analyze dystopic literary settings and highlight the concept of degrowth, a shift in perspective and priorities away from the single-minded goal of growth for growth's sake. In her 2015 *Feminist Geopolitics: Material States*, Deborah P. Dixon writes of “the Anthropocene as a site wherein particular forms of human activity are wielded as a geologic force” (172). In my reading, human activity within Montero's SF settings embodies that type of geologic force, and thus the Anthropocene is an important factor in Montero's SF novels. Each of her SF novels take place within the history or the future of the planet Earth during the period in which collective human behavior and human-created mechanisms had begun to affect the environment. When Crutzen proposed the term, he tied the beginning of the era to the invention of the steam engine. However, other scholars have argued that there is no synchronous event which marks the beginning of the Anthropocene. For example, Edgeworth et al argue for a geological marker they term Boundary A instead.

Boundary A is diachronous through and through. This diachroneity pertains not just to the past, but to the present and future. The archaeosphere is growing both laterally and vertically, downwards as well as up. The lower boundary (like the upper boundary) is still forming in places or being renewed in others. Even the material traces of geological and archaeological investigations— the cuts of excavation trenches, boreholes and test pits —renew and reshape the boundary. Former versions of Boundary A are being truncated and replaced by more recent versions, which in turn are liable to further truncation in the future. The archaeosphere,¹⁴ it would appear – and arguably the Anthropocene too – is in ongoing boundary formation mode (Edgeworth et al 17)

14 The layer or layers of observable human activity in the planet's surface

The diachronous nature of the Anthropocene's beginning means that it extends through much of human history. For the purposes of my analysis of *Historia del Rey Transparente*, I have chosen to use this as the theoretical frame. As with her other novels set in humanity's present and future, her historical fiction setting allows Montero to express her concern for the human impact on the environment of the Earth. This resonates with the concerns and observations that led to the formation of the Anthropocene Working Group.

Throughout her journalism and her SF writing, Montero's ethos is profoundly *ecocentric*, eschewing the egocentrism of the systemic exploitation of planetary resources. She identifies as an *animalista*, an animal rights activist, and she both avoids and condemns human-centric views that frame humanity as the culmination of a creative process. In her column "Mi perra no me habla" (12 Jul 1992), Montero writes:

A veces sucede que, observando a los animales, nos sorprendemos de la semejanza de algunos de sus comportamientos con los del ser humano.... Me parece que hay que huir, sin embargo, del antropomorfismo. De esa tentación, tan torpe y egocéntrica, de convertir a todo animal en una mera copia del ser humano. Una copia, además, siempre tonta y fallida, siempre insuficiente, a menudo risible. Como si las bestias fueran una suerte de ensayos defectuosos en el *camino de perfección* hacia la humanidad. [At times it happens that, observing animals, we are surprised by the similarity of some of their behaviors to those of the human being... It seems to me that one must flee, however, from anthropomorphism. From that temptation, so clumsy and egocentric, to convert every animal into a mere copy of the human being. A copy, moreover, always foolish and failed, always insufficient,

often laughable. As if the beasts were a kind of failed attempts on the path of perfection towards humanity.] (*La vida desnuda* 171, emphasis original)

Whereas anthropocentrism focuses on humanity to the detriment of other species and beings, Montero embraces an ecological ethics and views humanity as a part of a greater whole, a single node in the web of life that inhabits and makes up our planet and our solar system. Additionally, Montero has stated that regardless of spatio-temporal setting, what interests her is the human being:

Lo que me interesa de la ciencia ficción es que es un género que te da unas posibilidades, una herramienta metafórica para hablar de la condición humana. A mí no me interesa hablar del siglo veintidós, lo que estoy hablando es del ser humano que es el mismo desde Pericles. [What interests me about science fiction is that it is a genre that gives you possibilities, a metaphorical tool for talking about the human condition. Speaking about the 22nd century does not interest me; what I am talking about is the human being, which is the same since Pericles.] (Lemon-Rogers 2015)

Because of this interest in exploring human experiences through her writing, I read Montero's work as human-oriented, based on her concern for marginalized individuals and groups. She does this work without falling into the trap of anthropocentrism by highlighting the relationship between humans, animals, and the environment we share.

Feudal ecologies in *Historia del Rey Transparente*

This section examines the sociopolitical and ecological setting of *Historia del Rey Transparente* and the relationship between human society and the environment. a novel in which Leola, a serf in southern France, finds herself alone after her fiancé, her father, and

her brother are conscripted to fight in a war for their feudal lord. Like many of Montero's women and girl protagonists, Leola breaks with stereotypical gender roles, becoming a person who can "vivir todas las posibilidades del ser, más allá de la tiranía de los estereotipos [live all the possibilities of existence, beyond the tyranny of stereotypes]" (*Nosotras* 16). Leola's relationship with her surroundings evolves with her wardrobe, which changes her perceived social status from serf to knight/mercenary to city woman. This novel's setting is both quotidian and apocalyptic, following Leola's lifelong struggle to survive in a rapidly changing religious and political environment, in which the world is ending for groups who do not conform to the demands of the reigning hierarchy. Leola and Nyneve, a knowledgeable witch, embody many of Montero's feminist views as they interact with each other and with the world around them. The two women find themselves repeatedly forced from their homes as they flee the crusade against the heretical Cathar sect. They share the hope that the crusade will fail and that they can live in a freer and more peaceful society, or that they can at least find a more permanent place to take refuge from the apocalyptic war around them. Like the hierarchical order of the priestesses in *Temblor*, this religious crusade has a deleterious effect upon the landscape, as the troops trample cropland and forest and build fires from the trees to burn the heretic Cathars:

Los hombres de hierro asedian, tajan, matan, arrasan los sembrados, sacrifican rebaños y talan bosques enteros para alimentar sus atroces hogueras [The men of iron lay siege, carve up, kill, destroy planted fields, sacrifice flocks and chop entire forests down to feed their terrible bonfires.] (*Historia* 326)

Montero's journalism casts a critical eye on religious organizations and other organizations with rigid hierarchies by including such depictions of such events as military crusades

deployed by the Catholic Church. Of the Catholic Church, she also writes in a column from 1 Dec 1990 that it is “un dragón con alzacuellos, un bicho aún imponente, pese a su edad provecta y a tener el pellejo negro como la brea [a dragon with a clerical collar, a still-imposing beast, in spite of its advanced age and having a hide black as tar]” (*La vida desnuda* 121). Her critique of religion is not limited to the Catholic Church, but within *Historia del Rey Transparente* that Church and its military and economic power represent similar anthropogenic hierarchical systems which have shaped the land and the world in their favor. Such systems ignore the impact of their actions on marginalized people, on non-human animals, and on the land itself. In her column, “Mi perra no me habla,” from 12 July 1992, she writes critically of the human tendency to center humanity to the exclusion of all else:

Los humanos seguimos empeñados en sentirnos los reyes de la creación. Y en esta embriaguez ególatra, que suelen fomentar las religiones, echan sus raíces muchos de nuestros excesos: el modo en que estamos destrozando el planeta, por ejemplo. [We humans obstinately continue to feel that we are the kings of creation. And in this egotistical drunkenness, which religions often foster, many of our excesses take root: the way we are destroying the planet, for example]” (*La vida desnuda* 172).

This egocentric tendency is not limited to religions, in Montero’s view, nor is it an inherent or fundamental component of religion. She writes of Leola and Nyneve’s fight for the Cathar cause because of the way that the Cathars whom they encounter de-center the human ego and strive to change the status quo of the era which favors the powerful Catholic church. As Montero crafts the alternate history of her world in *Historia del Rey Transparente*, she crafts characters in both religions who do good because of their religious

beliefs. What she critiques is the hierarchy and the abuse of power, along with the exploitation of the land and its inhabitants in order to maintain that power.

Leola and Nyneve navigate their world during the crusade and they are often without a permanent home of their own. While they wander, they gather and care for a family made up of similarly displaced people. Leola and Nyneve's travels show the reader the disparate living conditions in the mid thirteenth century, in which feudal lords own the land and profit from the labor of serfs while free commoners establish cities and attempt to create a more democratic society. Leola and Nyneve cross gender and class boundaries in their travels as they navigate the conflict between varying political and religious ideals. Their journey echoes the struggle of modern-day refugees and immigrants due to forces beyond their control. As ecocriticism scholar Luis Prádanos García writes, "a meaningful and relevant cultural and literary criticism cannot go on treating human, social, and ecological issues as separate entities. Otherwise, we risk focusing on symptoms and not seeing the root problems at all" (Prádanos 25). Montero's ecological ethics views human, animal, and ecosystem as part of a single whole. As I examine the fields, forests, roads and cities in the novel in the context of Montero's journalism, I analyze how these spaces are influenced by human intervention, particularly the feudal division of territory and the devastation inflicted on the landscape by war and other systemic human violence. These human interventions, deliberate or unintentional, can create or destroy places of refuge.

Feudal Fields

As in the current capitalist economy, feudalism's class relations were fraught with peril for members of the lowest class. Jason W. Moore writes that "Feudalism's historical geography was shaped decisively by the agrarian class relations" (Moore 303). Montero's

novel takes place within an era of late feudalism and emerging mercantilism. The inequity inherent in the feudal system is a form of slow violence, defined by Rob Nixon as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2). The noble class wielded the feudal economy against the rest of society, and this shaped the landscape in which Montero set her novel. She makes use of the landscape, taking artistic license to move some of the landmarks, and places her characters in the middle of an era of apocalyptic changes. Luis I. Prádanos García states that because humans exist as one of many species embedded in the biosphere and because “an economic system is (or should be) a tool that humans deploy to organize their societies in a functional way,” that “the economy is a subsystem of the ecology, not the other way around.” (*Postgrowth Imaginaries* 16). Viewing humanity and the economy as part of the environment makes the ties between class struggle and environmentalism clear. The lower classes are most at risk of suffering the catastrophic consequences of environmental problems caused by climate change, as well as being already under the pressures to survive within human society.

Montero’s setting reflects this class division, as 15-year-old Leola works with her father and brother for their feudal lord. They can work their own fields only after they have completed all the work the lord has for them. Their feudal obligation includes working the lands of their *señor*, paying ransoms for him and his men when they get captured in battle, paying for the knightings of his sons and the weddings of his daughters, and paying a tax towards the wars he fights, all in addition to paying tithes to the Church. The mill, oven and brewery, resources necessary to their survival, belong to the *señor* and they must pay

to use them, as well as pay for the privilege of holding their own weddings and funerals. The feudal system, much like late capitalism, is a trickle-up economy, only perhaps more explicitly so (*Historia* 12-13). There is no possibility of escaping the system. The idea that one could move up within the feudal system is not impossible, but neither is it probable. While it is difficult to change one's socioeconomic position in the 21st century neoliberal economy, it is far more fluid than the rigid feudal social system with its elaborate class markers. Leola dreams of leaving the territory of the *señor* and going beyond the horizon but does not imagine it as an actual possibility. She and her fiancé, Jacques, discuss the possibility of visiting a nearby city after their marriage. Beyond that, exploring the world is mere wishful thinking. She thinks of the fields upon fields that she will never set foot on. It is significant that she thinks first in terms of fields, not of forests or roads or cities, though she declares that she would like to see everything (*Historia* 17). Leola sees herself as tied to the land. She recalls herself plowing the field with her father and brother (*Historia* 10). Having no horse or oxen, they use their own bodies to pull the plow. She and her brother in harness, pulling with all their might while their father guides the plowshare in its path through the rocky soil (*Historia* 11). The connection between the bodies of the serfs and the land, both belonging to the *señor*, becomes evident when Leola describes herself as a “campesina [field hand, countrywoman, serf]”: “Soy campesina y echo de menos mis campos abiertos, el horizonte ancho, los bellos labrantíos de cereal que el viento ondula [I am a *campesina* and I miss my open fields, the broad horizon, the beautiful fields of grain waving in the wind]” (*Historia* 46, she says, using the possessive to refer to the fields, to her home. She feels a clear connection to the land she inhabits, the farmland she works with her father and brother, the place she plans to build her life with Jacques. The

word *campesina*, country person or peasant, and *campo*, field, are closely related, and Leola's use of these words reflect the connection between her and land. The unfamiliar forested land frightens her. It takes a sudden violent event, the burning of the fields and the conscription of her father, brother and fiancé, to eject her from her homeland. This contrasts sharply with the slow violence of Leola's socioeconomic position and the oppression she and her family face daily. The soldiers burn the fields. When Leola's father complains, saying they will die of hunger, the soldiers tell him that they cannot leave anything for the enemy (*Historia* 20). The priority of the *señor* is, as always, his own well-being, which places the already marginalized serfs in an even more precarious position. The *señor*'s warmongering also contributes to the more attritional, slow violence of environmental destruction and pollution. Rob Nixon describes the aftermath of war as "The long dyings - the staggered and staggeringly discounted casualties, both human and ecological, that result from war's toxic aftermaths or climate change--are underrepresented in strategic planning as well as in human memory" (Nixon 2-3). Leola experiences these effects up close both as a peasant and later, after she learns to fight, as a mercenary. She participates in the skirmishes that displaced her from her home on behalf of various feudal lords, as a survival tactic, and inflicts immediate and slow violence on other families throughout her life as a paid fighter.

Montero juxtaposes the life-giving field that grows crops and the neighboring battlefield where knights kill each other fighting to establish control over small pieces of land. As they pull the plough, Leola and her brother's panting is punctuated by the cries and screams from the battlefield where soldiers continue a daily war:

Nuestros jadeos quedan silenciados por los alaridos y los gritos agónicos de los combatientes: en el campo de al lado, muy cerca de nosotros, está la guerra. Desde hace tres días, cuatrocientos caballeros combaten entre sí en una pelea desesperada. Llegan todas las mañanas, al amanecer, ansiosos de matarse, y durante todo el día se hieren y se tajan con sus espadas terribles mientras el sol camina por el arco del cielo. Luego, al atardecer, se marchan tambaleantes a comer y a dormir, dispuestos a regresar a la jornada siguiente. [Our gasps are silenced by the battle cries and the agonizing screams of the combatants: in the neighboring field, very close to us, is the war. For three days, four hundred knights have fought among themselves in a desperate fight. They arrive every morning, at dawn, anxious to kill and be killed, and all day long they wound and slice with their terrible swords while the sun walks along its path in the sky. Later, at evening, they depart, staggering, to eat and drink, willing to return the next day.] (*Historia* 11)

As they fight, the knights shed their blood on the soil of the field. Watering a field should bring life, but the blood spilled in this landscape is a sign of death: “Día tras día, mientras nosotros arañamos la piel ingrata de la tierra, ellos riegan el campo vecino con su sangre [Day after day, while we scratch the ungrateful skin of the earth, they irrigate the neighboring field with their blood]” (*Historia* 11). The narrow division between the two fields pairs sites of life and death, growth and destruction. The space allotted to Leola’s family should bring them life, but the constraints placed upon them by the feudal economy affect their lifespan, their health, and their wellbeing. The boundary between the two fields seems clear, but both are sites of violence, carried out on different timescales. As they work, the air carries the scent of the battlefield towards the farmland. “El aire huele a sangre

y agonía, a vísceras expuestas, a excrementos [the air smells of blood and the anguish of death, of exposed guts, of excrement]” (*Historia* 12). When Leola enters that same battlefield to obtain a disguise, she gets a closer look at the site of violence. The field is a hellscape filled with blood, bodies, body parts. The deathly, pestilent air seems thick and poisons her lungs. Leola searches among the bodies, trying to breath as little as possible.

A la luz de la luna, los cuerpos rígidos de hombres y jumentos parece rocas retorcidas de un paisaje fantástico. Camino entre los cadáveres intentando no pisar con mis pies desnudos las piltrafas de carne, los cuajos de sangre. [By the light of the moon, the rigid bodies of men and donkeys look like the twisted rocks of a fantastic landscape.] (*Historia* 24).

The difficulty in maneuvering through this landscape and in the normally simple act of breathing signals Leola’s connection to the land and to the space around her. Finally, she finds a body about her size, whose armor is in decent condition. The young man is from a different class. Taking his clothes is a passport to a different life for Leola. She must find a helmet from a different knight’s body, because the first one has a head wound (*Historia* 24). After gathering the armor, she retreats from the battlefield back to her family’s field to get dressed (*Historia* 25). The site of her hard labor as a serf becomes the site of her transformation into a knight. The clothes she puts on change how she interacts with the environment around her. The new clothes are social markers, designating a higher status than she was born into. Therefore, the clothing changes how people see her: instead of a young serf woman, they see a young man who forms part of the nobility. There is a large gender and class difference between Leola’s identity without her new clothing and the identity she puts on when she dresses in the armor. The new clothes also change how she

sees herself, because the armor makes her feel more secure: “Ahora soy un guerrero. Un terrible gusano en capullo de hierro, como le oí cantar un día a un trovador [Now I am a warrior. A terrible worm in an iron cocoon]” (*Historia* 26). This organic metaphor seems tied to the dismembered, rotting bodies she picked through to find the armor. Leola’s disguise lets her enter the road and be considered a fleeing warrior, one of the many displaced people of multiple classes who are on the road. She is far less vulnerable in her armor than she would be as a lone woman in that space.

The road goes on

The road is filled with displaced individuals of all classes. It recalls the current and recent movements of refugees and asylum seekers who have been pushed out of their homes by war, poverty, and a variety of other causes. The caravans of asylum seekers at the US/Mexico border come to mind, as well as the Syrian refugee crisis (“Migrant Caravans,” “Syrian Refugee Crisis”). War’s immediate and longer-lasting effects push people to interact in ways they otherwise would not, in spaces they didn’t enter of their own free will. In Leola’s voice, Montero writes that

La guerra produce estos movimientos masivos, este desesperado andar y desandar de los caminos, familias enteras acarreando sus pobres pertenencias a la espalda, los niños más grandes llevando en brazos a sus hermanos pequeños con paso tambaleante, los viejos inválidos atados al lomo de la vaca, si por suerte la tienen, o arrastrados agónicamente entre dos adultos. Y siempre el agotamiento, el hambre, la desesperanza, el miedo del enemigo que se acerca, la nostalgia de todo lo perdido, el polvo que recubre los doloridos pies. [War produces these massive movements, this desperate tracing and retracing of the roads, whole families carrying their poor

possessions on their back, the older children carrying their younger siblings in their arms with stumbling steps, the disabled elderly tied to the back of the cow, if the family happens to have one, or dragged painfully between two adults. And always the exhaustion, the hunger, the desperation, the fear of the approaching enemy, the nostalgia for all that is lost, the dust that covers the aching feet.] (*Historia* 445)

Leola begins her journey as a refugee of war after her father, brother and fiancé were conscripted and her home was burned, and she flees from war several more times throughout her narrative. The roads are not a space of refuge for her or anyone else she encounters. They are a transitional space, a pathway to a better, safer place that may only exist in the hopes of those who travel the road. The movements Montero describes in *Historia del Rey Transparente* in 2005 prefigure the increasing global refugee crises that continue up to the present day. The feelings that Leola describes are far from infrequent among displaced people: “el agotamiento, el hambre, la desesperanza [exhaustion, hunger, desperation/hopelessness],” and the fear and trauma caused by the event which pushed them out of their homes (*Historia* 445). The push motivations for migration are often more complicated than a single violent event. In her column from 1 July 2017, Montero ties the Syrian refugee crisis to the damaging effects of climate change, writing,

expertos mundiales han señalado que la tragedia de Siria se ha visto fomentada por una inaudita sequía de siete años que hizo que centenares de miles de personas se desplazaran desde el campo hacia Damasco y Aleppo, creando una situación de inestabilidad social que favoreció la radicalización y el estallido de la violencia. [worldwide experts have indicated that the tragedy of Syria was fomented by an unprecedented seven-year drought that displaced hundreds of thousands of people

from the countryside to Damascus and Aleppo, creating a situation of social instability that favored radicalization and the eruption of violence] (“Últimas noticias del fin del mundo” *El País*)

The slow violence of climate change that manifests in “natural” disasters like droughts fosters the more spectacular violence of war, and the indifferent violence of the aftermath as survivors struggle to continue surviving. The massive movements of refugees in *Historia del Rey Transparente* also echo the movement of undocumented immigrants who make the dangerous journey across the Strait of Gibraltar into Spain, from the 1990s continuing into the present. Montero describes one group of immigrants in her column “Invisibles”, from 18 July 1992. She laments the plight of “sesenta centroafricanos atrapados entre las fronteras de España y de Marruecos, esto es, en tierra de nadie [seventy Central Africans trapped between the borders of Spain and Morocco, that is, in no-man’s-land]” (*La vida desnuda* 173). Later in the same column, she observes that these immigrants have been

expulsados del inclemente paraíso europeo y se han caído por el desagüe de la inexistencia, por las grietas cada vez más profundas que se abren entre los países. Ahí están, en fin, deshidratándose en unos cuantos palmos de tierra calcinada. Condenados a la invisibilidad porque nadie los mira. [expelled from the inclement European paradise have fallen down the drainpipe of nonexistence, through the ever-deeper cracks that open between countries. There they are, in short, dehydrating in a few inches of scorched earth. Condemned to invisibility because no one looks at them.] (*La vida desnuda* 174)

In writing this column, Montero draws attention to the dehumanization inherent in placing a group of people outside of any national borders in this kind of liminal space. While the

roads that Leola travels throughout the novel are not outside of national borders, this is in large part because those national borders do not yet exist. Various feudal rulers control the lands that Leola travels, but the roads that connect the places Leola visits seem to be outside of any of those domains. They are the space of “inciertos personajes [uncertain characters],” as Leola says at a later point in her journey. She writes of her initial fear of the road and of people who belong there, recognizing that she has become one of them.

Atada a la tierra como estaba, siempre desconfié de esos *inciertos personajes errabundos*, saltimbanquis, turbulentos caballeros jóvenes, prostitutas, buleros comerciantes, cómicos, clérigos oscuros, soldados de fortuna, frailes mendicantes, troveros, truhanes. [Tied to the land as I was, I always mistrusted those *uncertain wandering characters*, acrobats, turbulent young knights, prostitutes, commercial pardoners, comedians, obscure clergy, soldiers of fortune, mendicant friars, troubadours, rogues.] (*Historia* 98, emphasis mine).

The list of road-travelers reads like a list of characters from Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, while Leola’s description of her initial feelings about the road echo what Montero describes when she writes about the human tendency to look inward and give most importance to our own spaces. In “Basuras,” Montero’s column from 1 Sept 1991, she writes that, as humans, “Vivimos como *las hordas medievales*: sólo nuestro espacio es importante. El resto, el *ancho mundo*, es *un lugar ajeno y enemigo*. [We live like *the medieval hordes*: only our space is important. The rest, the *wide world*, is an alien and inimical place]” (*La vida desnuda* 221, emphasis mine.) Leola is not maliciously self-centered, but she expected to remain in her home for her entire life. When forced to leave, her justifiable fear leads her to develop survival strategies that tend to isolate her from others, with few exceptions. As

her story progresses, she opens herself up to a larger group of people, but when she first sets out, she requires armor, both literal and metaphorical, to protect her from the uncertainties of the road.

When Leola enters the liminal space of the road, her costume change gives her a chance to inhabit the world differently and to travel in a manner prohibited to her as a serf, tied to a single piece of land. Armed with her warrior disguise and a sword she doesn't know how to use, Leola ventures into the highways to search for Jacques, joining the multitude of other travelers along the road. The clothes are only a temporary solution, however. With the persona of a warrior comes the expectation that Leola knows how to fight, which invites more danger unless she actually learns how to do that. The road space is one of encounter, and Leola meets a variety of people. The refugees from the wars are of varying classes. What they have in common is their expulsion from their homes and the displacement they experience as they move towards somewhere new. People who would otherwise not interact much mingle together on the road, though the relationships are still far from equitable. A group of peasant women share food with her, fearful that otherwise she would take it by force, signaling the power imbalances inherent in the class divide and the violence inherent in the feudal system. Leola also encounters the mother and sister of the knight whose armor she took, whose class has not shielded them from the pain of the war. The knight's mother assumes Leola is the knight who killed her son, and that she wears his armor by right of conquest. Leola recalls the loss of her own mother and their shared pain cuts across class boundaries, though the women have little else in common.

Forests

Like the road, the forest is a liminal space that interacts with the people who pass through it. The forest in this text, as in much of mythology and storytelling, is both a site of danger and refuge. Leola runs to the forest after the soldiers take Jacques away. Alone in the forest, she finds herself afraid. Her ties to the open fields contribute to her fear of this space (*Historia* 46). She encounters a wild pig, and she wonders if it might be the devil in disguise, then realizes that the pig is just as afraid of her. She feels a connection to the animal and senses that although it could hurt her, it doesn't want to, any more than she wishes to hurt it. Once she strikes out as a knight, an attempted robbery prompts her to return to the forest, seeking refuge from the dangers of the open road. She sighs with relief when she reaches a clearing. This pleasant bit of landscape with rocks, sun and clear water fits the trope of the *locus amoenus*, a literary trope comprising a pleasant place including the setting of the pastoral novels that Cervantes parodies in *Don Quixote*. Here, it provides the setting for Leola's meeting with Nyneve. The name Nyneve is tied to Arthurian mythology, which Montero weaves into her novel, and connected to Avalon, another *locus amoenus*. She is a wise woman, a witch, a sorceress, the Lady of the Lake. She is ancient, ageless, and when Leola finds her, she has gotten herself stuck in a tree. As well as being humorous, Nyneve's placement in a tree when Leola first encounters her signals a closeness to nature which corresponds with her demonstrated wisdom and healing ability. Despite her predicament, she is perfectly calm. Their encounter takes the form of a fairy tale in which the heroine selflessly helps an old woman and receives favors in return. In Leola's case, Nyneve promises to help her find someone who will teach her how to fight, which she does. After Leola frees her, Nyneve accompanies her on the rest of her journey.

She proves a loyal and knowledgeable companion, and she and Leola share the rest of their lives together, in what becomes a quest for Avalon, a symbol of permanent refuge from the violence of the world around them. Nyneve's knowledge and her independence make her a potential target of violence. In her prologue to *Nosotras*, Montero recognizes the gendered violence that turned and turns against women who left their place in European social norms, writing of women who were condemned for "conocimientos médicos que les estaban prohibidas (las mujeres no podían estudiar) y cierta independencia. [medical knowledge that was prohibited to them (women could not study) and a certain independence]" (*Nosotras* 32). In their travels, Nyneve and Leola both take control over their lives as they navigate the geographies they inhabit.

Cities

Nyneve guides Leola to the first city she has ever seen, where Leola feels entirely out of place. She finds it disorienting and smelly and she believes the citizens despise serfs, though she does not narrate any specific experience to support this belief. She merely states the citizens' distaste for serfs as a fact, while she despises the city-dwellers for living in what she terms a pigsty:

me desagrada la ciudad por su bullicio mareante y la dificultad para orientarse, por los olores pestilentes y, sobre todo, por ese aire de superioridad que todos tienen. Se creen mejores que los demás porque son libres. A los campesinos nos desprecian por nuestra servidumbre y nos consideran poco más que animales y, sin embargo, ellos viven como puercos en un estercolero. [the city displeases me because of its infuriating racket and the difficulty in getting one's bearings, its pestilent smells and, above all, that air of superiority that everyone has. They believe they're better

than the rest because they are free. They despise us *campesinos* for our servitude and they consider us little more than animals, and nonetheless, they live like pigs in a pigsty] (*Historia* 55)

After years of being a knight, away from her original home, Leola's perspective on city living evolves. When she accompanies her patron Dhuoda to Poitiers, the court of queen Leonor, her narration changes significantly from her first urban experience. She practically gushes:

Poitiers es un burgo casi tan bello como la propia Reina [Leonor]. No entiendo por qué antaño me desagradaban las ciudades. Hoy me fascina el ruido, la confusión, las orgullosas casas tan altas como torres, las tiendas, el comercio, el colorido, la riqueza de los trajes, la variedad de gentes, la mundanería, el refinamiento, todas las sorpresas que te esperan al doblar una esquina. [Poitiers is a town nearly as beautiful as the Queen herself. I do not understand why in years past I disliked cities. Today I am fascinated by the noise, the confusion, the proud houses as high as towers, the stores, the commerce, the color, the richness of the clothing, the variety of peoples, the worldliness, the refinement, all the surprises that await you on turning a corner] (*Historia* 195)

Far from her first impression of cities as pigsties, Leola continues to praise the quality of life, describing it as “La vida estalla aquí, *la verdadera vida* [Life bursts here, *real life*]” and contrasts it with the countryside, which she now describes as “un lugar tan yerto como un cementerio [a place as barren as a cemetery]” (*Historia* 195, emphasis mine). The city, then, is a site of life for Leola, a place of refuge and growth. Today, the majority of Earth's population lives in cities, as noted by the development of the transdisciplinary field of

Urban Studies. Leola's experience with medieval cities is different from Agua Fría's experience with Magenta in *Temblor* and Baba's experience in the Barrio of the Ciudad Bonita in *Bella y oscura*. Unlike the other two protagonists, Leola is not restricted to one area of the city, and she has access to the most privileged part of the city: the palace, where she is a guest. She describes the lifestyle in Leonor's palace as "tan fácil, tan deliciosa y animada [so easy, so delicious and animated]" (*Historia* 195). This site of refuge is a feminized space, under the control of a gracious and powerful queen. Leonor's palace at Poitiers becomes a reflection of Avalon, a strong contrast to Leola's original home, in the feudal lands of her birth. Montero's collection of biographies, *Nosotras*, mentions women throughout history who fostered learning and community. Leonor's court also recalls Debra Dixon's description of Madame de Scudéry's salons, which centered intelligent and amiable conversation as a means to political power, mapped out in the form of her fantastic country, *Tendré* (Dixon 29-31). Leola participates in such conversations within the court. Her new class protects her and gives her a far different position and therefore a divergent experience of the city from that of commoners who did not have access to the world within the palace. Living in Leonor's palace as a guest is far different from her first city experience, when she was dressed as a lowly knight making her own way to an inn.

Leola finds other sites of refuge as she travels and they are necessary, because the world she inhabits is difficult, and only becomes worse with the crusade against the Cathars. Leola narrates, "Me siento prisionera en mi cuerpo, en mi casa, en mi vida, en esta ciudad cercada por la guerra, en este mundo violento e implacable [I feel a prisoner in my body, in my house, in my life, in this city fenced in by war, in this violent and implacable world]" (*Historia* 437). The relationship between body, house, life, city, and world is

evident in this expression of frustration, and Leola finds herself lost in the hell that consumes her world. Montero writes in her column “Diablos” from 25 Oct 1986 that “estamos viviendo en un infierno. Las guerras, las matanzas, las torturas, las hambrunas, la explotación bestial del ser humano. [we are living in a hell. Wars, killings, tortures, famines, bestial exploitation of human beings]” (*La vida desnuda* 17-18). Montero writes a similar line for a Cathar priest in *Historia del Rey Transparente*, who says “El infierno existe, y es este mundo. [Hell exists, and it is this world]” (*Historia* 344). In Leola’s world, this priest’s statement is supported by the hellscapes of multiple battlefields and public executions. At one of these scenes, Leola observes:

El viento trae el tufo requemado del *Apocalipsis*, pero al mismo tiempo alienta nuestros deseos de vivir y la determinación de defender nuestras costumbres [The wind brings the burning stench of *Apocalypse*, but at the same time encourages our desires to live and our determination to defend our customs]” (*Historia* 327, emphasis mine).

The wind, a natural phenomenon, has positive and negative effects. It brings hope as well as the smell of the fires, and Leola compares it to Apocalypse. This apocalyptic occurrence contributes to the dystopian nature of the setting. As Leola and Nyneve navigate this apocalyptic hellscape, Nyneve paints Avalon on the walls of their home in Albi and continues to do so in every house they inhabit from then on. She says that contemplating the painting will bring them peace and that imagining Avalon will help manifest that peace in the world (*Historia* 328). Their home then becomes a sanctuary for them and their friends. They also find refuge in the feminine space of an abbey as they flee for their lives. The abbess recognizes their plight and states, “Venís a la abadía buscando santuario y,

como cristiana que soy, no puedo negároslo. [You come to the abbey seeking sanctuary and, as a Christian, I cannot deny it to you]” (*Historia* 398). The concept of sanctuary and refuge become evident throughout the text, especially after Nyneve and Leola join with the Cathar refugees in “Montségur, un pequeño nido de águilas posado en la cima de los Pirineos [Montsegur, a small eagles nest perched on the top of the Pyrenees]” (*Historia* 486), where they make their last stand. When that last refuge is overcome by siege, they lead a small group of Cathar refugees away from the fortified city, in the hopes that they will survive the crusade. That slim hope proves futile in the face of the hubris and the crusader’s

‘pensamiento de grupo’ (según el cual un pequeño grupo se cierra sobre sí mismo, jalea enfervorecidamente las opiniones propias, demoniza cualquier opinión ajena y desdeña todo dato objetivo que contradiga sus prejuicios), [cuyas] consecuencias pueden ser catastróficas. [‘group think’ (according to which a small group closes in on itself, enthusiastically cheers on its own opinions, demonizes any outside opinion and disdains every objective fact that contradicts its prejudices.)] (*El amor de mi vida* 52-53)

When all other doors are closed to them, Nyneve prepares a potion that she says will magically carry her and anyone who chooses to drink it to Avalon. Nyneve tells Leola that “El mundo de Avalon está aquí, muy cerca, incluso dentro de nosotras” (*Historia* 559). This site of refuge is the last hope they have to escape the crusaders who come to attack their group of refugees. Leola chooses to drink it, saying

Me marchó a la Isla de las Manzanas, me voy con Nyneve, y con Morgana la Fay, la bella y sabia bruja. Con Arturo, el buen Rey, que allí se repone eternamente de

sus heridas; con la Hermosa Juventud, rescatada de la derrota y de la muerte. Pero no nos iremos muy lejos. ... Y regresaremos, y seremos millones. [I go to the Isle of the Apples, I go with Nyneve, and with Morgan la Fey, the beautiful and wise witch. With Arthur, the good King, that rests there eternally from his wounds; with the Beautiful Youth, rescued from defeat and from death. But we will not go very far... And we will return, and we will be millions] (*Historia* 569-570)

This fantastic site of refuge may or may not exist. Leola believes it does. She learned about it when Jacques told her it was a place he would like to visit, if they could travel beyond their lands:

Escucha, hay un sitio que sí me gustaría conocer... Se llama Avalon y es una isla en la que sólo viven mujeres Es un lugar maravilloso. Está gobernado por una reina llena de sabiduría y de belleza, la mejor reina que ha existido hasta ahora. Hay diez mil mujeres que viven con ella, y no conocen al hombre ni las leyes del hombre. [Listen, there is one place I would like to go... It's called Avalon and is an island where only women live ... It is a marvelous place. It is governed by a queen full of wisdom and beauty, the best queen that has existed until now. There are ten thousand women who live with her, and they do not know men or the laws of men.] (*Historia* 18-19)

Avalon, as a feminine space like Scudéry's *Tendre*, is set apart from the masculinist crusades that threaten Leola and Nyneve's loved ones. It is also a site of refuge from the power of death: "En la isla de Avalon no hay muerte, enfermedad ni vejez; los frutos siempre están maduros, los osos son dulces como palomas y no es necesario matar a los animales para comer [In the isle of Avalon there is no death, sickness or old age; the fruits

are always ripe, the bears are sweet as doves, and it is not necessary to kill animals to eat]” (*Historia* 19). An Edenic space, it has everything humans could want or need and none of the dangers and sorrows of the world they inhabit.

Montero draws her protagonists from marginalized individuals who collect other oppressed people into a family. Thus, Leola and Nyneve find themselves allied with the marginalized and displaced Cathars, a heretical sect persecuted systematically by the Catholic Church in an attempt to consolidate religious and political power. Montero’s column “Dragones” from 1 Dec 1990 reads,

Llega dicho dragón y escupe fuego; y de su aliento ardiente salen unos cuantos obispos, todos ellos hondamente preocupados por el nivel moral de la ciudadanía. Nada más natural: no hay más que repasar la historia de la Iglesia en España, desde la fritura de herejes al apoyo sistemático a las dictaduras y los regímenes tiránicos, para darse uno cuenta de que lo ético y lo moral siempre les preocupó muchísimo. [The aforementioned dragon arrives and spits fire, and from his burning breath emerge a few bishops, all of them deeply concerned with the moral level of the citizenship. Nothing more natural: one only has to review the history of the Church in Spain, from the fry up of heretics to the systemic support for dictatorships and tyrannical regimes to realize that the ethical and the moral always concerned them greatly] (*La vida desnuda* 121)

Montero’s ironic tone condemns the past and present positions of the Catholic church in Spain which shaped the landscape. Her description of the Cathar Crusade similarly condemns religious leaders who persecute supposed heretics. This crusade shapes much of Leola and Nyneve’s later life, as they find themselves philosophically sympathetic to the

Cathar cause. They and their fellow refugees flee the crusading armies in search of peace, but it is a doomed quest. As they near the end of their last journey, they cross back through the forest where they first met, and find it gone. Nyneve is filled with sorrow when they return years later to find this forest erased from the landscape. The pool and stream in the clearing are gone, replaced by a pipe and a watering trough (*Historia* 537-538). An immense monastery has bought the land and stripped it of trees so they can graze their cattle, and also to do away with the old world and erase the place of refuge of the old gods and their followers:

Talan los árboles, para que paste su ganado. Y también para que desaparezca el mundo antiguo. Sabes bien que los antiguos dioses y sus seguidores nos habíamos refugiado en los bosques salvajes y recónditos. [They clear-cut the trees so their cattle can graze. And also so the old world will disappear. You know well that the old gods and we their followers had taken refuge in the wild and hidden forests].
(*Historia* 539)

By destroying the landscape that had been a sanctuary for followers of other gods, the Catholic monks change the world and make it so there is literally no place for other believers. One of Montero's principal concerns is the protection of the environment, and she condemns ecological devastation through her fiction and journalism. Here, she demonstrates the connection between the erasure of a place of refuge for the marginalized and the "improvements" and "civilizing" processes imposed on the landscape by the monks.

The systemic human violence of war and so-called economic "progress" shapes the landscape and particularly effects the marginalized individuals who inhabit it. As Leola

journeys through the fields and forests in this novel, she experiences the way that the feudal economy, moving towards mercantilism, along with the slow and sudden violence promoted by religious and political systems, negatively impacts her own family as well as other marginalized groups and individuals. She collects a family, starting with Nyneve, but never quite finds a safe site to establish a permanent home. She dreams of reaching Avalon, but the ending is ambiguous, if hopeful, and in more literal readings, the reader could easily conclude that she never reaches any permanent refuge. However, this ambiguity and hesitation also permits a fantastic reading, which would imply that Avalon does exist, and that Leola's dreams are more than mere wishful thinking. In either case, *Historia del Rey Transparente*, like much of Montero's work, provides a microcosmic view of the humanity of marginalized peoples. As she writes of the shift from feudalism to mercantilism, she also promotes a reevaluation of the priorities of human economies in general, in accordance with a lessening of suffering and an expansion of individual freedoms. In the following section, I examine the material impact that the hierarchical systems Leola and Nyneve navigate have on their bodies and on the bodies of their also-marginalized found family.

Non-normative Bodies in Late Feudalism

In *Historia del Rey Transparente*, Montero writes the narration in the historical present, as a chronicle which Leola is recording at the end of her life. The narrative is a work of memory, and in writing about memory, Montero does memory work, a term I borrow from Sara Ahmed, who writes, "Feminist work is often memory work. We work to remember what sometimes we wish would or could just recede" (Ahmed 22). This term will serve as an analytical tool in the discussion of the society in *Temblor* in chapter four. Leola's narration of her life echoes Baba's first-person narration of her childhood in *Bella*

y oscura. While *Temblor* looks at the world through Agua Fría's eyes, it is a third person limited narration, like the Bruna Husky novels. The first-person narration in this novel, like in *Bella y oscura*, simulates the memory work a person can do as they retell their life story. Argentine sociologist Elizabeth Jelin writes of this work in *State Repression and The Labors of Memory* (2003):

As a distinctive feature of the human condition, work is what puts the individual and society in an active and productive position. The person is an agent of transformation, and in the process transforms him or herself and the world. Activity adds value. Thus, to assert that memory involves 'labor' is to incorporate it into the activity that generates and transforms the social world. (Jelin 5)

The work of memory and of creating a record of memory matter because they are a means of working through the trauma of the past in the present. Leola creates a record of her life as she faces death. This process requires both psychological labor and the physical labor of writing. As she writes, she works through her memories and the trauma she has experienced. Montero writes in her column "La luz de la memoria" from 8 Dec 1991 that "No hay amigo más íntimo que nuestra propia memoria [there is no more intimate friend than our own memory]" (*La vida desnuda* 222) and that "olvidar el pasado es como no haber vivido [forgetting the past is like never having lived]" (*La vida desnuda* 224). Memory is one of the major themes in Montero's work. Memory inherently has a temporal component, and Montero's characters often reflect on their personal histories and how they have evolved over time. Leola does this as she makes her record, and Yiannis Liberopoulos does something similar in the Bruna Husky series, particularly in *Lágrimas en la lluvia*. Leola's memories and her record track how she has interacted with the

hierarchical systems which have left physical and psychic traces on her mind and body. Her body is marked by scars over time. In his philological study of scars in literature, Jeffrey Sychertz writes: “In the history of Western literature, we see numerous examples in which bodies inscribed by violence carry significant epistemological power: scars tell stories and wounds speak” (Sychertz 137). Leola’s body becomes part of her life story, and her scars track how her identity is influenced by the systems she inhabits.

While Leola’s record tracks the story of her past life, the recording happens in the present. Jelin writes:

Locating memory in time implies making reference to the ‘space of experience’ in the present. Remembrances of the past are incorporated there, although in a dynamic manner, since experiences incorporated in a given moment can be modified in subsequent periods. (Jelin 3)

Memory is fallible, in other words. What the present self remembers, the past self may have experienced differently. Montero plays with this idea in her autofictional text *La loca de la casa* where her afterword states that she cannot state with certainty that her narration of events from her own life are true. As Montero narrates her characters’ experiences, she plays with memory, the concept of creating an archive, and the way that lived experience influences memory and identity. This is closely related to the way that lived experience shapes the bodies of the characters. Agua Fría’s cut-off finger in *Temblor*, Chico’s scars and Baba’s repressed memories of the orphanage in *Bella y oscura*, and Leola’s physical and emotional scars in this novel all reflect ways that these characters have experienced trauma. Leola encounters many other characters who have also been marked by traumatic

experience either influenced by or made more difficult by the systemic hierarchies they live with.

Feudalism and the church

There are two main hierarchical systems which Leola navigates throughout her life. First, the feudal system which governs the economic and political organization of the society she lives in. Second, the church which governs religious life and reacts swiftly and harshly to any challenge to its authority. To describe the time period that Leola inhabited, Jason W. Moore, environmental historian and historical geographer writes of

the golden age of European feudalism. Between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries medieval Europe experienced rapid population growth, leading to new settlement throughout central and eastern Europe. Successful military campaigns (“Crusades”) were waged against non-Christians in the Baltic, Iberia, and Palestine. Cities grew. There was significant growth of manufacturing output and cash-crop agriculture, part and parcel of a generalized wave of commercial expansion throughout Afro-Eurasia. The states consolidated their power against feudal lords. (Moore 105)

This is the macro picture, an overview which describes the general phenomena of four centuries. Leola experiences several of these phenomena on a micro scale. She sees growing cities, shifting political alliances, shifting religious power, people departing on foreign Crusades, and the changing ecology and agricultural economy. She sees feudal families in decline and watches them struggle to maintain their power. She works for some of them as a mercenary and observes the pettiness of the battles up close. Nyneve tells her that

Los señores feudales son así, mi Leo... Tú hasta ahora has conocido la nobleza occitana, que es mucho más agradable. Pero por desgracia ésa es la excepción dentro de la norma [The feudal lords are like this, my Leo... Up until now you've known the Occitan nobility, which is much more agreeable. But unfortunately, that is the exception within the rule.] (*Historia* 301)

Even the Occitan nobles struggle for power, with Leola's sometime patron Dhuoda waging a years-long religio-political battle against her older brother at the expense of the serfs who are bound to the land she owns (*Historia* 253). As her story takes place towards the end of the twelfth century, Leola does not live to see capitalism. Rather, she sees mercantilist systems in motion within some of the cities she visits.

She and Nyneve also experience violence at the hands of the church hierarchy as church leaders wage a crusade against the Cathars. In her column "Dragones" from 1 Dec 1990, cited in the previous section of this chapter, Montero's description of the church as a dragon paints the Catholic Church in much the same light as her descriptions of the Cathar Crusade fifteen years later in *Historia del Rey Transparente*. She paints Fray Angélico, the priest that Leola interacts with most frequently, as a hypocritical, power-hungry man. He justifies his own actions with the same breath that he condemns those more vulnerable than himself. His character acts as a representation of the whole church and gives a face to the crusade against the Cathars. The Catholic dogma as represented in Montero's novel contrasts with the more inclusive teachings of the Albigense sect, also known as the Cathars. Both Leola and Nyneve support the latter group and fight with them against the armies of the more powerful Catholic Church. This leads to capture, torture, and death for many of the Cathars, what Montero refers to in "Dragones" as the "la fritura de herejes [the

fry up of heretics]” (La vida desnuda 121). The bodies of heretics become the object of debilitating technologies which the reigning church employs to maintain hierarchical control.

Bodies

Leola and Nynaeve interact with a large number of people that their society sees as misfits. Nynaeve provides vital healthcare for some of them, including a girl whose skin condition resembles leprosy, a condition which several cultures treat as cause for collective shunning. Garland-Thomson writes of people who are formally and literally cast out:

People with disabilities have historically occupied positions as outcasts or misfits as, for example, in the roles of lepers, the mad, or cripples. ... Their outcast status is literal when the shape and function of their bodies comes in conflict with the shape and stuff of the built world. The primary negative effect of misfitting is exclusion from the public sphere—a literal casting out—and the resulting segregation into domestic spaces or sheltered institutions. (Garland-Thomson 594)

In Leola’s world, domestic or sheltered institutions that accept the types of misfits which Garland-Thomson describes here are few and far between. Perhaps there is an abbey or other space which would perform the labor Nynaeve does, but if so, Leola and Nynaeve never encounter it. Nynaeve gives of her time and skills to care for those who need medical attention regardless of the beneficiaries’ financial situation. Leola relates, “Nynaeve se gana la vida como curandera. Sus conocimientos médicos son extraordinarios y sus artes sanatorias muy requeridas, pero de todo ello extrae magras ganancias, porque *casi nunca cobra* a sus pacientes [Nynaeve earns her living as a healer. Her medical knowledge is extraordinary and her healing arts much sought-after, but from all of that she extracts

meager benefit, because she *almost never charges* her patients]” (*Historia* 333, emphasis mine). Nyneve’s ideals reflect her hope of finding a way back to Avalon. Leola and Nyneve adopt several others more marginalized than themselves throughout their journey. These people more often than not are misfits, as Garland-Thomson defines the term. For many of them, their misfitting leads to debilitation as Puar defines it: “a practice of rendering populations available for statistically likely injury” (Puar (2017) xviii). As they interact with harsh social systems, some bodies are more exposed to injury than others. All of Leola and Nyneve’s adopted family experience misfitting as a result of at least one aspect of their identities, and ultimately as “a contingent and fundamental fact of human embodiment” (Garland-Thomson 598). Existing as a misfit means needing other people. Most humans do rely on others to some degree or another: we are social creatures and do better when we care for one another. For me, this is the moral of Montero’s work: that people need to care and be cared for by other people, and that interpersonal connection is the only chance of survival in uncaring and debilitating hierarchical systems.

Leola and Nyneve carve out a space where people who misfit in society can exist and fit more comfortably, with some degree of protection from the harsh systems that surround them. One of the people they take in is a man named Guy, who they meet during Leola’s training. As part of her training, her teacher Roland has her fight the imposing Caballero Negro. Until she defeats him, she has only seen the knight in his armor. She wins the fight and knocks the knight down, much to her teacher’s surprise. As he comforts his son after his fall, Roland reveals that the knight is his son, Guy. Guy is an adult with an intellectual disability. Leola describes him when she first sees his face after the fight:

Su cabezota cuadrada posee una piel blanca y delicada, totalmente lampiña. Sus ojos están demasiado juntos sobre la nariz; su boca retorcida por los pucheros es demasiado pequeño y de labios rosados. *Es el rostro de un niño*, de un niño aventajado y monstruoso. [His great square head possesses a white and delicate skin, totally hairless. His eyes are too close together above the nose; his mouth twisted by puts is too small with rosy lips. *It is the face of a child*, of an overgrown and monstrous child] (*Historia* 86, emphasis mine)

In contrast with what Leola sees as a childlike face, Guy's body is tall and strong. His father dresses him in imposing black armor in an attempt to protect him: "Es un *inocente*. No quiero que se sepa: podrían hacerle daño. Ésa es la razón de su disfraz de caballero [He is an innocent. I don't want it to be known: people could do him harm]" (*Historia* 87). The disguise protects Guy's identity in much the same way that Leola's own armor protects her. Guy's father tells Leola and Nyneve that Guy is "muy grande por fuera, pero su alma es tan pequeña como la de una criatura [quite large on the outside, but his soul is as small as that of a young child]" (*Historia* 87). Leola also views Guy as childlike and needing protection, and she takes him in years later when she and Nyneve find him among other refugees during the Cathar Crusade. Guy's character is perhaps the one who is given the least agency, as he is described as permanently incapable of truly protecting himself (*Historia* 491). He does need a greater degree of care than many others. Within the narrative, Montero maintains that his value as a person is in no way diminished by the need for this type of accommodation. Leola herself benefits repeatedly from Nyneve's care for her. All of Montero's protagonists learn to rely on others to at least some degree as they navigate harsh realities.

They must care for each other because the most powerful people they encounter also have the least concern for those less privileged than themselves. Some nobles consider serfs to be disposable resources, whose value does reside in their usefulness and their productivity, which diminishes if the serfs' bodies prevent them from working. Serf bodies are servant bodies, and the nobles see them as comparable to animal bodies. Leola and her brother perform the labor that an ox or horse would perform when they work to pull the plow in their field:

Mi hermano y yo nos apretamos contra el arnés y tiramos con todas nuestras fuerzas del arado, mientras padre hunde en el suelo pedregoso nuestra preciada reja. [My brother and I pressed ourselves against the harness and pulled the plow with all our might, while father sinks our precious plowshare into the rocky soil.] (*Historia* 11)

Their entire bodies become part of the machinery that tills the land. Their bodies are worth more than their selves to the lord who benefits from their labor. Just as the nobles value serfs for the labor they perform, one of the main arguments made for the improved conditions of free city dwellers is that

Los burgos librados *trabajan mejor*, pagan beneficios, crean menos problemas, participan con hombres y dinero en los conflictos armados... y son mucho más leales a sus antiguos señores [Free towns *work better*, pay benefits, create fewer problems, contribute men and arms to armed conflicts... and are much more loyal to their former lords.] (*Historia* 209, emphasis mine).

This statement is part of Queen Leonor's dialogue. Despite her more progressive values, relative to other nobles, the emphasis is on the benefit the *burgos* can provide to the ruling class.

Montero points out that in addition to the value of their labor, another social function that the poorest classes fulfill is a rhetorical one. In her column from 9 Nov 1991, “Pobres,” she writes:

Recuérdese, por ejemplo, que durante muchos siglos los pobres fueron un estupendo instrumento de salvación. Los señores feudales les sacaban las mantecas a sus siervos y los patronos del siglo xix explotaban a sus obreros hasta dejarles hechos cisco, pero luego señores y patronos siempre podían repartir unos cuantos cobres a los mendigos y, zas, tan relimpios y redimidos de conciencia que se quedaban. Si no llega a ser por los pobres-pobres, los pobres ricos se hubieran ido todos de patitas al infierno. [Remember, for example, that during many centuries the poor were a stupendous instrument of salvation. Feudal lords beat their servants brutally and the bosses of the 19th century exploited their workers until they were broken to bits, but later lords and bosses could always distribute a few coppers to the beggars, and snap! Just like that they have bought back a clean conscience. If it weren't for the poor poor, the poor rich would have gone straight to hell. (*La vida desnuda* 160)]

With this column, Montero condemns anyone who exploits one group of less privileged people and serves another to soothe their conscience. Montero writes the duchess Dhuoda, Leola's patron, as this kind of feudal ruler. As Leola's first dinner at Dhuoda's table ends, a chandelier falls and kills one of the entertainers. Dhuoda's reaction highlights her view of the entertainers as merely disposable bodies:

Y, contemplando la carne rota y ensangrentada del acróbata, la Duquesa arruga con desagrado su blanca naricilla y remata: ‘Bendito sea Dios, se nos podría haber caído

encima a cualquiera. En fin, menos mal que no ha ocurrida nada' [And, contemplating the broken and bloody flesh of the acrobat, the Duchess wrinkled her nose with displeasure and concluded: 'Blessed be God, it could have fallen on anyone. Well, luckily nothing bad happened.] (Historia 134)

In dismissing the acrobat's dead and broken body as nothing, Dhuoda reveals her dehumanizing view of those who do not share her social status. Her reaction is that of someone disappointed by a broken toy, rather than one of mourning in the aftermath of accidental death. Montero has written about the way the financially privileged overlook the poor: "La verdadera marginación es invisible [True marginalization is invisible]" ("Pobreza" *El País* 14 Oct 2013). As Leola spends more time around Dhuoda, her own needs are met. She lives comfortably in Dhuoda's castle. She also values her relationship with the duchess enough that she chooses to ignore Dhuoda's harmful practices. Dhuoda does not discuss the management of her feudal lands with Leola and Leola is not forced to confront Dhuoda's treatment of the serfs on her land. Nyneve warns Leola that she should not trust Dhuoda, but Leola is able to ignore her friend's advice. As Montero writes in her satirically-named column "Los pobres apestan [the poor stink]" from 4 Jan 2014, "intentamos no ver lo que nos duele, lo que nos incomoda. Esto es algo muy humano [we try to not see that which pains us, that which discomforts us. This is something very human]" (*El País*). Leola's loyalty to Dhuoda ultimately leads her to actions that horrify her. A group of serfs who ask Dhuoda to delay or forgive their rent payments in consideration for a poor crop attack Dhuoda's party as they return home. Leola, acting as a knight, draws her sword. Her narration relates: "De pronto *me vi* con la espada en la mano, rodeada de campesinos que intentaban agarrarse a mis piernas y desmontarme

[Suddenly I saw myself with sword in hand, surrounded by country folk who were trying to grab my legs and dismount me]” (*Historia* 229, emphasis mine). The wording “me vi” places Leola as a spectator to the events, rather than an active participant. It removes the agency from her choice to defend Dhuoda with deadly violence. She continues,

Y que Dios me perdone, pero les odié. Odié su *violencia*, su *ira*, su *suciedad* y su *pobreza*. Odié sus *pretensiones*, su falta de respeto, su rudeza y la molestia que nos causaban [And may God forgive me, but I hated them. I hated their *violence*, their *wrath*, their *filth*, and their *poverty*. I hated their *pretensions*, their lack of respect, their rudeness, and the bother they were causing us.] (*Historia* 229)

Here Leola’s use of the first person does recognize the choice she makes and the way her decision is influenced by a hatred that led her to see these serfs the way Dhuoda does. She sees them as violent, wrathful, dirty, and poor. She herself is violent and full of wrath. She has been a serf herself, her body often dirty, her family poor. She has been in the place of these people. She has risen above the class she was born to by chance and pretension. Putting on stolen armor and setting out from her home is at least as pretentious an act as approaching a feudal ruler to ask for relief from taxes. In the moment that the serfs attack her, however, they see her as one of the nobles. She is dressed as a knight, carrying a sword, and riding a horse. Her presence in Dhuoda’s party separates her entirely from the serfs. Leola further states that “Les odié porque me odiaban y me defendí, y no sólo me defendí, sino que atacué y herí y tajé” (*Historia* 229). She goes beyond self-defense in her hatred and once she begins to fight, she does not stop herself:

Ciega de furor y embebida en la lucha, no paré hasta que súbitamente me encontré rodeada de soldados ... Me detuve a mirar alrededor como quien despierta de un

sueño, con el aliento entrecortado y la espada teñida de sangre [Blind with fury and drunk with the fight, I did not stop until suddenly I found myself surrounded by soldiers ... I stopped to look around like someone waking from a dream, with short breath and a blood-stained sword.] (*Historia* 229)

As she wakes up from her battle and realizes the full extent of what she has done, it is a clear signal to her that she needs to change. She first begs Dhuoda for the life of the leader of the quashed rebellion, but when Dhuoda refuses her petition, she prepares to leave Dhuoda's castle.

Leola's actions in Dhuoda's service mark her, and so does her work as a mercenary after she leaves Dhuoda's castle. Dhuoda knights her, and this enables her to earn her living as a mercenary for a long while, and this has consequences. Her body is inscribed with scars from her battles, and her psyche is marked by the choices she makes. The sense of horror Leola feels at her actions and the violence she inflicts on the bodies of comparatively helpless people marks her. Unlike Dhuoda, she feels remorse at this. Montero's narrative around Dhuoda's worldview recalls a column published 26 Mar 1983: "El horror", in which Montero writes that

El horror no tiene una progresión cuantitativa, sino *cualitativa*, de sustancia. El número de víctimas no basta para definir lo horripilante, porque el horror se asienta en la consciencia, en la crueldad planificada, en la voluntad de ser horrible. El horror es un atributo humano y ha de ser ejecutado por personas. [Horror does not have a quantitative progression but a *qualitative* one, of substance. The number of victims does not suffice to define the horrific, because horror rests in the

conscience, in the planned cruelty, in the will to be horrible. Horror is a human attribute and must be executed by people] (*La vida desnuda* 43, emphasis mine)

By this definition, much of Leola's story is horrific. The violence against the serfs near Dhuoda's castle was one of the most horrific things Leola participated in as a perpetrator. Throughout the novel, Montero describes other horrific events through Leola's perspective, including the torture and murder that the Crusaders commit against adherents of the Cathar sect.

Misfitting

I argue that misfits often possess non-normative wills, what we might also call *queer* wills. A misfit may possess a non-normative will, a non-normative body, or a non-normative mind may all reside in the same person. Those whose way of being contrasts the dominant norm bump up against that norm as they experience misfitting. The Cathars experience this misfit as their religious arguments collide with the dominant dogma of the Catholic church. Queer people in heterosexual and cisgender societies often experience this as their desires contradict the dominant narratives about identity and attraction. Sara Ahmed writes that "Willfulness and unhappiness seem to meet at this point, a stray point. This intimacy of willfulness and unhappiness remains to be thought. And to think that intimacy is to queer the will" (Ahmed *Willful* 4). The Cathars, whom the Catholic church see as heretics, are committing an error of will in the more powerful church's view. Their "sin" is in deviating from established doctrine. As Sara Ahmed writes, "Willfulness is used to explain errors of will—unreasonable or perverted will— as faults of character" (Ahmed *Willful* 4). The Cathar's refusal to stop fighting and "repent" by complying with the will of the church reads as an act of persistent willfulness in the face of overwhelming odds.

Ahmed writes that “One of my arguments is that some bodies have to push harder than other bodies just to proceed; this argument might be true for arguments as well as bodies” (Ahmed *Willful* 20). The Cathars’ doctrinal arguments have to push to be heard in the face of the official doctrines of the Catholic church, and ultimately many of the Cathars’ bodies become fuel for the Crusader’s fires. As the Grimm Brothers’ tale of the willful child points to punishment as the remedy for willfulness, so the torture and murder of the Cathars’ bodies provide the remedy for their heresy in the Crusaders’ limited worldview. Similarly, some queer bodies belong to those who have internalized the dominant narratives about worth and willfulness as they struggle to find a fit in their society. Such narratives encourage the misfit individuals to discipline themselves to create a better fit. This is like the norms which encourage disabled bodies to “try harder” to do more work to fit into a society which does not accommodate their bodies. While in Leonor’s¹⁵ palace, a relative haven of more progressive nobles, Leola comes across Leonor’s son Ricardo¹⁶ in the chapel. He does not see her, and she observes as he prays. He involves his whole body in his petition:

Está tumbado cuan largo es sobre el suelo, delante del sagrario. Pero ahora se incorpora; echa el cuerpo hacia atrás y se pone de rodillas, para volverse a postrarse inmediatamente [he prostrates his whole self upon the floor, before the sanctuary. But now he rises; he throws his body back and kneels, to again prostrate himself immediately.] (*Historia* 212)

As he moves his body, he prays aloud, raising his voice enough that Leola overhears:

15 Eleanor of Aquitaine.

16 Richard the Lionheart, future king of England.

Señor, me acuso de tener deseos contra natura. Perdonadme, Mi Señor. Sé que estoy tentado por el Maligno y sé que soy *débil*. Mi *carne es pecadora*; mi *voluntad, miserable y perezosa* [Lord, I accuse myself of having desires against nature. Forgive me, My Lord. I know that I am tempted by the Evil One and I know that I am *weak*. My *flesh is sinful*; my *will, miserable and lazy*.] (*Historia* 212, emphasis mine)

Ricardo's cry connects the self, the mind, and the body. He "confesses" that he is weak and that his body's *flesh* is sinful. Immediately after, he states that his *will* is both miserable and lazy. His confession draws a causal connection between a sinful body which houses a weak or incorrect will and the "deseos contra natura [desires against nature]" that he accuses himself of possessing. He equates his sexual orientation¹⁷ to a willful sin, though the prayer which Leola overhears indicates that he would willingly stop desiring if it were possible:

Oh, Dios Mío, ayudadme a no caer en la tentación. Prometo *enmendarme* y alejar de mí los pensamientos impuros, mi aberrante lujuria, mi viciosa *debilidad* por las criaturas de mi propio sexo. Dios Mío, ayudadme a salir de *este infierno* [Oh, My God, help me to not fall into temptation. I promise *to mend myself* and put far from myself impure thoughts, my aberrant lust, my vicious *weakness* for creatures of my own sex. My God, help me to escape from *this hell*.] (*Historia* 212)

Ricardo promises to straighten himself, to "fix" himself and become pure and strong in the face of what he sees as a weakness. I read the scene as an act of self-discipline in the face

17 Montero notes in "Unas consideraciones finales" at the end of the novel, "es cierto que el pobre Ricardo Corazón de León hizo varias penitencias públicas, confesando pecados contra natura" (*Historia* 589).

of strict doctrines, like the mother who punished her Willful Child to give her “rest.” As he prays, he demonstrates the unhappiness that comes from existing with an uncomfortable fit between his identity and the world around him.

Another character whose queer sexuality plays a role in the novel is Dhuoda, Leola’s patron. Dhuoda’s past includes abuse at the hands of her older brother, who sold her to a much older husband, who kept her locked in a tower as a hostage more than anything (*Historia* 154). Dhuoda’s traumatic past shapes part of her present identity. As Leola stays in the castle, she maintains her disguise as the warrior Leo. Dhuoda sees through the disguise and propositions Leola:

Hace tiempo que sueño con tus ojos azules... y con las suaves y redondas formas que se ocultan bajo tu cota de malla. Y ahora que ha quedado todo claro, ¿de verdad que no te atreves a jugar conmigo? [For some time, I’ve dreamed of your blue eyes... and of the soft round form that hides beneath your coat of mail. And now that all is clear, do you truly not dare to play with me?] (*Historia* 148)

Leola’s narration relates, “nunca he deseado a una mujer [I’ve never desired a woman]” (*Historia* 148) and she begs the duchess to forgive her for her lack of desire. Dhuoda respects Leola’s refusal, saying that she could threaten Leola with punishment but chooses not to. Instead, the two women develop a friendship forged in shared secrets, which lasts until Leola leaves the castle and Dhuoda becomes a steadfast enemy instead. Even while their friendship lasts, Dhuoda benefits from the power differential as Leola cannot deny her wishes safely. Nonetheless, they have a peaceful relationship, if an unequal one. Dhuoda teaches Leola how to act like a noblewoman, using the same techniques that she learned with:

He pasado largas tardes apresada dentro de unas espalderas de cuero provistas de clavos, para aprender a mantenerme bien derecha. Ahora uso collarines de mimbre que corrigen la posición de la cabeza, y Dhuoda acostumbra a hacerme caminar descalza delante de ella y me azota los tobillos desnudos con un junco si no me muevo bien. [I have spent long afternoons pressed within leather back and chest plates with nails to learn how to keep myself properly straight. Now I use wicker collars to correct the position of my head, and Dhuoda often makes me walk barefoot before her and she whips my naked ankles with a reed if I don't move well] (*Historia* 152)

When Leola gets tired of the methods, Dhuoda tells her, “No te quejes. Así he aprendido yo. Así hemos aprendido todas las damas. [Don't complain. This is how I learned. This is how all ladies have learned]” (*Historia* 152). The way these techniques mold noblewomen's bodies into a specific shape is a matter of discipline, enforced via punishment. Dhuoda's appearance evolves as she becomes more powerful, more dangerous, and more certain of herself. She is one of the principal personal antagonists in Leola's life. When Leola encounters her again after Dhuoda has joined the anti-Cathar crusade, not only has the duchess's castle become shrouded in permanent clouds and rain, the duchess's own appearance has transformed. Dhuoda wears newer plate armor on her torso and skirts from the waist down. She is also losing her hair. Hair is a common sign of femininity and the loss of it accompanies the hardening of the duchess's heart, a stereotypically unfeminine characteristic. Leola records that the duchess

Parece una vieja, o quizás un viejo: esta *turbadora* mezcla de sayas de seda, collares de perlas y armaduras feroces le otorga una inquietante *imprecisión sexual*, un *lugar*

indefinido entre el varón y la hembra. [She looks like an old woman, or perhaps an old man: this *disturbing* mix of silk skirts, pearl collars and ferocious armor gives her a disquieting *sexual imprecision*, an *indefinite place between male and female*] (*Historia* 371-372, emphasis mine)

Whereas Leola's crossdressing for most of the novel puts her squarely in either masculine or feminine presentation, Dhuoda's wardrobe mixes the two styles, putting her in a liminal space. At the last battle of the Cathar crusade, Leola and Nyneve also maintain their feminine clothing while armoring themselves to fight, echoing Dhuoda's dress in this scene. As one of Leola's antagonists, the duchess is a foil for Leola. Both had difficult childhoods, both have learned to fight, and both have made choices that they see as self-protection. Dhuoda's choices are rooted in a lack of recognition of the humanity of other people, however, and Leola's choices ultimately place her among the Cathars because they argue for more rights for everyone.

Leola's own body is at the center of her narrative. Her relationship with her body evolves over the twenty-five years of her journey as she experiences different fits with the world around her. When she dresses as a man, her body moves through the world with less friction than she experiences when she dresses as a woman. Garland-Thomson writes that "A good enough fit produces material anonymity" (Garland-Thomson 596). Her armor shields her from the debilitating social systems that impact her more when she dresses as a woman. Nonetheless, Leola experiences mixed feelings about her clothing. At times the armor feels like protection, at others like a cage. Puar writes that

there is no pure debility or pure capacity. Debility and capacity are not properties or attributes of one discrete body or a representational grid certain bodies are placed

into. Debility may well simultaneously appropriate bodily capacities closing off, perhaps to give rise to a new set of bodily capacities. Capacity is not discretely of the body. It is shaped by and bound to interface with prevailing notions of chance, risk, accident, luck, and probability, as well as with bodily limits/incapacity, disability, and debility. (Puar (2017) 19)

As Leola dresses as a man, her debility and capacity shift. Sometimes she feels that she has imprisoned her body in the disguise, but at other times she feels like a prisoner within her body. When her menstrual cycle begins while she is riding with a group of men, they see the blood and express concern. She explains it as an old wound.

Y proseguimos nuestro camino, mientras yo maldecía mi cuerpo de mujer. *Este pobre cuerpo prisionero*, que pugna por salir y derramarse. [And we continued on our way, while I cursed my woman's body. *This poor imprisoned body*, that fights to get out and spill over.] (*Historia* 251, emphasis mine)

As Leola frames it, her body fights the disguise in an attempt to escape. Leola also narrates an uncomfortable fit within her own body and within the world: “Me siento prisionera en mi *cuerpo*, en mi *casa*, en mi *vida*, en esta *ciudad* cercada por la guerra, en este *mundo* violento e implacable [I feel imprisoned in my *body*, in my *house*, in my *life*, in this violent and implacable *world*]” (*Historia* 437). The relationship between life, body, house, city, and world is often an uncomfortable one. After a time in which she presents as feminine, Leola describes returning to her armor:

El cuerpo me pesa. Estoy vestida una vez más de caballero y siento mi armadura como una jaula. No entiendo cómo pude permanecer durante tantos años *incrustada en este caparazón* de duro hierro. My body weighs me down. I'm dressed once

more as a knight and I feel my armor like a cage. I don't understand how I could stay so many years *incrusted in this shell* of hard iron.] (*Historia* 337, emphasis mine)

The way her body weighs her down highlights the discomfort of the fit between her and her body and the world. Her body also experiences changes as she ages, and she finds her work more and more difficult to bear:

Mi trabajo de Mercader de Sangre me resulta cada día más insoportable. Además estoy envejeciendo: advierto que mi vigor físico disminuye y que aumenta mi miedo, dos *consecuencias de la edad*. [My work as a Merchant of Blood is more unsupportable every day. Moreover, I'm getting old: I notice my physical vigor diminishing and my fear growing, two *consequences of age*]” (*Historia* 314, emphasis mine).

The measures Leola takes to protect herself and her body as best she can through disguise run the risk of punishment from the Catholic church if they discover her “heretical” behavior. Leola's disguise, according to Fray Angélico, Dhuoda's cousin and a Catholic priest, is a grave sin:

Vestirse de hombre ya es una abominación ante los ojos de Cristo. Sólo por eso te podrían haber quemado ciento y una veces. Y, luego, mi desdichada amiga, agravaste de modo repugnante tu pecado escogiendo el partido de los herejes. [Dressing as a man is already an abomination in Christ's eyes. Only for that they could have burned one hundred and one times. And, then, my unfortunate friend, you increased your sin repugnantly by choosing the side of the heretics.] (*Historia* 381)

Leola does not see her disguise as a sin but as a choice to protect herself. It is a survival strategy. When she disguises herself, it is a calculated risk which lets her access opportunities that she could not have if she dressed as a woman. Especially after the betrayal of a former lover, Gastón, Leola relates that “no he querido volver a sentir la fragilidad de mi cuerpo de hembra. [I have not wanted to feel the fragility of my female body again]” (*Historia* 418). As she works to protect herself, she has the aid of Nyneve, whose medical knowledge saves Leola on more than one occasion. The results of the wounds Leola receives leave marks, despite Nyneve’s care:

Una nueva cicatriz *deforma y afea* mi maltratado cuerpo. Nyneve ha vuelto a remendarme, rescatándome del mundo sombrío de los medio muertos [A new scar *deforms and disfigures* my mistreated body. Nyneve has mended me again, rescuing me from the shadowy world of the half dead.] (*Historia* 432, emphasis mine)

The idea that the scars deform her body and make it ugly follow from standards of beauty. As time passes, her body changes from age and from scarring. Sychterz writes, “while the scar carries a story inscribed on the body, the wound speaks with a voice” (144). The trauma of being wounded in a way that leaves a scar takes time to heal and process before it can become part of a person’s narrative. Montero’s use of the present tense throughout the narration in *Historia del Rey Transparente* creates an immediacy when Leola speaks of her wounds and reflects Leola’s feelings about the traumatic experiences that cause them. In the quote above, in which Leola speaks of her body as ugly and deformed, I read her tone as discouraged. In my reading, she is still processing the psychic trauma that accompanies such wounds. While her disguise as a knight protects her from the dangers inherent in being a woman in her world, it brings a different set of dangers that can wound.

Leola's non-normativity comes from her choice to dress as a man and become a knight. Other characters' non-normativity resides in how their bodies were formed at birth or in things that other people did to their bodies. Violante, a Little Person, and Filippo, whom Leola's friend and lover León rescues from slavery, are two such people. Violante is the daughter of one of the Cathar leaders. When Leola first meets her, she describes Violante as “una *desdichada* criatura con un *rostro de ángel* y un *cuerpo de endriago* [an *unhappy* creature with the *face of an angel* and the *body of a monster*]” (*Historia* 321). This is the first thing she notices about the girl. Much like Leola's description of Guy, she focuses on the contrast between perceived innocence and monstrosity. In Guy's case, she focuses on his size and his childlike face. In Violante's case, the description focuses on the “normal” size of her head and the small size of her body:

Su cabeza posee una dimensión normal y se diría que corresponde a una muchacha de quince o dieciséis años, pero del cuello para abajo apenas abulta lo que un niño de cinco. [The proportions of her head are normal, and one would say they matched a girl of fifteen or sixteen years, but from the neck down she hardly measures more than a child of five.] (*Historia* 321)

The perceived misfit between the size of Violante's head and the size of her body calls Leola's attention. She also remarks upon the size of her arms and hands: “De un tórax picudo y diminuto emergen unos brazos *quebradizos*, rematados por unas *manitas* transparentes. [From her long and diminutive thorax emerge *fragile* arms, finishing in a set of transparent *little hands*]” (*Historia* 321, emphasis mine). The focus on Violante's delicate arms is like Montero's narrative descriptions of other Little Person characters, Torbellino (*Temblor*) and Airelai (*Bella y oscura*). An analysis of those characters' non-

normative bodies can be found in chapter four. As with Airelai, there is also a focus here on Violante's clothing: "Viste un bonito traje de seda azul con bordados de flores. [She wears a pretty dress of blue silk with embroidered flowers]" (*Historia* 321). Finally, Leola notices that the crowd makes it impossible for Violante to observe the speaker they have gathered to see "como sus ojos quedan muy por debajo de las espaldas de la gente, la *pobre* no ve nada. [as her eyes are far below the backs of the people, the *poor thing* can't see anything]" (*Historia* 321, emphasis mine). The way that Leola observes Violante focuses on her body, on her clothing and on the way she interacts with her surroundings. Rosemary Garland-Thomson writes that "A person with dwarfism is excluded primarily because she must navigate a world whose scale is wrong for her body" (Garland-Thomson 602). Violante experiences this type of misfitting constantly. As Leola notes the misfit, she sees Violante as someone who requires her pity. Because of the way she sees Violante, Leola is surprised by the young woman's smile: "*Pero* una viva sonrisa ilumina su bonito rostro y parece feliz. Eso es lo que más *me extraña*: su alegría insospechada. [*But* a lively smile illuminates her pretty face and she seems happy. That is what *seems strangest to me*: her unexpected joy]" (*Historia* 321, emphasis mine). The way that Violante's joy surprises Leola and seems to her to contrast with her identity recalls the experiences that people with non-normative bodies have while moving through a normative world. As with Montero's other protagonists, Leola's interactions with people different than her often focuses on those differences. Violante is one of the people who eventually become part of Leola's and Nyneve's adopted family. She grows particularly attached to León, Leola's lover. She grows accustomed to riding on León's shoulders, which echoes Montero's Edenic story about the giants and the dwarfs who existed at the beginning of the world, which Airelai

tells Baba in *Bella y oscura* and which Bruna tells Gabi in *El peso del corazón*. León's large size and Violante's small size form another contrast. Violante was born with her physical non-normativity. Filippo was not. His body is non-normative in two ways. He has the text of the Iliad tattooed over his body, covering most of his skin. He is also a eunuch (*Historia* 458). In both cases, his body was almost certainly altered without his consent. He has been held captive and displayed for the amusement of a feudal lord. León sees him and objects to his mistreatment, then rescues him by winning an arm-wrestling contest. The lord sees both Filippo and León as sources of amusement rather than people whose lives matter. After they take Filippo home, Leola notices how Filippo's behavior has been affected by the way people have treated him as an object, rather than a person. Like herself, he experiences psychic scarring as a result of trauma. Jelin writes that "Intense traumatic events generate in the subject who lives through them an inability to respond, leading to diverse kinds of difficulties in the ability to function socially" (Jelin 50). Filippo's trauma and a language barrier block his ability to communicate with the people who have adopted him, and he never fully relates his experiences as an enslaved person. The reader and the other characters are left to imagine for themselves the pain he has suffered based on the marks on his body and his psyche.

The way in which Leola and Nyneve's family grows beyond the two of them is centered around non-normativity. Each of their family has a non-normative identity and they grow together in the middle of a normative world. Garland-Thomson writes that

By framing the materialization of identity and subjectivity as *perpetual, complex encounters between embodied variation and environments*, fitting and misfitting can help reconceptualize the reigning notion of "oppression," with its suggestion

of *individually enforced, hierarchically structured subjugation*. (Garland-Thomson 602, emphasis mine)

The people Leola and Nyneve take in amidst the horrors of the crusade all embody non-normativity. Their embodied identities and subjectivities all interact with the world around them in different ways. As the environment grows more hierarchical while the Catholic church reinforces its authority, Nyneve and Leola work to keep the people they care about safe as long as they can.

The time that Leola and Nyneve enjoy their adopted family in relative peace comes to an end after the last battle of the Cathar crusade. They lead a small group of Cathars out of the last stronghold to relative safety as the crusaders capture those who stayed behind and burn them at the stake. The escapees become separated, León and Violante going one way and Nyneve, Leola, and Guy going another, and they are unable to reunite. Finally, though they find a temporary refuge, Nyneve seems to lose hope for the first time since she started traveling with Leola. She works to prepare a potion that she explains will carry her away to Avalon, leaving her physical body behind:

‘Basta con beber un trago... y caerás sumida en un sueño... tan profundo que semeja la muerte. Pero en realidad lo que queda de ti aquí es sólo un espejismo... tu espíritu y tu verdadero ser atraviesan el éter hasta Avalon. [You only have to swallow one mouthful ... and you will fall into a sleep so deep that it resembles death. But in reality, what remains of you here is just an illusion... your spirit and your true self pass through the ether to Avalon.] (*Historia* 558)

Nyneve tells Leola there is enough potion for her, Leola, Guy and all of the Cathars who have fled, but Leola objects that this would mean disappearing from this world forever.

Nyneve explains that everything returns, and that they can take refuge in Avalon just until “los años de plomo [the years of lead]” end and “las cosas mejoran [things get better]” (*Historia* 559). As she prepares to take the potion, Nyneve urges Leola to join her, but Leola hesitates. Nyneve promises to wait in Avalon for Leola, then she drinks the potion and her body assumes the appearance of death (*Historia* 561). Leola waits to drink the potion until the crusaders are at their gates and she has finished recording her story.

The record which Leola writes before departing the world she has spent her life in ties into Montero’s themes of collective and individual memory. While Leola uses the present tense to narrate her past, the narrative demonstrates how Leola sees herself at the moment of writing: her story is filtered through her present perspective. Montero writes in *La loca de la casa*, that although what she writes about other books and other people is true,

me temo que no puedo asegurar lo mismo sobre aquello que roza mi propia vida. Y es que *toda autobiografía es ficcional y toda ficción autobiográfica*, como decía Barthes. [I fear that I cannot be certain of the same about that which concerns my own life. And it is the case that *every autobiography is fictional and every fiction autobiographical*, as Barthes said.] (*La loca de la casa* 249)

Montero often plays with memory, remembering, and the line between truth and fiction in this way. She does so with Airelai’s self-narrative in *Bella y oscura* and also with the character of Yiannis in *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, Montero discusses the effect that the passage of time has on memory and identity. Dale J. Pratt notes, “Hasta Yiannis mismo se considera ‘otro’; ... el Yiannis veinteañero y el Yiannis actual son y a la vez no son la ‘misma’ persona [Even Yiannis considers himself to be ‘other’;... the twenty-year-old Yiannis and

the current Yiannis are and at the same time are not the ‘same’ person]” (Pratt 8). In the same way, the person that Leola is at her moment of writing shapes the memories she records of her past self. As Jelin writes, memory has a strong temporal component: “The past that is remembered and forgotten is *activated in a present and in relation to future expectations*” (Jelin 9, emphasis mine). Leola’s future expectations are for a different life instead of an immediate continuation of her present life in the world she knows, and she shapes her remembrances accordingly. Her story and her self-image are materially impacted by the systems she has navigated through her life.

In this novel, Montero creates a microcosm of the human experience of life in a society. As she weaves Leola’s story together with the lives of other non-normative people who become part of Leola’s family, this allows her to show the impact of harsh social systems on the bodies of individual marginalized people. It also allows Montero to craft a narrative about marginalized individuals who form alternative familial relationships during difficult circumstances. These relationships are often strengthened by shared or similarly traumatic life experiences as a result of misfitting. Montero’s focus on specific characters and particular relationships taps into the conversation about what it means to be human and to survive in the world.

Conclusion to Chapter Two

Montero writes about feudalism for the same reason she writes about the future, to examine the human condition. As in her other SF novels, her human-oriented work in *Historia del Rey Transparente* focuses on a concern for the ecological well-being of the planet we inhabit as well as a concern for marginalized individuals and groups within a historical conflict. Montero draws her characters not from the victors but from the defeated.

The novel's alternate history gives voice to a story of dissidence and defeat. Its focus on members of the dissenting party and the cause they fought for speaks to present-day struggles against oppressive hierarchies. The story also resonates with similar fights in other historical moments around the globe. Montero's narration works against the human tendency towards anthropocentrism by highlighting the relationship between Leola and her found family and the environment they inhabit. Within an Anthropocene setting, Leola, Nyneve, and the rest of their chosen family members experience the brutality of the Cathar crusade, and they observe the harmful effects the crusade and the solidification of Church power have on the land around them. Within the feudal ecology, non-normativity is molded into compliance or extinguished. This chapter has explored the bodily impact that oppressive systems have on non-normative characters as well as the harm which human organizations cause to the environment within *Historia del Rey Transparente*.

Chapter three: Complex Sociopolitical Ecologies in Dystopian Systems

Montero's ecological ethic, which she expresses in both her fiction and journalism, shapes the spaces that she creates for her fictional characters to inhabit. Montero clearly expresses a critique of problems which are also part of the Capitalocene. Montero's ecological concerns influence the relationship between her characters and the settings they inhabit. "To inhabit as a whole, not only in relation to housing, is also understood as being part of a group, of a community which the person inhabits" (Uribe Vilarrodona 2). Groups and individuals interact with each other in the environments in which they live. Their presence and their actions influence the place where they live. The speculative settings of Montero's novels create a foundation for the next chapter's analysis of the material impact which hierarchical systems have on the bodies of their inhabitants within Montero's novels. Montero does not take a subtle approach as she describes the devastating impact of Capitalist systems on the environment. This chapter deals with the settings of *Temblor* and the Bruna Husky trilogy, as the previous chapter dealt with *Historia del Rey Transparente* and the setting of *Bella y oscura* is realistic rather than speculative. In the Bruna Husky series, Montero creates futuristic settings which are the direct result of present-day global policies and decisions to pursue profit and power over environmental well-being. This results in reduced inhabitable space, contaminated air and water, and apocalyptic landscapes plagued by war and destruction. In *Temblor*, Montero's setting is even further in the future, though it was published 21 years prior to *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, the first Bruna Husky novel. Details within *Temblor* indicate that the inhabitants of Agua Fria's world descend from the people of the floating worlds in the Bruna series, who were the only survivors of a nuclear apocalypse on Earth. Montero's use of fantastic landscapes, thrilling

storylines, and settings which remove the reader from the twenty-first century may combine to ease audiences of varying political persuasions into the story and to treat the ecocritical message as a human concern rather than a partisan one. Montero's protagonists generally have a strong sense of place, a strong connection to nature, or both. The speculative settings allow Montero to explore the human condition and implicitly argue for better stewardship of the planet, in a different method and from a different angle than she does in the explicit calls for better relationship between humanity and ecology which she often makes through her journalism. In this chapter, I examine the dystopian and apocalyptic ecologies of *Temblor* and the Bruna Husky series, and how Capitalist systems and mechanisms have shaped the ecology of those settings.

When Montero focuses on a single individual or group of individuals, she creates a microcosm of the relational web of society and nature. Jason Moore writes, "planetary life is a web of interdependencies, all the way up and down. Species form and differentiate through a web of life. That web of life is historical, and not only over geological time" ("The Capitalocene, Part I" 599). The concepts of Society and Nature are often framed as a binary opposition, which Moore critiques, arguing that this framing is both reductive and misleading. He writes:

This [Society/Nature] dualism obscures our vistas of power, production and profit in the web of life. It prevents us from seeing the accumulation of capital as a powerful web of interspecies dependencies; it prevents us from seeing how those interdependencies are not only shaped by capital, but also shape it; and it prevents us from seeing how the terms of that producer/product relations change over time. (Moore "The Capitalocene, Part I" 598)

Moore attributes this kind of binary reductiveness to the concept of the Anthropocene itself. I disagree with his characterization of the theoretical concept of the Anthropocene, and instead point to the human tendency towards *anthropocentrism* which both Anthropocene and Capitalocene scholars criticize. However, Moore's point about the reductiveness of binary framings themselves stands. Such binary framings are false dichotomies which, if accepted as true, prevent both scholars and laypeople from viewing the complexity of reality. If Society and Nature are in opposition in a zero-sum game, then any effort to "grow" society must necessarily come at the cost of "Nature." The current push to reopen the United States amidst the COVID-19 pandemic without the infrastructures that other reopening nations have in place is based on a similar dichotomy, the idea that the economy and human life cannot both be saved and so one must be sacrificed to save the other (Baker). The idea that the economy can only continue if we sacrifice people's lives – especially marginalized people's lives – to preserve it is much like the idea that human society can only exist at the expense of nature. As Montero writes in "Mi perra no me habla", cited in the previous chapter, the human tendency to center ourselves leads to excessive and destructive behavior (*La vida desnuda* 172). Especially in her third Bruna Husky novel, *Los tiempos del odio*, Montero strongly condemns the rich and powerful who manipulate capitalist systems to take what they want at the expense of everyone else. This egocentrism shores up hierarchical systems in favor of the powerful. The destructive nature of capital accumulation eventually becomes part of the system and therefore remains unseen and unexamined. As long as we allow rampant capitalism to continue, it will have increasingly devastating consequences which will continue to harm every living being on

the planet. The Capitalocene serves as a foundation for my analysis of Montero's critique of such harmful capitalist systems.

In this chapter, I want to look at how callous hierarchical systems impact the landscape, which in turn impacts those who inhabit it, particularly those who are already marginalized in other ways by hierarchies. Here Montero's concern with animal life and animal rights also comes into play, as does her concern with ecology. She concludes the "Mi perra no me habla" column with a call for humans to recognize ourselves as part of a greater whole:

si te llegas a poder reconocer en los ojos de una criatura de otra especie, entonces sí que debes de intuir, por un instante, el misterio mismo de la vida; y sentirte tan infinitamente diminuto que alcances a ser tan grande y eterno como el universo. [if you come to be able to recognize yourself in the eyes of a creature of another species, then you must intuit, for an instance, the very mystery of life; and to feel yourself so infinitely minute that you rise to be as great and eternal as the universe]
(*La vida desnuda* 172)

Montero's characters all embark on some type of journey, whether they travel or remain physically in one location, and they explore their surroundings, finding and revealing their connections to the places they inhabit. In "El poder de los viajes" from 26 January 1992, Montero writes that

Viajar nos exhibe tal y como somos, delata nuestros sueños y nuestros pavores. Hay viajes de muy diversa especie, como distintos somos los seres humanos [To travel exposes us just as we are; it reveals our dreams and our terrors. There are journeys

of extremely different kinds, as distinct as each of us humans are.] (*La vida desnuda* 163)

The various journeys in her novels help Montero's characters know themselves and invite the reader to know them better. Dixon provides the example of the fictional country of *Tendre*, created by Madame de Scudéry in a 17th-century Parisian salon. De Scudéry mapped out this imaginary, idyllic space as a variety of possible metaphorical journeys. Unlike *Tendre*, Montero's novels are set in dystopian worlds, but like de Scudéry's writing, Montero's settings reflect and question our real-world geopolitical and ecological situation. Starting my study of Montero's SF novels with an analysis of her settings and her concern for ecology expressed in her columns allows me to continue my analysis in chapter three, where I view those settings as territories where her characters' "bod[ies] both merge[]with and distinguish[themselves] from [their] environment" (Dixon 50). In the present chapter's analysis, this focus will help me analyze the connections between human and inhabited geography in the context of the Capitalocene.

Vanishing ecologies and willful ignorance in *Temblor*

Despite the evidence of her own eyes of the dissolving landscape, twelve-year-old Agua Fría knows for a fact that her world has essentially never changed and that it never will change: this is the Law she has learned her entire life. The priestesses and the Law they teach regard the fact that pieces of the surrounding landscape dissolve into mist from time to time as unimportant because those pieces were not essential to the world. Therefore, Agua Fría is shocked to hear Corcho Quemado, her trusted Anterior, a mentor who has been selected to pass down her memories, tell her that the priestesses' teachings are wrong. Their world is ending, and the priestesses tell the people to ignore it. When Agua Fría discovers the lies she has been taught as a novice priestess, she is forced to flee for her life. After her escape, she begins a journey of self-discovery as she searches for a solution for the apocalyptic changes that affect her world on a geologic but increasingly rapid time scale, despite the hierarchy's willful denial of apocalyptic events. This denial reflects our own day and age. Montero weaves together her real concerns for our planet with the fantastic landscape of *Temblor* with the fantastic element of the actually vanishing sites within the novel, creating a compelling setting for her characters to inhabit as well as a reflection of the real-world consequences of society's willful ignorance of the ecological consequences of capitalism. On her journey, Agua Fría encounters three new groups of people who each have a distinct relationship with the land, which create varied and complex ecologies. She meets a nomadic people who travel as a caravan, a group of renegades who have fled from Magenta, and the Uma, an indigenous-inspired group with an entirely foreign culture to that of Magenta. With Agua Fría's culture of origin, the empire whose capital is Magenta, the novel contains four cultural groups with varying

views of and connections to the lands they inhabit. Three of these share a parent culture, that of Magenta and the Law, while the Uma have a different cosmology altogether.

The Empire

The decaying empire takes place in a dystopian world with low-level magic and little technology. The landscape and its inhabitants have been affected by a generations-past nuclear apocalypse and by the dreams and ambitions of those who rebuilt the society afterwards. In *Temblor*, the reference to nuclear power is highly symbolic, taking the form of a mystical Crystal. The high priestess Océano recounts the history to Agua Fría:

Antes de nuestro tiempo hubo un tiempo más antiguo. Otra civilización, un mundo diferente, muy técnico, rico en ingenios mecánicos... Pues bien, ese mundo desapareció un día abruptamente, no me preguntes cómo. [Before our time there was an older time. Another civilization, a different world, very technological, rich in mechanical engineers... Well, that world abruptly disappeared one day, don't ask me how.] (*Temblor* 302-303)

Although Océano as a character does not have the memory of the apocalyptic events, the consequences that follow point to nuclear disaster, and the mix of technology and magic that combined to create the Crystals that the Magenta society uses in religious ritual. Destroying the Crystals heals the land. The empire's history begins with probable nuclear disaster, on a global scale. The disaster takes a vague form in the novel. Océano speculates on its cause but has no real knowledge of what happened to the earth in the time before her own people's history began: "Puede que se tratara de un accidente, un fallo técnico. O un sabotaje, o la consecuencia de una guerra. O incluso la caída de un meteorito, no lo sé [It could be that it was an accident, a technical fault. Or a sabotage, or the consequence of a

war. Or even the fall of a meteorite, I don't know]" (*Temblor* 303). All she knows is that the people in that time before history had "el secreto de una energía muy poderosa, mil veces más fuerte que el fuego, y quizá fuera eso lo que arrasó el planeta [the secret of a very powerful energy, a thousand times stronger than fire, and perhaps it was that which destroyed the planet]" (*Temblor* 302-303). This points to nuclear power, which has been a concern for Montero at least since 1990, when she published *Temblor*. This concern with the possibility of nuclear disaster appears again in her Bruna Husky series as well as in a few columns from 2017. In her column, "Entre huracanes [Amid hurricanes]" published on 8 September 2017, she includes potential nuclear war among several global threats, calling out

el monumental chiflado de Kim Jong-Un jugando a las batallas nucleares contra ese otro disparatado gorila que es Donald Trump (y digo gorila, con perdón de esos inteligentes simios, porque ambos líderes no hacen más que aporrearse fanfarronamente el pecho) [the monumental crackpot of Kim Jong-Un playing nuclear war against that other absurd gorilla Donald Trump (and I say gorilla with apologies to those intelligent simians, because both leaders do nothing but beat their chests boastfully).] (*El País*)

In addition to her concerns regarding nuclear missiles, Montero also sees nuclear power as a serious environmental problem. In a column from 21 January 2017, she writes that as humans we suffer from

una ignorancia esencial ante nuestros propios descubrimientos que ya hemos mostrado antes, por ejemplo, al inventar la bomba atómica o al desarrollar la energía nuclear, con cuyos letales, longevísimos desechos no sabemos qué hacer,

cosa que no impide que cada año produzcamos otras 10.000 toneladas métricas de basura nuclear de alto nivel que mantenemos en cementerios provisionales, una chapuza tóxica en la que casi nadie piensa. [an essential social ignorance before our own discoveries which we have demonstrated before, for example, upon inventing the atomic bomb or developing nuclear energy, whose lethal, long-lasting leftovers we don't know what to do with, which does not impede us from producing another 10,000 metric tons of high-level nuclear waste every year, a toxic pool which almost no one thinks about] (“Todos somos esquimales”)

This willful ignorance of the contaminating presence of the nuclear waste that we have created becomes a monstrous figure, a haunting figure that threatens us with destruction if we continually avoid and defer the necessary steps to avoid that consequence. That type of denial is present in the structures the priestesses set up to maintain their power and control over the hierarchical society in Magenta. The nuclear waste after the Great Catastrophe takes a symbolic form in the shape of a number of crystals.

The world which Montero creates in *Temblor* takes the shape of the dreams of the people who inhabit it. After the Great Catastrophe, Océano recounts, the survivors

Ambicionaban construir un mundo perfecto y casi lo consiguieron, porque *la realidad*, aunque rebelde, *termina por parecerse a nuestros sueños*, si estos se sueñan con la suficiente perseverancia [They aspired to construct a perfect world and they almost achieved it, because *reality*, though rebellious, *ends up looking like our dreams*, if people dream persistently enough.]” (*Temblor* 304, emphasis mine)

This history, revealed at the end of the novel, explains the nature of Agua Fria's world, specifically the way that human ambitions and dreams literally shape their material reality.

When Agua Fría demands an explanation for why the Uma's lands have not suffered the same problems as Magenta and the priestesses' Empire, Océano can only speculate: "Quizá su sueño sea distinto al nuestro y su realidad sea, por consiguiente, también distinta [perhaps their dream is different from ours and their reality is, therefore, also different]" (*Temblor* 308). The difference in their dreams is a difference in cosmology, and their respective cosmologies and cultural practices have a marked effect on the landscape. The way people see the land shapes it, and the land has an equal effect on the people. Just as the Magenta people's cosmology shaped their lands, the Uma people's cosmology shapes their land. Montero portrays the Uma as more in tune with their environment than Agua Fría's people, by worldbuilding their religion as nature worship:

La tribu, compuesta de unos ochenta adultos y más de un centenar de niños, adoraba al sol y a la luna, al fuego y al agua, a los bosques, a las tormentas y a los animales que cazaban. Adoraban, en fin, *a todo aquello de lo que dependían para su subsistencia*. [The tribe, composed of eighty adults and more than a hundred children, worshipped the sun and the moon, the fire and the water, the forests, the storms and the animals they hunted. They worshipped, that is, *everything upon which they depended for their survival*.] (*Temblor* 230).

Montero's descriptions portray the Uma's lifestyle as more in tune with the natural world. This emphasizes Montero's belief in the interconnectedness of living things. *Temblor's* apocalyptic setting warns of the dangers of a belief system like Magenta's, which demands that humans ignore the effects of their actions on the earth. The Uma people's lifestyle and closeness to the earth is portrayed as far better than the Magenta people's separation from reality. Montero's depiction of the Uma's burial practices reflects this. An underground

burial for the Uma symbolically puts them closer to the earth than the Magenta people's sky burials. The Uma lands also remain solid longer than the lands of the Magenta empire. Even within the Magenta lands, the places with more people seem to be vanishing at a slower rate. The text implies that the land in more populated areas remains longer because of the people who remember how it should be.

De hecho, empezaron a encontrar grandes zonas sepultadas por la niebla; parecía que los territorios más despoblados de vida, tanto humana como animal y vegetal, sucumbían antes al empuje de la nada [in fact, they began to find large zones buried in mist; it appeared that the areas where human, animal, and plant life was scarcer succumbed faster to the advancing nothingness.] (*Temblor* 270)

The connection between the land and the human perception of the land is key. The Uma believe the land is permanent, and their lands vanish slower than the lands under the control of the Magenta people, who have been taught that the vanishing pieces of land are unimportant. Their belief systems shape their view of the land and there begin to be more and more vanishing places.

Within the Magenta people's belief system, there are rituals that grew up around the worship of the Crystal, including funerary rituals. The funeral rituals of the Magenta people differ significantly from those of the Uma people, who inter the preserved bodies of the dead in a communal underground sepulcher after a procession in which the entire community accompanies those who have died that year to their final resting place (*Temblor* 263-264). The Magenta people have two classes of funerals: for the remembered dead, they leave the bodies on platforms under the sky. For the forgotten dead, they bury them in the earth (*Temblor* 20) The funeral ritual, according to Océano's narration within *Temblor*,

began with a simple ritual to honor the memory and preserve the knowledge of the departed, but became increasingly complex. The concept of memory has played a key part in Montero's fiction and non-fiction work. On 9 February 1992, Montero's column contained her recollections of Desirée, a woman whom she met in Paris years before. The column talked about her specific memories about Desirée, but also meditated on the importance of individual perspective and memory. She wrote, "Con [la muerte de] Desirée desapareció *el mundo que sólo ella llevaba* en la cabeza [with the death of Desiree, there disappeared *the world that only she carried* in her head]" (*La vida desnuda* 109, emphasis mine). The idea that the world is what we perceive it to be and that this perception ceases to exist upon our death has a literal effect in Agua Fría's world and also creates an unintended side effect: within a few generations, whenever anyone dies without passing their memories down to another via the Crystal ritual, pieces of the world begin to vanish into a fog of oblivion. To maintain the status quo and the existing hierarchies, the priestesses and priests explained away the vanishing pieces as undeserving of being preserved.

These vanishing bits of landscape and their increasingly personal consequences for Agua Fría and the other inhabitants of her world echo the ecological changes that go unnoticed or deliberately ignored by real-world reactionary groups like PragerU. Journalist Parker Molloy, an editor-at-large at *MediaMatters.org*, writes in her analysis of Prager University's tactics that "The site, founded in 2011, is known for its polished and persuasive five-minute videos" (Molloy). Some of the videos are somewhat innocuous, cloaking the site's "extremism in a veneer of respectability, and that's crucial to its success" (Molloy). The pseudo-academic videos which PragerU produces have titles such as "Can

Climate Models Predict Climate Change?” which they summarize with the statement “Predicting climate temperatures isn't science – it's science fiction” (PragerU.com). This glib dismissal disregards both the fact that science fiction has predicted and promoted many real-life scientific advancements along with the consensus of a majority of climate scientists on the past, present, and future effects of climate change as reported by such groups as NASA (“Evidence”). PragerU, supported by “fracking billionaires and Daily Wire funders Dan and Farris Wilks” among others, contests NASAs reports with no evidence but with set dressing that adds to the veneer of respectability, mimicking real educational videos to push far-right talking points.

With large chunks of money coming in from these extremely religious GOP mega-donors with ties to the fossil fuel industry, it's not exactly shocking that the site would have videos with titles like ‘Climate Change: What's So Alarming?’ ‘Do 97% of Climate Scientists Really Agree?’ ‘The Paris Climate Agreement Won't Change the Climate,’ ‘Fossil Fuels: The Greenest Energy,’ and ‘The Truth about CO2.’ (Molloy)

Montero laments the collective immaturity of humanity and seeing content like that produced by PragerU inclines me to agree with her. She writes in her 21 Jan 2017 column, referring to the rapid technological changes in recent decades,

Cada vez soy más consciente de la inmadurez de los humanos, de nuestra falta de rigor, de nuestra irresponsabilidad como especie. [I am ever more aware of the immaturity of humans, of our lack of rigor, our irresponsibility as a species.] (“Todos somos esquimales”)

The irresponsibility and disregard for the consequences of the propaganda spread by the priestesses within *Temblor* seems to predict the wave of “alternative facts”¹⁸ that I have only recently become aware of in my own country. Montero’s concern about deliberate human ignorance regarding the state of our planet shows up throughout her columns, including her column from 10 October 2015:

Entiendo que no queramos creérnoslo. Primero, por sensatez anti-egocéntrica: el ser humano lleva milenios poblando este planeta y ¿resulta que el gran colapso de nuestra especie va a suceder precisamente en nuestra generación y la de nuestros hijos? Pero, sobre todo, porque nos horroriza enfrentarnos a un futuro que nos obliga a cambiar de vida. [I understand that we don’t want to believe it. First, for anti-egocentric sensibility; the human being has spent years inhabiting this planet and it turns out the great collapse of our species will occur precisely in our generation and that of our children? But above all, because it horrifies us to confront a future that obliges us to change our life] (“Una granja en el Ártico”)

Montero attributes the human reluctance to believe in this slow-time apocalyptic violence against the planet to a simple incredulity that it could actually come to pass in our generation but also to a desire to continue living as we are. In her framing, human resistance to recognize the effects of our actions is thus an effort to avoid the consequential need to change our harmful behaviors.

18 United States counselor to the president Kellyanne Conway used the phrase alternative facts on 22 Jan 2017 to justify a false statement by then-Press Secretary Sean Spicer about the number of people who attended Donald J. Trump’s presidential inauguration (NBCnews.com). The current presidential administration has employed similarly alternative facts in many other situations since then.

In Magenta, the priestesses control the information that the people receive and those who never leave the city have little access to other sources of information. The geography of the city reflects the centrality of the priestesses' control. The city of Magenta is on a plain, with a plateau at the center, whose top contains the two centers of the theocracy, the Talapot, “un monstruoso cubo de más de trescientos metros de lado y otros tantos de altura [a monstrous cube of more than three hundred meters in width and the same in height]” which houses the members of the priestesshood, and the Temple of the Crystal, where the priestesses lead public religio-political ceremonies (*Temblor* 37). The circular architecture of the temple, which is

un recinto circular de piedra y madera ricamente labrada [cuya] forma era una representación de la Rueda Eterna y [cuyo] interior estaba dividido en dos zonas concéntricas, [a circular enclosure of richly-worked stone and wood {whose} form was a representation of the Eternal Wheel and {whose} interior was divided in two concentric zones,] (*Temblor* 37)

and the central location of the temple and the colossal Talapot in relation to the city that surrounds the central plateau reflect the totalizing dogma of the people who founded the city and rebuilt the civilization following their own ideas of what society should look like:

Mientras recorría las callejuelas de Magenta en pos del sacerdote, Agua Fría sentía cernirse sobre ella la tremenda mole de la roca y el palacio, visible desde todos los rincones de la ciudad. *Tan omnipresente como la Ley, Que Su Poder Sea Temido* [While she walked the alleys of Magenta after the priest, Agua Fría felt the enormous bulk of the rock and the palace looming over her, visible from all the

corners of the city. *As omnipresent as the Law, May Its Power Be Feared/Respected*] (*Temblor* 36, emphasis mine)

The visual omnipresence of the physical center of power reminds the people of the social hierarchy. This center of power remains solid, not vanishing. According to the Law taught by the priests, only the inconsequential spaces vanish. Agua Fría knows this by heart. When Corcho Quemado tells her that the world is ending, she studiously responds that “El mundo no tiene fin. Sólo se borra lo que carece de importancia, lo defectuoso y lo impío. [The world has no end. There only disappears that which lacks importance, the defectuous and the impious]” (*Temblor* 15). At the center of the world where the unimportant things dissolve, the physical presence and the solidity of the Talapot and the temple prove their importance.

The definition of “importance” comes into question as Agua Fría sees signs of change and deterioration when she returns home after the death of her mentor Corcho Quemado. She arrives to find her childhood home empty, with its walls and furnishings already beginning to dissolve into mist. “El cuarto *carecía de solidez*, como si se tratara de una imagen reflejada sobre el agua [The room *lacked solidity*, as if it were an image reflected upon water]” (*Temblor* 27, emphasis mine). The lack of solidity in this place that was important to Agua Fría and her mother shocks her: “¡*Su casa temblaba, su hogar se deslizaba hacia el vacío!* Agua Fría se tambaleó, golpeada por la enormidad de su descubrimiento, y apoyó la mano contra el muro: la pared estaba helada y tenía un tacto blando e inestable. [*Her house trembled, her home slipped towards the abyss!* Agua Fría stumbled, struck by the enormity of her discovery, and caught herself with an outstretched hand on the wall: the wall was freezing and felt soft and unstable]” (*Temblor* 27, emphasis

mine). The uncanny sight of her home, once so familiar, dissolving into oblivion, can only have one cause, the permanent death of her mother: “¡Que había muerto de *muerte verdadera*! Su madre había fallecido y su mundo se esfumaba detrás de ella. [That she had died of *true death*! Her mother had passed away and her world was turning to smoke after her passing]” (*Temblor* 28 emphasis mine). The difference between her reaction of peace and calm at Corcho Quemado’s death and her immediate tears at her mother’s *true death* and disappearance are striking. Corcho Quemado’s death was expected and even required as part of the social order, but Agua Fría hoped for that kind of death for her mother, too. Instead, her mother died violently, before Agua Fría could say goodbye. Her mother’s death shakes the foundations of Agua Fría’s world, symbolically but also literally, because the physical home that Agua Fría shared with her mother is vanishing before her eyes. This removal of the material representation of Agua Fría’s childhood and the stability her mother’s presence provided is a metaphorical *temblor*, an earthquake, which shakes her life out of its expected course.

Now homeless, she accepts her fate as a novice of the priestesses and moves to the center of their power, the Talapot. Here she sees signs of decay in the form of disused rooms, decaying furniture, and broken windows, despite the ostensible solidity of the priestesshood. However, her teachers maintain the fiction that the changes are not happening and that any change that does happen is not truly change, but merely a matter of imperfect human perspective towards the landscape. They teach the novices, including Agua Fría, to ignore the evidence of their own eyes. This is similar to a 2011 blog post from Dennis Prager, founder of PragerU: “Ever since I attended college, I have been convinced that either ‘studies’ confirm what common sense suggests or that they are

mistaken” (quoted in Molloy). Common sense, in this context, is his own preconceived notions. He gives as an example: “study after study showing that boys and girls were not inherently different from one another, and they acted differently only because of sexist upbringings” (Prager, “Why young Americans can't think morally”). Prager does not cite any specific studies, nor does he elaborate on the wrongness of those studies, thus setting them up as a rhetorical strawman. His deliberate choice to disbelieve multiple studies on any topic rather than change his mind or adapt his beliefs to make room for new information mirrors that of the fictional Magenta priestesshood, who Montero uses to comment on the dangers of extremism, much like the later Labari and Cosmos hierarchies in the Bruna Husky series. The priestesses and the priests who teach Agua Fría use cruel methods of discipline and punishment to shape Agua Fría’s view of the world. They attempt to push her into the priestesshood, where she will further spread the propaganda which she learns and must accept under pain of severe punishment. The disciplinary methods shape the relationship between the novices and the spaces they inhabit. That relationship is mediated by the dogma that the priestesshood inhabits and perpetuates. Rather than connecting to the world around them, they must subordinate the evidence of their senses to what they *know* to be “true”. Training the next generation of the hierarchy to believe the dogma, rather than giving them tools to examine the world as it is, perpetuates the damage that their cultural practices are causing to the world.

Montero’s depictions of Agua Fría’s interaction with the landscape start and end in Magenta. When she enters the Talapot the first time, she is removed from any interaction with the outside world and prevented from observing the land or the people outside the tower. Agua Fría’s world exhibits literal decay and degeneration due to the destructive

priestesshood, which maintains the status quo and allows the population to die away as they preserve their own power. Their center of power, the Talapot, represents this decay. As discussed previously, it is literally the center of Magenta, the capital city, and its bulk overwhelms the city's skyline. When Agua Fría first enters the Talapot to begin her training as a future priestess, she is forced to climb up to the 97th floor of the 100-story building. The darkness of the building compared to the bright sunlight foreshadows the difficult time that awaits Agua Fría as a novice priestess:

Comparado con la luz solar del mediodía, el interior del edificio era un túnel negro y sin perfiles. Agua Fría se detuvo en el umbral, sobrecogida; el sacerdote le señaló que entrara y la muchacha avanzó unos pasos, zambulléndose en las sombras. [Compared to the light of the midday sun, the interior of the edifice was a black and formless tunnel. Agua Fría stopped on the threshold, overcome; the priest signaled that she should enter, and the girl advanced a few steps, plunging into the shadows]" (*Temblor* 43).

She hesitates at the threshold of the Talapot. Once she plunges into the darkness of the building, she observes the emptiness of the space as she climbs through the building.

Debían de llevar cerca de una hora subiendo, primero por la estrecha y húmeda escalera tallada en los inmensos bloques de piedra y después a través de los pisos del palacio. Agua Fría aún no había visto a nadie en el interior del Talapot: la gran puerta de bronce parecía haberse abierto por sí sola. A la entrada, y a la luz del candil que encendió el sacerdote, la muchacha creyó ver el comienzo de una vasta sala polvorienta y en apariencia abandonada. 'Esas son las dependencias en donde aquellos del vulgo que han sido designados Anteriores son instruidos en el uso del

Cristal,’ explicó el hombre. ‘Pero sólo los sacerdotes o los novicios, como tú, pueden usar estas escaleras’ [They must have spent close to an hour climbing, first by the narrow and humid stairway carved in the immense blocks of stone and later through the palace floors. Agua Fría had not seen anyone in the interior of the Talapot: the great door of bronze appeared to have opened by itself. At the entrance, and by the light of the candle the priest lit, the girl thought she saw the beginning of a vast dusty room, apparently abandoned. ‘These are the rooms where those of the commoners who have been designated Anteriors are instructed in the use of the Crystal,’ explained the man. ‘But only the priests or the novices, like you, may use these stairs’ (*Temblor* 43-44).

The dusty state of the rooms used for instructing Anteriors in the use of the Crystal signal their disuse. The society's low birth rate means that few children are available to be assigned to an Anterior, which means that fewer adults can receive the honor of becoming Anteriors. Other than these dusty rooms, only the top three floors are in use, as the priest who guides Agua Fría towards her new life explains. When Agua Fría asks why all the other floors they pass are empty, the priest, named Humo de Leña, replies, “Siempre ha sido así, ésa es la norma. [It has always been thus, that is the norm]” (*Temblor* 44). His statement is obviously false upon observation, but any sign of change in the world is assimilated immediately into the way things have always been, and memory is altered to match the new state of the world. The hierarchy imposes the new collective memory on pain of severe punishment. Elizabeth Jelin writes about the activation of memories: “certain memories are activated in special moments or conjunctures; in other moments, silences and even forgetting prevail. There are also other ciphers for the activation of memories,

expressive or performative in nature, in which rituals and myth occupy privileged places” (Jelin 9). Similarly, myths and rituals can work to silence memories. Periods of crisis can lead to a restructuring of collective or individual memory. Jelin writes: “Periods of internal crises or external threats are usually preceded, accompanied, or succeeded by crises in the sense of collective identity and in memories” (Jelin 15). In *Temblor*, the crisis of the world ending leaves a mark on the world, but the official narratives ignore that. The space of the building itself, dusty and unmaintained, but built to house vast numbers of people, demonstrates a different past, full of change and inconsistency: “Iban atravesando los pisos sin pararse y las grandes salas por las que ascendían eran un desolador paisaje en ruinas [The traversed the floors without stopping and the great rooms through which they ascended were a desolate landscape in ruins]” (*Temblor* 44). Even the inhabited floors show signs of disuse and disrepair: “Había salas con grandes alfombras descoloridas y agujereadas por la polilla; otras, con el suelo desnudo, mostraban el caprichoso dibujo de sus baldosas [there were rooms with great discolored, moth-eaten carpets; others, with naked floors, showed the capricious drawing of their tiles]” (*Temblor* 45). The dining room, made for many novices, feeds only six, counting Agua Fría. When she enters she sees

una gran sala con hachones en las paredes. En el medio había una enorme mesa de madera basta; los cinco novicios que se apretujaban en una esquina hacían parecer aún más colosales las dimensiones de la mesa. [a great room with torches on the walls. In the middle there was an enormous wooden table; the five novices that crowded together in a corner made the table’s dimensions seem even more colossal.] (*Temblor* 48)

The situation in the dormitory is similar, with a vast room with several hundred sleeping pallets, the majority of which are broken, without mattresses, and filled with spiderwebs. The presence of the spiderwebs, like the dust in the unoccupied rooms on the lower floors, signals long disuse and no maintenance. “Tan sólo una decena de camas permanecían intactas, en un extremo de la sala [Only a dozen beds remained intact in one end of the room” (*Temblor* 49). The dozen remaining beds, like the underused dining room, speaks to a drastically reduced number of novices.

Agua Fría’s first teacher, Humo de Leña, describes the symbolic structure of the Talapot to Agua Fría after she arrives. The architecture separates the novices from the outside world, creating a heterotopia, a term created by Michel Foucault and described as being “outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias” (Foucault 3-4). Within Montero’s dystopian settings, there are several heterotopias, places set apart for disciplinary or pedagogical purposes. The Talapot is such a space. Just as the Talapot’s exterior overshadows the city of Magenta, reminding the citizens of the priestesshood’s power, the interior structure and division of space within the Talapot reminds the students of the lessons they are learning. The students’ progress in their novitiate as they physically move from space to space. There are three rings surrounding a center column of living spaces, inhabited by the most powerful priestesses, including Océano, the high priestess. When Agua Fría first arrives, there are three levels in use in each ring. Each has distinct rules and the punishments for breaking them grow more severe the further in the novices go. The Círculo Exterior, the Círculo de Sombras (of shadows), and the Círculo de

Tinieblas (of darkness) also have different levels of light, creating a symbolic descent into darkness as the novices gain experience and a specific set of knowledge (*Temblor* 47). The descent into darkness in pursuit of knowledge recalls the form of what Joseph Campbell described as the monomyth or Hero's Journey in his work, including the book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell 210-211). The archetypal story of a hero descending into a dark place and emerging with greater knowledge seems to resonate throughout multiple myths and stories. My purpose here is to recognize that when Agua Fría embarks on her journey, she is on an archetypal heroic quest, which includes specific types of interactions with the landscape she travels through and the people she meets. She encounters obstacles and helpers along the way, growing in knowledge, but still not finding what she seeks until she ultimately returns to where she started, passing through the same landmarks as on her first journey. Her circular quest begins when she escapes the Talapot and becomes a renegade priestess. She pulls up her roots and flees the city that she has known her entire life, that contains the space where her childhood home existed before it was lost years before to the fog of oblivion. During her search for a cure for the vanishing world, the homeless Agua Fría encounters people who have specific ties to their homeland, as she travels through these various spaces, her experiences shape her identity. She puts down roots occasionally, but something always occurs to uproot her again and push her to move on. Finally, Agua Fría realizes that the best chance to save the world is to return to Magenta and confront the High Priestess Océano. A delegation of Uma warriors accompanies her, and she reaches the Talapot, where she enters the building, this time going all the way to the high priestess's chambers. She learns that Océano has no idea what to do to save the world and that her only concern was maintaining her power and the

hierarchy. Upon threat of death, Océano suggests that destroying the Crystals might help. Agua Fría's ally Torbellino destroys the Crystals, the symbol of nuclear power as well as the center of the hierarchy, and the world stabilizes. Finally, Agua Fría's circular journey ultimately leads to a rebirth for her world and for herself, and her quest is complete. At the end of the novel, she is free to set out on a new journey and determine her own relationship to the land she inhabits, without the obligation to return.

The way we see the world in the Capitalocene shapes the world via our collective actions and attitudes. Agua Fría discovers that the hierarchy's willful denial of the apocalyptic changes affecting their world is nothing but a coverup, a lie that has no power to stop the world from vanishing and which contributes to the land disappearing ever more quickly. As Montero writes, it is extremely tempting to avoid negativity by telling ourselves that things cannot be all that bad. She also demonstrates that comforting ourselves with false optimism can only make the problems we refuse to face worse. Montero's real life worries about the state of the Earth attain metaphorical life in the fog of oblivion that devours so-called unimportant sites in Agua Fría's world.

Zero zone ecology: slow violence in the Bruna Husky novels

Bruna Husky lives in Madrid, Spain, in the United States of Earth, a planetary government that is only fourteen years old in 2109, at the start of the series (*Lágrimas* 210). The novels in this trilogy follow Bruna through a series of mysteries, from Madrid to the former USSR to the floating world of Labari to Onkalos, Finland, to the floating world of Cosmos and back to earth, to the factories where androids are “born”. The setting of these novels is dystopian and apocalyptic, a probable future if we do not stop the process of slow violence and change course from “a socioeconomic system that exploits both humans and non-humans as resources to trigger economic growth and capital accumulation” (Prádanos 24). The economy of the EUT is capitalist and the effects of even later-stage capitalism continue to harm people. People die because companies commodify air and water. Bruna and her family are harmed by the systems they inhabit but have no means of escape.

Selections from the archives throughout *Lágrimas en la lluvia* inform the reader of the wider history of the world and the devastation that the slow violence of human-propelled climate change and the fast violence of humanity’s wars have wrought. Montero speaks of her setting in her *Maneras de vivir* column on 10 Oct 2015:

imaginé un mundo venidero que por desgracia no hace más que cumplirse. En mis libros, la Tierra ha sufrido a lo largo del siglo XXI las violentas consecuencias del cambio climático. La inundación o agostamiento de los terrenos fértiles habría provocado migraciones de una dimensión jamás conocida, y, en consecuencia, enfrentamientos y matanzas. Cuando empiezan las novelas, ya en el siglo XXII y con toda esta degollina a las espaldas, sólo quedan 4.000 millones de personas viviendo en el planeta. [I imagined a coming world that unfortunately keeps taking

shape. In my books, the Earth has suffered throughout the 21st century the violent effects of climate change. The flooding or exhaustion of fertile lands has provoked migrations on an unprecedented scale and consequentially confrontations and killing. When the novels begin, in the 22nd century with all this slaughter behind them, there are only 4,000 million people left living on the planet.] (“Una granja en el Ártico”)

The global effects of climate change that the archives describe include the melted polar ice caps and the extinction of polar bears, the creation of zero zones and clean air zones, and the institution of ecologically sustainable measures such as a fee for eating meat. The planetary government also tries to make the best of a bad situation by creating underwater tourist attractions in the former coastal zones swallowed up by the oceans. In addition, there is a steep fee for living in a zone with clean air and water, which adds to the slow violence of classism. Most people no longer have access to meat and eat jellyfish and seaweed-based products.

Bruna moves through her world as a pedestrian and a passenger, in spaceships and space elevators, in taxis, on the metro, and in friends’ vehicles. On foot, she often uses the moving sidewalks to travel around the city. Her view as she travels the city of Madrid includes the public screens that play propaganda for anyone who can afford the screen time. The city boasts other technological advances such as the moving sidewalks and aerial trams that make the city accessible to many, at least to those who can afford to pay for the air and water. Like Leola, Bruna uses disguises that change her interactions with her surroundings. When her android identity is visible, people see her as Other. While disguised as a human, she can enter spaces that are inaccessible to her android self.

Throughout the Bruna Husky novels, Montero examines urban, global and near-space ecologies and probes at the logical extension of the current-day practices she decries in her columns. As I look at the central and peripheral geographies, the pollution, and the effects of climate change portrayed in the series, I examine how the majority human inhabitants of the Earth have impacted the ecology through a lack of concern and through deliberate economic and political choices by institutions of power. Bruna and her family of choice live those impacts and experience the consequences of choices they did not make and have no power to change.

Changing central and peripheral spaces

In Montero's 22nd-century United States of Earth, the central and peripheral spaces have shifted from what we experience in our 21st-century Earth. The United States of Earth is divided into zones of varying contamination levels, with varying price points for the residency fees. They have numerical ratings that reflect the level of contamination, with the most polluted areas called zero zones. The areas with the most breathable air and the cleanest water are green zones, rather than having a number. In chapter three, I will examine the societal inequities that prevent Earth's poorest citizens from accessing clean air and water, but it is important to mention the existence of these divisions here. The borders form part of the geography Bruna interacts with throughout the novels. Residents of contaminated spaces bear the highest environmental high risk for health problems. Bruna thinks of the zonas de Aire Cero, as "Los vertederos del mundo [the dumps of the world]" (*Peso* 13). As Bruna reads a novel set in one of these places, the reader learns that the android

había estado durante la milicia en uno de esos sectores hipercontaminados y marginales, y tuvo que reconocer que el autor sabía transmitir la *desesperada* y *venenosa* atmósfera del maldito agujero [had been with the military in one of those hypercontaminated and marginal sectors, and she had to recognize that the author knew how to transmit the *desperate* and *poisonous* atmosphere of the cursed hole.] (*Lágrimas* 71, emphasis mine)

The desperate and venomous atmosphere describes the harmful physical, emotional and mental effects of these contaminated sites upon their inhabitants. Even the threat of possibly having to move to contaminated areas leads inhabitants of the green zones to take any job they can find to be able to pay the fee that will allow them to continue to stay:

cada día había más gente que no podía seguir pagando el coste de un aire respirable y que tenía que mudarse a alguna de las zonas contaminadas del planeta [every day there were more people that couldn't keep paying the cost of breathable air and who had to move to one of the contaminated zones of the planet.] (*Lágrimas* 40)

There is a large disparity between the poorest and the richest inhabitants of the green zones, and the marginal areas within the least polluted places may be nearly as precarious as some of the more contaminated areas. These marginal spaces include sites whose geography has been shaped by violent events in the past, especially the Guerras Roboticas, which preceded the establishment of the Estados Unidos de la Tierra. For example, the city of Madrid contains its own central and peripheral spaces, differentiated by housing quality and density. Montero plays with the projected decay of currently central, prestigious areas, such as the Plaza de Callao, Nuevos Ministerios, and the Reina Sofia museum. The Plaza de Callao is a seven-minute walk from the Plaza Mayor, in the center of Madrid, and part of

the shopping and tourist areas of the city. It is home to several well-known buildings, including the Cine Callao, whose external walls hold giant screens which may well be an inspiration for Montero's use of the *pantallas públicas* that dominate the landscape in 2150 Madrid. In 2150, however, the surroundings of Callao bear the marks of war and have become a slum,

la zona de la ciudad más destruida por las Guerras Robóticas. ... era un oscuro laberinto de míseras construcciones de realojo para los desplazados, viejas naves industriales y las colmenas más baratas de Madrid. La que ellos buscaban estaba junto a un *moyano*, los siniestros crematorios de androides. La oscura chimenea se elevaba en la noche por encima de la irregular aglomeración de tejados, y de ella salía ahora mismo un humo blanco. [the zone of the city most destroyed by the Robot Wars. ... it was a dark labyrinth of miserable rehousing constructions for the displaced, old industrial warehouses and the cheapest "beehive apartments" in Madrid] (*Tiempos* 108-109)

The presence of the *moyano* signals the extreme marginalization of the area and juxtaposes the life of the inhabitants of the neighborhood with this site of death, at the same time signaling the slow violence that affects those who can only afford to live in these conditions. The *edificios colmena* (beehive buildings) contain micro apartments:

estaba en un microapartamento de doce metros cuadrados que había alquilado en un edificio colmena. Era un lugar mísero de construcción barata, y decenas o quizás cientos de vecinos debían de estar al alcance auditivo de su alarido. [she was in a microapartment of twelve square meters that she'd rented in a beehive building.] (*Tiempos* 15)

The lack of privacy and the cramped conditions are a contrast to present-day Callao. This is not to say that similar conditions do not exist in reality in the 21st century. By placing these apartments in the geography of Callao, Montero's worldbuilding draws attention to the contrast between sites like central Madrid and the shockingly poor conditions that are already the daily reality for those on the periphery, the inhabitants of marginal sites that already exist.

Like Callao, Nuevos Ministerios is situated in one of the other "nice" zones of Madrid. It is currently a government center, about an hour's walk north of Plaza de Callao, and would be a 15-minute drive. In Montero's 2150s Madrid, Nuevos Ministerios has been hit hard by the Guerras Robóticas and has become "uno de los agujeros marginales de la ciudad, una zona de prostitución y de venta de droga [one of the marginal holes of the city, a zone of prostitution and drug sales]" (*Lágrimas* 74). Unlike Callao, 21st century readers who know Madrid will recognize the buildings that remain in Bruna's time, and 22nd century Nuevos Ministerios is not as much a residential zone as a leisure center, containing clubs and similar businesses. It is a place of business for sex workers and drug dealers, both common literary shorthand for a bad neighborhood. Bruna finds herself in the area on a nighttime run and realizes that she might be able to find a lead on her case. First, she thinks about possible dangers:

No era el sitio más recomendable por el que pasearse de noche y sin armas, pero, por otra parte, un rep de combate haciendo deporte tampoco debía de ser el objetivo más deseable para los malhechores [it wasn't the most recommended site to troll through at night, unarmed, but, on the other hand, a combat rep out for a run wasn't the most desirable object of attack by evildoers either.] (*Lágrimas* 74)

Bruna discounts the danger because of her own physical strength and her appearance. Then the narrative, from her perspective, provides a description of the place:

eran muy viejos. Habían sido contruidos dos siglos atrás como centros oficiales: se trataba de un conjunto de edificios unidos entre sí que formaban una gigantesca mole zigzagueante, y debió de ser un mamotreto de cemento feo e inhóspito desde el momento de su inauguración. [they were very old. They'd been built two centuries back as official centers: they'd been built as a complex of joined buildings that formed an enormous zigzagging block, and it must have been an ugly, inhospitable cement monstrosity from the moment of its inauguration.] (*Lágrimas* 74)

These buildings and their surroundings have changed significantly in function, rather than form. A reader could go to Nuevos Ministerios and have a good chance of locating the place where Bruna encounters the drug dealer who sells her a *mema*, an illegal artificial memory implant.

La Reina Sofía, like the other two sites, is located in what is currently central Madrid. A twenty-minute walk from Plaza de Callao, it was similarly damaged in the Guerras Robóticas. Montero plays with the history of the building as she imagines its future after that war:

Se trataba de un edificio muy antiguo; Bruna sabía que originalmente había sido un hospital y que luego fue un importante museo de arte durante más de un siglo. Las Guerras Robóticas lo destrozaron y en la reconstrucción se volvió a recuperar su uso sanitario [It was a very old building; Bruna knew that originally it had been a hospital and that later it was an important art museum for more than a century. The

Robot Wars destroyed it and, in the reconstruction,, it regained its function as a healthcare site.] (*Lágrimas* 434)

These three sections of the city demonstrate a small sample of the variety of possibilities for the life of a building or architectural zone: Callao obtained a new form and a new function, Nuevos Ministerios retained its form and took on a new function, and the Reina Sofia museum's return to its original function as a hospital takes place after its original form was destroyed and rebuilt on the same site. Changes to geographical sites may affect the way that people interact with them, whether those changes are physical or not. In turn, the way that people interact with sites can cause a cumulative effect that changes the human geography of the space, as in the case of Nuevos Ministerios. Montero's *madrileña* geography functions as part of her worldbuilding, demonstrating how events leave their mark on places and people, and serving as a kind of archive of the fictional future history of the Earth. As Bruna moves through various spaces, readers learn more about her from her interactions with the physical and human geography that surrounds her.

Another change to the landscape of Madrid is the addition of "lung parks", which help clean the air. The *parques pulmón* are not simply a public good, however, but the property of companies like Texaco-Repsol rather than the city (*Lágrimas* 73). For the company, the park likely provides a positive effect on their public reputation and probably also garners income from a city contract. The air inside the park is easier to breathe:

A la rep le gustaba correr entre las hileras de árboles artificiales porque le era más fácil respirar: absorbían mucho más anhídrido carbónico que los parques auténticos y realmente se notaba la elevada concentración de oxígeno. [The rep liked running between the strands of the artificial trees because it was easier to breath: they

absorbed much more carbon dioxide than the authentic parks and the elevated concentration of oxygen was really noticeable]” (Lágrimas 73).

In addition to the cleaner air, Bruna notes the contrast between the artificial trees and natural trees in both form and level of function:

eran como enormes pendones de una finísima red metálica casi transparente, tiras flotantes de un metro de anchura y tal vez diez de altura que se mecían con el viento y producían pequeños chirridos de cigarra. Cruzar el parque era como atravesar las barbas de una inmensa ballena. [they were like enormous pendants of a fine, almost transparent, metal net, floating strips a meter wide and perhaps ten tall that swayed with the wind and produced small chirps, like a cicada. Crossing the park was like traversing the baleen of an enormous whale] (*Lágrimas* 73)

Rather than looking like trees, the artificial trees in the park take on the appearance of baleen, the filters in the mouths of some whales. The play between the natural and unnatural nature of the *parques pulmón* highlights the tension between the artificial and the natural, much as the existence of the androids, artificially created humans, does. These parks create cleaner air, and readers might question why, if this technology exists, it has not been used to clean the air worldwide, to make the more contaminated areas safer for their inhabitants, rather than being limited to use within the already cleaner areas.

Pollution

The green zones need their *parques pulmón* because, like the rest of the planet, they suffer the effects of pollution, only to a lesser degree. The effects are still visible to the naked eye:

El sol, todavía muy alto, parecía estar envuelto en una gasa. La bruma era resultado de la contaminación, aunque éste fuera uno de los sectores Verdes, las zonas privilegiadas y más limpias del planeta. Pero hacía meses que no llovía. [The sun, still quite high, seemed to be wrapped in gauze. The mist was the result of contamination, though this was one of the Green sectors, the privileged, cleanest zones of the planet. But it was months since it had rained.] (*Peso* 31)

This pollution not only shapes the appearance of the environment but also has an impact on the environment's inhabitants. This effect takes the shape of the large-scale climate change that causes the months-long drought but also a direct impact on individual bodies. For example, many inhabitants suffer from “el Síndrome de Sensibilidad Química [Chemical Sensitivity Syndrome]” which is caused by “el contacto generalizado y continuado con sustancias artificiales, omnipresentes por doquier en la vida cotidiana [generalized and continuous contact with artificial substances, omnipresent in every part of everyday life]” (*Peso* 54). As human beings and others continue to live on the contaminated Earth, they find ways to survive, but they still suffer the consequences of pollution, which often means aging and dying at younger ages:

Se encontraban en una Zona Dos, es decir, más contaminada que las Zonas Verdes, y, pese a contar con una universidad importante, la población *se veía bastante envejecida*. [They were in a Zone Two, that is, more contaminated than the Green Zones, and despite having an important university, the population *seemed significantly aged*.] (*Peso* 302, emphasis mine)

The pollution is not limited to the Earth's surface: In the third volume of the series, Bruna travels to Cosmos, a geostationary space station, as part of her investigation. In order to

safely navigate the space between earth and the station, the spaceship requires a condom made of nanotubes to protect it from the space debris which surrounds the Earth: “Restos de naves, de estaciones y satélites, excedentes de las Tierras Flotantes, chatarra de accidentes. [Remains of ships, stations and satellites, leftovers from the Floating Worlds, junk from accidents]” (*Tiempos* 184-185). From a distance, the cloud of debris seems beautiful despite its contents:

Un poco más arriba, no muy lejos, estaba la principal órbita cementerio de basura espacial. En la negrura cósmica se veía brillar un anillo de puntos luminosos, casi como una nueva Vía Láctea. Sólo que no eran estrellas, sino chatarra. [A little bit higher, not very far, was the principal cemetery orbit of space junk. In the cosmic blackness sparkled a ring of luminous points, almost like a new Milky Way. Only they weren't stars, but junk.] (*Tiempos* 196)

The belt of trash that orbits the Earth is modeled on Montero's observation and extrapolation of our current reality. In her column “500 TN” from 5 Dec 1992, Montero writes of the way humans have polluted the planet, from rivers and streams to the ocean to Mount Everest, to

el espacio exterior, en donde dicen que *orbitan, ciegos y locos, una infinidad de pirindolos y basurillas astronáuticas*, residuos de la carrera del espacio [outer space, where they say *an infinity of astronaut trash and things orbit, blind and crazy*, residue from the space race.] (*La vida desnuda* 233-234 emphasis mine)

Montero's condemnation of the human tendency to pollute even the most inaccessible areas of our planet is nothing new, and her worldbuilding in the Bruna Husky series draws on her long-established ecological ethic.

In Montero's narration in the Husky series, she paints a warning, not an optimistic portrait of the future. The EUT has taken a capitalist approach to their attempt to curb the human impact on the environment, which largely consists of imposing fees for contaminating activities, such as raising animals for meat or using the air conditioning. In "Environmental impact of dietary change: a systematic review", Hallstrom et al conclude that dietary changes that remove meat can in fact reduce carbon emissions by as much as fifty percent. In Montero's worldbuilding, the Estados Unidos de la Tierra has enforced that measure for anyone who cannot afford the license. Of course, this merely means that those individuals and companies with enough financial resources have free reign to continue polluting the planet as much as they want, while the more vulnerable in the population suffer the consequences of that pollution. Bruna notes that the number of slaughterhouses has dropped significantly over the last several years,

en parte por la creciente sensibilidad animalista y en parte porque, para reducir las emisiones de CO2, el Gobierno obligaba a sacar *una carísima licencia para comer carne*, [sin embargo] aún quedaban cientos de ellos en funcionamiento en todo el planeta. [in part due to the growing animalist sensibility and in part because, to reduce the CO2 emissions, the Government required one to obtain *an extremely expensive license to eat meat*, {not withstanding} there were still hundreds of slaughterhouses in business around the planet.] (*Lágrimas* 69, emphasis mine)

A human can survive without access to meat, especially in Bruna's world, where most of the population dine on flavored jellyfish protein and seem to have access to basic nutrition. Other economic deterrents to contaminating activities cause greater harm to poor people. On a hot night, Bruna's apartment

parecía un horno, porque Husky sólo podía pagarse cuatro horas de aire acondicionado al día (las tasas para las actividades contaminantes se habían puesto por las nubes en los últimos años) y ya había consumido su cuota al atardecer, cuando el sol machacaba las ventanas. [seemed an oven, because Husky could only afford four hours of air conditioning per day (the rates for contaminating activities had gone through the roof in the last few years) and she had already consumed her quota in the afternoon, when the sun beat against the windows] (*Peso* 98)

Unlike the impact of the restrictions on beef and pork, the impact of not being able to afford sufficient air conditioning can be immediately life threatening. It is a trade-off that puts the lives of poor people at risk while the rich can use as much air conditioning as they want, because there seems to be no upper quota of consumption as long as the consumer can pay. This increases the amount of overall pollution, which also has life threatening, though on a slower timescale than the effects of heat stroke, like the cumulative effects of breathing contaminated air which contribute to a higher risk of lung cancer.

Reshaped geographies

When Montero incorporates the dangers of climate change into her speculative fiction, most of these effects are not mere speculation, but based on sound scientific projections, which she also includes in her non-fiction column.

¿Que el calentamiento global, cada vez más acelerado y evidente, nos conduce a inundaciones, cataclismos climáticos, desplazamientos masivos, hambrunas y matanzas? Bueno, esto no sólo es posible sino probable, y además se diría que está sucediendo ya. [Global warming, every day faster and more evident, is bringing us floods, climate cataclysms, massive displacements, famine and killing? Well, this

is not only possible but probable, and moreover it is happening already.] (“Últimas noticias del fin del mundo”)

Whereas all of Montero’s SF works contain more fantastic elements, and thus more psychological, temporal, and spatial distance from the problems they describe, the Bruna Husky series is the most immediately grounded in scientific probability, incorporating current events and contemporary scientific projects into its worldbuilding. As Montero builds her 22nd century setting, she consults with friends and colleagues and incorporates their feedback into her work. In her Estados Unidos de la Tierra, then, the effects of climate change have reshaped the face of the planet, changes at least as drastic and more probable than those caused by the Guerras Robóticas. For example, 22nd century Earth contains cities which have been made uninhabitable when they were covered by water from the rising oceans.

Hay que tener en cuenta que las franjas costeras albergaban grandes núcleos urbanos y estaban por lo general densamente pobladas. A medida que el mar fue avanzando, hubo ciudades que desaparecieron por completo, como Venecia, Amsterdam o la isla de Manhattan, mientras que otras quedaron anegadas en parte, como Lisboa, Barcelona o Bombay. [One must keep in mind that the coasts held great urban centers and were generally densely populated. As the sea advanced, there were cities that disappeared completely, like Venice, Amsterdam or the island of Manhattan, while others became partially flooded, like Lisbon, Barcelona or Mumbai.] (*Lágrimas* 226-227).

NASA scientists warn that “sea levels are rising at a rate of more than 3 millimeters (mm) a year. Sea level rise will have increasingly serious consequences for human health and life

quality, with coastal populations at risk for dislocation due to flooding” (“Coastal Consequences of Sea Level Rise”). When these densely populated cities were destroyed or majorly impacted by the effects of climate change, and their inhabitants in most cases forced to relocate, in Montero’s narrative, any speculation is based on research of the most likely outcomes of current climate trends. She recognizes the other consequences of sea level rise, including the loss of farmland and population centers:

Cientos de millones de individuos desesperados y hambrientos que lo habían perdido todo fueron ascendiendo, perseguidos por las aguas hacia tierras más altas. Pero esas tierras altas ya estaban habitadas y a menudo también acosadas por el hambre, dada la pérdida fatal de las mejores tierras cultivables. [Hundreds of millions of hopeless and hungry individuals that had lost everything kept moving to higher altitudes, pursued by the water. But those higher lands were already inhabited and frequently also threatened by hunger, given the fatal loss of the best farmable lands.] (*Lágrimas* 227)

The scarcity of land and the food it produced leads to conflict between those displaced by the floodwaters and those who lived higher above sea level, which conflict becomes part of the history that led to the creation of the Estados Unidos de la Tierra. This too has a basis in Montero’s observations of current events, as she stated in her column “Últimas noticias del fin del mundo [breaking news from the end of the world]” on 1 July 2017 (*El País*). Quoted in the previous chapter, she wrote of the famine which contributed to the Syrian refugee crisis. Of course, the Syrian refugee crisis has other causes as well, including the conflict of war and foreign interference, but the climate change-influenced drought certainly contributed to the problems. The even more drastic change in the geography with

the much higher ocean levels creates exponentially more difficulties for the survivors of the flooding. At the beginning of the Bruna Husky series, there are only four thousand million people living on Earth (“Una granja en el Ártico”), counting the androids and the alien immigrants, compared to the approximately 7.53 billion inhabitants in 2019.

As the world rebuilds after the unification of the Estados Unidos de la Tierra, the flooded cities are no longer inhabitable, but corporations find a way to make them useful, or at least profitable, by repurposing them as sites for underwater tourism.

Los consorcios consolidaron las ruinas de las Tierras Sumergidas y crearon islas artificiales para albergar hoteles, restaurantes y demás servicios. Las zonas inundadas pueden visitarse en batiscafo, en burbuja individual subacuática o con equipo de buceo. Hay parques temáticos urbanos, como el famoso Manhattan, o históricos, como el delta del Nilo. Estos populares destinos vacacionales forman el llamado **turismo húmedo**. [Consortiums consolidated the ruins of the Submerged Lands and created artificial islands to hold hotels, restaurants and other services. The flooded zones can be visited in submersible, in an individual subaquatic bubble or with scuba gear. There are parks with urban themes, like the famous Manhattan, or historical themes, like the Nile delta. These popular vacation destinations make up the so-called **wet tourism**]” (*Lágrimas* 239, emphasis original)

Bruna and her lover Merlín had taken a vacation to Venecia before his death (*Tiempos* 36). These sites of tourism become places for leisure, relaxation, exploration, when before they had been cities and homes. For most people, they are now destinations rather than sites to live, and as such their function has disappeared. These underwater cities are thus no longer cities because they cannot be inhabited, only visited briefly. The right to the city which

Henri Lefebvre claims for citydwellers no longer exists for those places and is not a given in our world or in Bruna's. Rather, the right to the city is something that must be fought for and claimed: "The right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in realization, to habitat and to inhabit." (Lefebvre 173). The former inhabitants of the underwater cities either fled or died as the cities flooded. In either case, the former cities were left uninhabitable, and thus with no inhabitants, only tourists. Lefebvre writes that "The *right to the city* cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life" (Lefebvre 158, italics original, underline mine). Tourism comprises a visiting right, not a right to inhabit, and the right to be a tourist has a price. The changing climate and sea levels came as consequences of choices which corporations and their wealthy stakeholders made. This changed the landscape of the now underwater cities. As a consequence, those same cities have become sites of recreation for those who can afford to visit. This comes at the cost of their function as homes for those who formerly possessed, however tenuously, the right to live there. One of Bruna's clients works as a tour guide: "Estaba en Nueva Venecia, a punto de conducir a un grupo de turistas en un tour submarino por la antigua Venecia, hoy sumergida [she was in New Venice, about to conduct a group of tourists on a submarine tour through old Venice, now submerged]" (Tiempos 36). There is a contrast between the complex original cities with their numerous inhabitants and the reduced function of their present state as uninhabitable tour stops.

The only way to see the underwater cities and the ocean flora and fauna within them is to arrange a paid tour, a clear example of commodification. Lefebvre also speaks to the

notion of visiting commercialized 'natural' spaces that have been set aside for recreation and leisure as a substitute for habitable urban spaces.

This 'natural' which is counterfeited and traded in, is destroyed by commercialized, industrialized and institutionally organized leisure pursuits. 'Nature', or what passes for it, and survives of it, becomes the ghetto of leisure pursuits, the *separate place of pleasure* and the retreat of 'creativity'. (Lefebvre 158, emphasis mine)

In theory, anyone could visit these sites, but in actuality, not everyone can afford commodified leisure activities. In a United States context, this recalls “the construction and maintenance of outdoor recreation as a White activity” (Goodrid 6). The inequities inherent in unequal access to recreational spaces are principally economic in Montero’s EUT, where racism is replaced with anti-android and anti-alien speciesism. Classism and poverty limit the movement of EUT citizens between differing zones. Travel for business as well as tourism is a privilege of those who can afford it. In the 22nd-century Earth, the long distances involved in world travel are quite surmountable, and the Earth is consequently smaller for those who can pay for transportation. Bruna’s travels have taken her to the mining planet Potosí, during her military days, around present-day Europe, into Russia, to the equator to catch the elevator to the floating world of Labari, to what is now Finland, and to the floating world of Cosmos. The ability to travel such distances shapes Bruna’s experience of global geography as much or more than melting ice caps and rising sea levels.

Along with the sea levels and the warmer average temperatures, Montero includes other phenomena in her worldbuilding, such as a number of sudden polar storms that affect Madrid each year:

una inversión de la llamada oscilación ártica... causaba de cuando en cuando unas inusitadas y breves olas de intensísimo frío, un día o dos de nieves copiosas, furiosos vendavales y una caída en picado de los termómetros, que en Madrid podía fácilmente llegar hasta los veinte grados bajo cero [An inversion of the so-called arctic oscillation ... from time to time caused unusual and brief waves of intense cold, a day or two of copious snow, furious gales, and a drastic fall in temperature, which in Madrid could easily reach even twenty degrees {celsius} below zero.]”
(*Lágrimas* 332)

These crises occur at least once or twice per year, but the narration informs the reader that “la gente vivía como eso fuera una excepción, algo anormal que nunca volvería a producirse. Y así, cada vez que venía una ola de frío se agotaban los implementos térmicos. [people lived as if that were an exception, something abnormal that would never happen again. And thus, every time that a cold wave arrived, the supply of thermic devices dried up]” (*Lágrimas* 332). Montero writes in “No aprendemos [we don’t learn],” her column for 20 Jan 2014, of humanity’s tendency to repeat our own foolish history, tying together the economic crisis with the crisis of climate change. She writes of her optimism that the economic crisis of that time is improving, but continues:

Pero no puedo evitar la sensación de que este arreglo es un parche; que *la situación se repetirá*; que *no hemos cambiado*; que nos estamos comportando con una estupidez tan impermeable a la realidad que resulta suicida. [but I cannot avoid the sensation that this arrangement is a patch; that *the situation will repeat*; that *we have not changed*; that we are behaving with such an impermeable stupidity towards reality that it becomes suicidal.] (*El País*, emphasis mine).

Montero's fear that we will repeat our mistakes explains the dystopian world she builds in the Bruna Husky series, in which the problems of today are exponentially worse, and the inhabitants of the world continue to act as if the problems are "una excepción, algo anormal que nunca volvería a producirse [an exception, something abnormal which would never happen again]" (*Lágrimas* 332). Some of the problems of climate change have already led to the extinction of various species of flora and fauna, represented most visibly by the polar bear. Bruna's internal monologue reveals that half a century ago, the last of the polar bears died, and that before her death, "fue seguido por un helicóptero de la organización Osos En Peligro [she was followed by a helicopter from the organization Bears In Danger]" (*Lágrimas* 185). The organization took DNA samples from that bear. From those samples, a clone named Melba was born. She is the only specimen of polar bear in existence on the planet. Notably, she was produced in the same way as Bruna and her fellow androids, who are also created from replicated human DNA. Like human replicants, Melba is destined to live a shortened life due to Tumor Tecno Total: in her case, about 8 years (*Lágrimas* 189). Like the underwater cities, Melba has been transformed into a tourist attraction. She lives alone in her enclosure, as a symbol of Madrid, recalling the present-day statue of the Oso y el Madroño [the bear and the strawberry tree] by Antonio Navarro Santafé, which represents the Madrid coat of arms and is located in Puerta del Sol. When Melba dies, they will create another clone to occupy her space, creating "Una infinita cadena de Melbas en el tiempo [An infinite chain of Melbas throughout time]" (*Lágrimas* 189). If she were a wild animal, she would have no function relative to humans, though polar bears play an important role in their local ecologies. Polar bears in zoos, on the other hand, function as ambassadors for conservation efforts due to the human perception of them as cute and

cuddly (“Polar Bears Say Stay Away”). Rather than serving as an ambassador for conservation efforts, Melba’s function is that of a living memorial to her species and she and her enclosure serve as a monument to the failure of human conservation efforts.

Human’s failure to protect biodiversity on both land and sea is another contributing factor in the scarcity of food sources that comes with the disappeared farmland. This has pushed humans to find other sources of nutrition. Montero extrapolates the current problem of jellyfish blooms¹⁹ to imagine a future in which jellyfish have become the dominant lifeform of Earth’s oceans:

si te fijabas bien, por debajo de la superficie gris plateada se veía palpar la masa gelatinosa de las medusas. Gigantescos bancos de medusas espesando los océanos y vaciándolos de otras formas de vida [if you looked closely, beneath the silvered gray surface beat a gelatinous mass of jellyfish. Gigantic banks of jellyfish filling the oceans and emptying them of other lifeforms.] (*Peso* 345)

To deal with the lack of other seafood as well as the scarce farmland-grown food, Montero imagines the jellyfish as a source of food. As Bruna prepares a 22nd century microwave dinner, she considers the origins of her food:

aprovechó para calentarse en el autochef una sopa de pollo sintético. Que en realidad era medusa, como casi todos los alimentos reconstruidos. Desde que la plaga de medusas hubiera casi acabado con la vida marina, la humanidad se

19 “Until now, [jellyfish have] been kept in check by marine predators, which eat jellies and their food sources. Seabirds, sea turtles, marine mammals, fish, and even other jellyfish have developed methods for overcoming the jellies’ defensive stings to take advantage of the abundant, accessible food source that they are. Just as populations of rodents boom when top predators are removed from their ecosystems, overfishing of predatory species such as tuna can result in population increases further down the food chain” (Lamb).

alimentaba básicamente de esos asquerosos bichos. Claro que en ninguna caja de comida preparada se leía jamás la palabra *medusa*. Como mucho, ponía *cnidario* en letra diminuta en algún lugar recóndito dentro del apartado de los ingredientes. [she used the time to heat some synthetic chicken soup for herself in the autochef. Which in reality was jellyfish, as were practically all reconstituted foods. Since the plague of jellyfish had almost done away with marine life, humanity basically fed themselves on those disgusting creatures. Of course, no box of prepared food ever read the word *jellyfish*. At most, it said *cnidarian* in small letters in some hidden corner within the ingredients section.] (*Peso* 180, emphasis original)

The marketing of the *medusa*-based food using the phylum name *cnidaria* rather than the species name plays with human cultural perceptions of what food is palatable and what is disgusting. The narrator, immersed in Bruna's thoughts and perceptions, calls the fear of bugs *sensato*, sensible or reasonable: "milenios de *prejuicios* y de *sensatos miedos* hacían que la visión de estas granjas de insectos siguiera resultando difícil de soportar. [millennia of *prejudices* and of *reasonable fears* made the sight of the insect farms difficult to stomach]" (*Tiempos* 205). On the floating world of Cosmos, the food comes from insect farms, which Bruna sees when she travels there disguised as a feed smuggler.

vio grillos, cucarachas, escarabajos, saltamontes, arañas, cúmulos de élitros indistinguibles y trémulos. ... sin duda, todo el alimento de Cosmos estaba elaborado a partir de insectos, era la forma más eficiente de conseguir nutrientes de calidad en una plataforma orbital como ésta. [she saw crickets, cockroaches, beetles, grasshoppers, spiders, piles of indistinguishable and vibrating elytra {insect wings} ... without a doubt, all of Cosmos's food was made from insects; it was the

most efficient form of obtaining high quality nutrients in an orbital platform like this.] (*Tiempos* 205)

She realizes that the feed she has smuggled in is destined not for the humans on Cosmos but for the insects, who will then become higher-nutrient food for human consumption. There are currently a number of cultures which do consume insects, and the idea of which foods are “weird” or “gross” often has classist and racist implications, a point I mention because it often gets overlooked in discussions of world cuisines.²⁰ Such prejudices against the consumption of insects tend to reside in the global north, despite insect consumption continuing strong in various cultures worldwide. Julieta Ramos-Elorduy, in a review of the scientific literature on insects as a sustainable food source, writes that worldwide, there are 1,783 recorded species of edible insects which people in 124 countries eat, and in Mexico alone there are 549 recorded species (Ramos-Elorduy 277). Those numbers are the ones recorded, and there are likely more. The problem of food in the future, whether in space or on Earth, is one that many science fiction writers have tackled, and Montero’s worldbuilding, like the ocean levels and the vast quantities of jellyfish, extrapolates from real-world ideas about how to ensure a sustainable diet for the Earth’s population. Interestingly, though she eats food made from jellyfish, Bruna also views them as disgusting, thinking of them as “esos asquerosos bichos [those disgusting creatures]” (*Peso* 180). There is ample material for a future study of food sources, perceptions, preparation, and consumption in the Bruna Husky series. In my study, I mention these food sources as part of the consequences of and the solution to anthropogenic and capitalogenic climate

20 The “Food and Foodways” panel at WisCon in 2019 informs my understanding of this concept. WisCon is a feminist science fiction and fantasy conference.

change. The jellyfish and the bugs which make up the main diet of the Earth and of Cosmos are both relevant to the geographical focus of this chapter. Food plays a part in the ecology and geography of any society, and these sources of nutrition highlight the use of space both on Earth and in space itself.

In the *Estados Unidos de la Tierra*, Montero has created an even-later stage capitalist world in which land is at a premium and biodiversity has withered. Twenty-second-century Earth contains changed central and peripheral spaces; increased pollution, concentrated in the homes of the most vulnerable classes; and the extrapolated effects of climate change, which reshape the face of the planet. Bruna's world is inhabitable, but life is far more comfortable for those whose financial means allow them access to the green zones. Chapter four will examine the structural inequities that maintain the boundaries differently habitable geographies. The Bruna Husky SF novels work hand-in-hand with her non-fiction, more explicit newspaper columns, in which she decries humanity's repeated mistakes and deliberate disregard for the life of the planet we inhabit. As she builds worlds that both imagine a better future and show the possible and probable catastrophes that will occur if we don't work for something better, Montero creates a literature that may serve as an antidote to the egocentrism of the Capitalocene.

Conclusion to Chapter Three

All of Montero's geographical, sociological, and ecological worldbuilding provides her with settings which reflect and explore her environmental concerns, which makes them perfectly suited to aid readers in learning to see the harmful effects of the Capitalocene. Throughout *Temblor* and the Bruna Husky series, she works to share the perspective of humanity as part of ecology, rather than as cut off from nature. In Agua Fría's journey to save a dying world and in Bruna Husky's efforts to survive in the Estados Unidos de la Tierra, Montero explores the relationship between dystopian capitalist and post-capitalist systems and ecological life of the planet, which includes humans. This chapter has explored dystopian and apocalyptic settings in *Temblor* and in the Bruna Husky series. Those settings are shaped by Capitalist systems and mechanisms which have a marked effect on the Earth's ecology. In the next chapter, I will examine the material impact that violent systems and mechanisms have on individual bodies, especially upon marginalized bodies.

Chapter four: Unruly Bodies in Material Existence - Misfitting, Inequities, Disabilities

Montero's main characters in each of her Speculative Fiction (SF) works are drawn from the non-normative members of society. They are all, in one way or another, misfits, whose bodies and/or identities do not *belong* in the public sphere in the same way as those who pass as normative individuals. Their misfitting is not a choice but is due to the material existence of their bodies in the world and the disabling nature of oppressive systems. They face or observe gender, race, class, age, ability, and educational inequities, as well as inequities related to housing, judicial, policing, and healthcare systems. Montero's columns on social justice often focus on similarly marginalized people in the real world, especially women and girls, Inuit groups, and Romani in Spain. Deborah Dixon's feminist material geopolitics formed part of the theoretical frame for the previous chapter, which serves as a foundation for this. Having examined the divisions between privileged and unprivileged, dominant and marginalized spaces in the previous chapter, I now move to examine the material effects that division of spaces has on the bodies of those who inhabit those spaces, with a particular eye towards the bodies of the most vulnerable individuals. The first section of chapter two along with chapter three discuss the human geographies and ecologies of the worlds that Montero builds in *Temblor* and the Bruna Husky series. This chapter, like the second half of chapter two, is about the physical and material impact of oppressive systems in the bodies of the most vulnerable inhabitants of those systems. Montero's novels and columns focus on the most disadvantaged and decry the oppressive behavior and ignorance of the most privileged. Dixon writes, "A feminist material approach, as articulated by Braidotti (2008) for example, asks questions of the body as existing in and for itself, as well as part and parcel of a web of relations that stretch well beyond the social

realm” (9). In this chapter, I combine a feminist material approach with a disabilities studies perspective as I examine the capitalist and post-capitalist social systems Montero creates in *Tembler*, *Bella y oscura*, and the Bruna Husky novels. This approach allows me to analyze the misfits that occur when unruly, non-normative bodies attempt to navigate those systems, which Montero’s fictional characters and the marginalized people she discusses in her columns must do to inhabit the spaces they live in. Examining Montero’s SF and journalistic writings, I look specifically at the accessibility of material spaces, systems, and resources and how unruly bodies interact within these facets of daily life which facilitate access for the privileged and hinder access for the marginalized.

A Material Feminist Disability Perspective

Debilitating, maiming Capitalocene systems are designed to be all-encompassing for their inhabitants. As I discussed previously, the term Capitalocene originates with Andreas Malm’s work on capital and the fossil fuel industry. The Capitalocene centers the discussion of ecological problems on capital and capitalism, and

the advanced capitalist states that single-handedly constructed the fossil economy in the service not of humankind, but of their own enrichment, thereby drove people into those margins of poverty and vulnerability into which the early blows of climate chaos now slam” (Malm “Who Lit This Fire?” 248).

The pursuit of profit at all costs leads to harm towards the environment and within the bodies of individuals. Above, I referred to Capitalocene systems as debilitating and maiming. I adopt this terminology from Jasbir Puar’s *The Right to Maim*, which examines how oppressive, normalizing systems treat individuals with disabilities. Puar deploys “the concepts of *debility* and *capacity* to rethink disability through, against, and across the

disabled/non-disabled binary. I situated disability in relation to concepts such as neoliberal and affective *capacitation*, *debilitation*, and *slow death*” (Puar (2017) 2, emphasis mine). Debilitation and slow death are related to what Rob Nixon defines as slow violence. Slow violence, in Nixon’s terms, is “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2). Puar contends “that the term ‘debilitation’ is distinct from the term ‘disablement’ because it foregrounds the slow wearing down of populations instead of the event of becoming disabled.” (Puar xiii-xiv). Montero’s SF novels represent the slow violence and slow death caused by debilitating systems, and her journalism often decries systemic injustices against marginalized groups.

These systems also create gaps between the needs of the people and the reach of the systems and spaces available. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson coined the term misfit to describe these gaps, which cause discomfort at best and death or extreme debilitation at worst. I include her description of this relational, contextual process here:

Fitting and misfitting denote an encounter in which two things come together in either harmony or disjunction. When the shape and substance of these two things correspond in their union, they fit. A misfit, conversely, describes *an incongruent relationship between two things: a square peg in a round hole*. The problem with a misfit, then, inheres not in either of the two things but rather in their *juxtaposition*, the awkward attempt to fit them together. When the spatial and temporal context shifts, so does the fit, and with it meanings and consequences. Misfit emphasizes *context over essence, relation over isolation, mediation over origination*. (Garland-Thomson 592-593, emphasis mine)

As Garland-Thomson uses it, misfit functions as both noun and verb. To misfit is to fit uncomfortably, to experience the world differently than those who fit well enough. The noun “misfit” is both one who misfits and also the relationship between person and space, the not-good-enough fit in an encounter between body and world. Montero’s protagonists and the principal casts of her novels are drawn from the misfits of the world, and they regularly experience misfitting as they move throughout the settings they inhabit.

Garland-Thomson provides the term in order to describe the particularities of disabled experience, and the fluidity of the relationship between non-normative persons and the worlds they navigate.

First, the concept of misfit emphasizes the particularity of varying lived embodiments and avoids a theoretical generic disabled body that can dematerialize if social and architectural barriers no longer disable it. Second, the concept of misfit clarifies the current feminist critical conversation about universal vulnerability and dependence. Third, the concept of misfitting as a shifting spatial and perpetually temporal relationship confers agency and value on disabled subjects at risk of social devaluation by highlighting adaptability, resourcefulness, and subjugated knowledge as potential effects of misfitting. (Garland-Thomson 592)

The idea of misfitting contributes to a feminist material discourse with a particular emphasis on disability. Pairing misfitting with Puar’s work on disability, debility, and capacity allows me to examine the way that Montero’s character’s experience their worlds.

An overlapping term, that serves to describe at least some of those who experience misfitting, is the “unruly body.” I take this term from Roxane Gay’s memoir, *Hunger*, in which she describes the uncomfortable and painful misfittings she experiences as a fat

Haitian American woman. Gay's observations of life as a fat woman will form part of my analysis of Montero's fat characters, but I believe that though unruliness is rooted in Gay's experience of navigating the world while fat, the concept can extend to others with non-normative bodies. *Unruly Bodies* (2007) is Susannah B. Mintz's critical study of personal narrative by American women authors with disabilities, which links disability studies and autobiography studies. Mintz argues that the authors in her study "challenge the troping of disability in able-bodied culture as deviance, helplessness, insufficiency, and loss," that they "speak openly about a form of embodiment often excluded from the conversation in both disability and feminist discourse" and that they "display corporeal difference to demonstrate the damaging effects not of disease or impairment but, rather, of the cultural mythologies that interpret those conditions in reductive or disparaging ways" (Mintz 1). I define unruly bodies as those bodies which exceed societal norms and expectations in some way, especially through their size, race, disability, and/or queerness. The concept of unruly bodies, of unruliness, thus has a great deal of overlap with the concept of misfitting, but specifically serves to describe the non-normative body, the attention-drawing body, that experiences not-belonging within oppressive, limiting, and debilitating social norms, while misfitting describes the experience of not-belonging, and a misfit is one who does not fit. Misfits experience misfitting, often because they have unruly bodies.

Though Garland-Thomson does not use the term unruly to describe disabled bodies, her description of disabled bodies that draw the most attention reads to me as a kind of unruliness:

Although variations and limitations in functioning are often the core experience of disability, appearance tends to be the most socially excluding aspect of disability.

Bodies whose looks or comportment depart from social expectations—ones categorized as visually abnormal—are targets for profound discrimination. Bodily forms deemed to be ugly, deformed, fat, grotesque, ambiguous, disproportionate, or marked by scarring or so-called birthmarks constitute what can be called appearance impairments that qualify as severe social disabilities. Perhaps the most virulent form of bodily disciplining in the modern world is the surgical normalization of bodies that deviate from configurations dictated by the dominant order. (Garland-Thomson 1579-1580)

This kind of bodily disciplining is debilitating, despite its purported aim to promote a better fit between individual and society. Rather than altering social spaces to fit inhabitants' needs, it aims to alter individual bodies to force them into an uncomfortable "fit" with the space. Truly capacitating technologies would alter social spaces, making them more accessible, rather than altering and/or maiming the bodies of disabled individuals. Real-world attempts to "cure" or "fix" disabled people by making their bodies less unruly and more acceptable to the abled gaze abound, and SF narratives often contribute to the debilitating representation and misrepresentation of people with disabilities. This is one reason that disabled fans and critics often call out problematic science fiction "cure" narratives. Kathryn Allan promotes the study of disability as part of science fiction studies, writing:

the exclusion of the study of disability in [science fiction] extends the cultural sidelining—theoretically and practically—of people with disabilities in the academic engagement with genre; and second, it also neglects to condemn the repeated instances of the *erasure*, "*curing*," *prosthetization*, and *negative*

marginalization of people with disabilities in SF novels and films. When people with disabilities are turned into props and tropes (or left out completely) in narratives of a collective human future, it is imperative that SF scholars begin to call out—as we do for instances of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia—outdated, humiliating, and harmful images of disability. (“Categories of Disability in Science Fiction”, emphasis mine)

To remedy these harmful tropes, it is vital to center disabled voices in any conversations that affect disabled people and to ensure accessibility and bodily autonomy. However, in both real life and fiction, social spaces incorporate exclusionary obstacles to access. Montero’s worldbuilding includes such spaces, a reflection of real-world inaccessibility. Her misfit characters and her characters with unruly bodies, categories which often overlap, have no choice but to interact with the control societies they inhabit. They are often debilitated by the mechanisms and technologies which the societies they live in use to control their inhabitants to a greater degree and/or in a different way than individuals whose bodies fit, whose bodies are not unruly.

Montero spoke with me about the relationship between self and body in an interview in 2014. I had asked her about the way bodies interact with technology in *Lágrimas en la lluvia* to create cyborg-like characters. She replied,

Bueno, sobre todo ahora, en este mundo, yo ya me siento así, tengo implantes de titanio en la boca, tengo lentillas, tengo cuatro tornillos y una placa de titanio en la columna vertebral, y ya creo que eso es todo, pero vamos, es bastante [Well, above all now, in this world, I already feel like that, I have titanium implants in my mouth,

I have contact lenses, I have four screws and a titanium plate in my spine, and I think that that's all, but hey, it's a lot]" (Lemon-Rogers 133).

She was stating facts about her body rather than complaining about the necessity of the various additions to her body. Still, Montero's own relationship with the body often colors the feelings her characters have for their bodies. Shortly after she described the various implants she has acquired to help her body function, she discussed other forms of body modification, including tattoos:

Esa es la sensación que tienes sobre el cuerpo, que no lo he escogido, además eso me enferma, me envejece, me mata, pero ahora lo voy a tatuar y *ya eso sí te vas a morir, cuerpo asqueroso, con esta lagartija que he puesto yo*. Hay una voluntad para hacerlo tuyo. La dominación del cuerpo que te domina. [That is the sensation you have about the body, that I haven't chosen it, moreover this thing makes me sick, makes me old, kills me, but now I'm going to tattoo it and *now you're going to die, disgusting body, with this lizard that I have put on you.*] (Lemon-Rogers 134, emphasis added)

The personalization of the body as a way to reclaim it from inevitable debility is another theme in Montero's work, especially the Bruna Husky series. Montero continued to talk about the relationship with the body, saying:

El cuerpo siempre me ha interesado mucho. La relación con el cuerpo y la elocuencia del cuerpo. *El cuerpo es súper elocuente*. La enfermedad. Se muere alguien de pena y se le rompe el corazón. Estás atrapado que no puedes salir y te asfixias, tienes un cáncer del pulmón. *El cuerpo es la gran metáfora*. [The body has always interested me greatly. The relationship with the body and the eloquence of

the body. *The body is extremely eloquent.* Illness. Someone dies of sorrow and their heart breaks. You're trapped and cannot get out and you suffocate, you have lung cancer. *The body is the great metaphor.* (Lemon-Rogers 134, emphasis added)

While the body has indeed served as metaphor throughout much of literature, I want to push back at the concept of the disabled body as a metaphorical or inspirational body. As I do so, I want to look at the bodies Montero writes as the embodiment of the characters who live with those bodies. I want to recognize the agency and the voice of disabled people *as* embodied people rather than seeing their bodies as merely metaphorical. I think this follows naturally from Montero's attempt to write characters who represent a wide variety of people. Her characters are people who bump up against the bigotry of society, most often sexism and classism. There are also some common tropes of heightism, fatphobia, ableism, racism, and other types of discrimination. They are not unavoidable, but it is difficult to avoid them without concerted effort. Some of these I will examine as they come up, and others I will look at in chapter 5 in which I examine the way that Montero's writing reflects some of the bigotries that permeate our society.

The next concept that we need to know to examine Montero's characters and how they fit or do not fit in their respective societies is the idea of willfulness, as described by Sara Ahmed in her texts *Willful Subjects* (2014) and *Living a Feminist Life* (2017). Willfulness is part of what makes someone a killjoy, someone who "is getting in the way of something, the achievement or accomplishment of the family or of some *we* or another, which is created by what is not said" (Ahmed *Living* 37). Misfitting, unruliness, and willfulness are all tied together as concepts that serve to describe people who *will not* stay in their socially normative place. It's seen as willful, for example, to insist that people

examine their ableism and their harmful behavior in general. People don't like being uncomfortable, but discomfort from having caused harm is vastly different from being on the receiving end of that harmful behavior. Marginalized people are perceived as willful when they point out systemic inequities or when they ask for vital resources.²¹ When people who experience a misfit point the misfitting out to more privileged groups, they often run into obstacles posed by the systems which Louis Althusser called Repressive State Apparatuses and Ideological State Apparatuses.²² Montero's protagonists and those who become part of their families are often misfits because of their marginalized identities. Montero told me in an interview in 2014 that her novels often feature a marginalized protagonist who begins alone, but as the novel progresses the protagonist

va haciéndose una especie de familia de monstruos, o sea, de *gente que es marginal también*, y de alguna manera es un poco monstruosa también, pero que la novela demuestra que es más válida que la gente de poder que aparece en la novela. [goes about making a kind of family of monsters, that is, of *people who are also marginalized*, and who are in some way also a bit monstrous, but who the novel demonstrates are more valid than the powerful people who appear in the novel.] (Lemon-Rogers 132, emphasis added)

These marginalized protagonists are often willful subjects, who cause problems for those in power. In return those in power attempt to marginalize them further. Though Montero

21 This brings to mind the scene from Emperor's New Groove in which Yzma, seated on Kuzco's throne, tells a hungry peasant that if they and their family needed food, "You should have thought of that before you became PEASANTS!"

22 French Marxist philosopher Althusser enhanced the marxist theory of the state by locating institutionalized repression in Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) which take educational, religious, governmental, media and other forms and which work to perpetuate oppressive systems. ISAs may also become sites of resistance to oppressive systems.

never employs the term willful, I read her SF protagonists as willful subjects. As Sara Ahmed points out, “willful” is an adjective which more powerful people deploy against anyone not a cisgender white man who refuses to stay in their normative place. It deploys whenever someone gets “out of place” by trying to move beyond the role or position that society has defined for them. Ahmed begins *Willful Subjects* with the Brothers’ Grimm’s tale of the Willful Child, a girl child who simply *will not* do as she is told, and who dies because God “takes no pleasure in her” because she will not obey her mother’s wishes (Ahmed *Willful* 1). Then, once the child is buried, her arm “willfully” rises and begins to wave about above the ground until her mother takes a rod and beats her with it. Only “then at last the child had rest” (Ahmed *Willful* 1). A cautionary tale against disobedience to the wishes of authority, this serves a purpose: it disciplines the children who hear it with the implicit threat of death. Abuse is normalized when it is deployed against the “correct” target. The grim tale becomes part of an ideology, reproducing an ideology of hierarchy upon the impressionable listeners. Ahmed writes, “Willfulness is used to explain errors of will—unreasonable or perverted will—as faults of character. Willfulness can thus be understood, in the first instance, as an attribution to a subject of will’s error” (*Willful* 4). To be willful is to be wrong. To be wrong is to go against the norm, to stand out like the girl child’s willful arm, to misfit. I posit that to be willful is bound up with being unruly or un-rule-y, to break the rules and norms that one is expected to fit into as an obedient inhabitant of society. Disabled people, queer people, neurodivergent²³ people all misfit and

23 Kassiane Asasumasu coined the term neurodivergent to describe those of us whose brains function differently than established norms. Neurodivergent includes autistic people, people with ADHD, and mentally ill people.

become unruly when compared to abled, straight, cis²⁴, neurotypical²⁵ people whom society is designed to accommodate. This misfitting reads as *willful* to a society invested in reproducing normativity, particularly when more and more people start asking to be recognized and listened to on an equal basis. This theoretical concept works to analyze Montero's characters because they embody willfulness by embodying non-normativity as they live their lives and bump up against the social and political norms.

In this chapter, I analyze the specific consequences which Montero's disabled, queer, and otherwise non-normative characters face while inhabiting inescapable control societies, as well as analyzing how those societies disable and debilitate their inhabitants by exposing them to contamination and cellular violence, violence which takes place on a microscopic level within the body. One of the ways in which late capitalist systems affect marginalized people is through the poisonous environmental conditions which cause or contribute to debilitating illness: these conditions are a form of violence. Rob Nixon writes that "Chemical and radiological violence ... [are] driven inward, somatized into cellular dramas of mutation that--particularly in the bodies of the poor--remain largely unobserved, undiagnosed, and untreated" (Nixon 6). These cellular dramas can create disability and debility in the bodies of those exposed to ecological contaminants, which has a direct effect on health and well-being. Jenna Loyd draws out the connection between health and violence in her work *Health Rights are Civil Rights*, writing "Health and violence cannot be understood as mutually exclusive issues so long as there is social injustice" (Loyd 15).

24 Cis is an abbreviation of cisgender, which refers to people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

25 Neurotypical people are those who are not neurodivergent, whose brains function according to established norms.

The struggle for capacity, for accessible spaces, and for healthy living conditions are all tied together. Loyd also writes,

First, health as a state of being refers to the *embodied, lived* effects of *socially produced harms*. Second, health as a discourse marks people's desires for *well-being, flourishing, bodily integrity, and self-determination*. As a dialectical process, struggles for health connect the necessity of meeting immediate needs and healing with long-term, broadscale organizing efforts to create *healthier, freer, and socially just* relations and spaces for living. (Loyd 14-15, emphasis mine)

I read Loyd's approach to the embodied, lived effects of socially produced harms and her analysis of the struggle for social justice and well-being as a materialist approach, and I find a close connection between her approach, Ahmed's concept of willfulness, Puar's concepts of debility, capacity, and disability, and Garland-Thomson's description of misfitting. I employ these concepts in concert to think through the idea of embodied, material social justice for those whose bodies do not fit societal norms. It is important to note the material harm that these systems cause. It's harmful to face discrimination. Misfitting hurts.²⁶ This hurt is emotional, mental, and physical. Inaccessible spaces are inequitable and that perpetuates harm against already vulnerable individuals and groups. Together the concepts of misfitting, willfulness, debility, capacity, health, and disability form a feminist materialist disabilities framing for my study of how Montero's spaces and systems function within her novels and journalism as I look at the material impact those spaces have on individuals that inhabit and navigate capitalist systems.

²⁶ See this link for further reading relating specifically to the material harm Black Americans experience as a result of the stresses of systemic racism <https://www.apa.org/pi/oema/resources/ethnicity-health/racism-stress>

Technologies of discipline and control in *Temblor*

Agua Fría inhabits a control society, whose geography we examined in chapter three. In this chapter, we will examine the mechanisms and technologies that this society deploys to control its inhabitants and extract value and compliance from them. Jasbir Puar writes that “control societies operate covertly by deploying disciplinary power to keep or deflect our attention around the subjugation of the subject, thus allowing control to manifest unhindered” (Puar 24). In Agua Fría’s world, the political disciplinary systems and public punishments and deterrents to non-normativity materially impact the population that inhabits the matriarchal Magenta empire. The hierarchy controls who has access to knowledge, to rituals, and to social acceptance. In *Temblor*, the hierarchy of the empire centered in Magenta focuses principally on controlling and preventing non-normative thought through disciplinary techniques that include physical and psychological maiming. Agua Fría experiences the debilitating effect of the hierarchical practices and the way the world is structured to maintain the existing hierarchy. Magenta society comforts and supports those who already fit in and to silence the marginalized and prevent them from asking for changes to create a better fit for more people. This is the function of debilitatingly oppressive governments and other Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser 75, 247). The dystopian worlds which Montero creates draw on these kinds of structures, whether religious, governmental, political, or social. *Temblor* and the Bruna Husky trilogy show this worldbuilding most clearly, as these works involve the creation of potential futures, while *Bella y oscura* and *Historia del Rey Transparente* examine and critique organizations which already exist or which have existed in the real-world past.

In her work as a journalist, Montero has observed and called attention to the dangerous behaviors of authoritarian regimes and their effects throughout her career. In her column, “Recordando el peligro [recalling the danger],” published on 4 Feb 2017, Montero traces the connections between the global reaction to Donald J. Trump’s presidential inauguration and our reactions in the face of climate change, both bound up with strenuous and unfounded human optimism and the idea that things cannot possibly be as bad as they look. Montero writes,

Estoy harta de escuchar tranquilizadoras, esperanzadas frases del tipo de: “Nooooo, luego en el cargo se moderará, luego la política la harán sus asesores, esto es solo fachada, bravatas, apariencia, luego en realidad no cambiará casi nada”. Siempre se dijo lo mismo de los monstruos; de Hitler, por ejemplo, que firmó un pacto con Rusia (estremecedor paralelismo) y a quien *nos esforzábamos en ver inofensivo...*; o del ayatolá Jomeini, a quien todos creían una figura meramente simbólica y nada peligrosa. [I’m sick of hearing calming, hopeful phrases like: “Nooooo, he’ll moderate once he’s in office, later his advisors will make the policy, this is just façade, bravado, appearance, later in reality almost nothing will change”. The same was always said of monsters; of Hitler, for example, who signed a pact with Russia (chilling parallelism) and who we strove to see as inoffensive... or of the Ayatollah Khomeini, who all believed to be a merely symbolic figure and not at all dangerous.] (*El País*, emphasis mine)

Montero decries the efforts we humans make to see the bright side when there is none. There are strong parallels between *Temblor*, published in 1990, and her continued concerns about the human willingness to believe we inhabit the best of all possible worlds despite

evidence to the contrary. Our unwillingness to believe in harsh realities leads to severe consequences, as Montero also states in “Recordando el peligro”: “Pero claro, como no queremos creer en la amenaza que suponen los diversos Trump, seguimos sin hacer los cambios necesarios, como tampoco los hacemos con el calentamiento global. [but of course, as we don’t want to believe the threat that these various Trumps pose, we continue without making the necessary changes, neither do we change as we face global warming]” (*El País*). Montero’s concern about powerful tyrannical regimes is nothing new to her journalism and her reference in “Recordando el peligro” to the Ayatollah Khomeini is based on her own impressions of the former leader of Iran. She interviewed Khomeini on the tenth of January in 1979, an interview which she directly references in “De rodillas ante Jomeini [kneeling before Khomeini],” her column on 14 August 2005: “Ha sido la entrevista más absurda y extravagante que he hecho en mi vida [It was the most absurd and extravagant interview that I’ve done in my life]” (*El País*). In a 2013 interview with Isabel Bugallel, she states that her 1979 report on the interview had been too benevolent, and that Khomeini seemed a monster to her, which she says she should have stated more clearly:

¿Cómo no me iba a parecer un monstruo si me tuve que tapar la cabeza hasta las cejas y tumbarme porque no podía estar por encima de él y él era un viejo pequeñísimo y estaba sentado en el suelo? [How would he not have seemed a Monster if I had to cover my head to my eyebrows and prostrate myself because I couldn’t be higher than him and he was a little old man and was sitting on the floor?..] (“La entrevista a Jomeini fue la más ridícula que hice en mi vida”).

Clearly, Montero’s 1979 encounter with the Iranian Ayatollah had a strong impact on her and has maintained a prominent place in her memory. The same year as her interview with

Khomeini, she published an educational column on the sociopolitical situation in Iraq in June 1979, just prior to the overthrow of Al-Bakr and the rise of Saddam Hussein, and a year before the Iraq-Iran war (*Estampas bostonianas* 19). The regimes and hierarchies that Montero creates in her novels have a strong basis in her knowledge of our own world's political history and the human tendency towards seizing power. In “De rodillas ante Jomeini” she reflects, “Ya se sabe que el poder atrae tanto a los humanos como el estiércol a las moscas. [It’s well known that power attracts humans like manure attracts flies]” (*El País*). Specifically, many of her fictional villains are authoritarians, often religio-political authoritarians like the Ayatollah. These fictional villains seize power and manage to remain at the top of the hierarchies which shape the worlds of Montero’s novels have their roots in her observations of real-world religious and political power structures. She takes artistic license, of course, and the speculative settings she crafts emphasize the dangers of unchecked tyrannies that she warns about in columns like “Recordando el Peligro.” In her SF work, Montero both depicts past events such as the mass murder of “heretics” in events such as the Cathar crusades that she weaves through the plot of *Historia del rey transparente* and extrapolates into the future, as in *Temblor* and the Bruna Husky series.

One of the main inequalities in *Temblor*’s dystopian world is the diminishing birth rate, which means that there are not enough children to take on the memories of all the aging adults. Agua Fría belongs to one of the last generations of children born in Magenta. In *Temblor*, Montero creates a world where particular memories can be passed down from an elder, called an Anterior, to a child, with the use of a magical/technological Crystal.²⁷

²⁷ This memory-sharing mechanic is like the way memories are passed on via touch in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*, though *Temblor* was published in 1990, while Lowry’s was published in 1993. I doubt there is an

Therefore, the Anterior can live on in the child through these hand-me-down memories. Being an Anterior means access to the rituals of remembrance after death. In writing about memory here, as in *Historia del Rey Transparente*, Montero does memory work, to use Sara Ahmed's term again. The novel begins with the death of Agua Fría's Anterior, Corcho Quemado²⁸, and with the last memory and instructions which she passes on to Agua Fría. The work of passing down memories allows the places inhabited by the dead to remain in the world. Corcho Quemado tells Agua Fría that contrary to the dogma which the priestesses teach, the world is ending, that the places that dissolve in forgetfulness are not limited to the unimportant, defective, and impious and that the priests invented the Law which they teach to the people. When she imparts this information to Agua Fría, Corcho Quemado becomes what Sara Ahmed calls a killjoy. She disrupts and interrupts the idea that nothing ever changes and that nothing can ever change, thus planting a seed of doubt that will continue to grow as Agua Fría learns more (*Temblor* 15). She then warns Agua Fría not to let the priests take her to the Talapot, the palace, but dies before she can explain further. After Corcho Quemado's last breath, Agua Fría returns home to her mother's house and finds that it is dissolving into mist (*Temblor* 28-29). Her mother has died, and her grief is interrupted by Humo de Leña, a priest who comes to take Agua Fría to the Talapot. Having nowhere else to turn, Agua Fría accepts and follows him, despite Corcho Quemado's warning.

intentional connection between the two books, though I suppose it is possible that Lowry was familiar with Montero's work.

28 The names within Magenta society all have meanings taken from the memories of a person's Anterior. Some people use shorted versions of those names. Part of the traditional greeting upon first meeting a person is an explanation of the name's significance. Corcho Quemado's name means "burnt cork" and Agua Fría's name, "cold water."

Agua Fría's world is based on who deserves to end their life in the Casa de los Grandes and be remembered after their death. This process of remembrance is similar to the function of an obituary as described by Judith Butler. Butler writes that "the obituary functions as the instrument by which grievability is publicly distributed. It is the means by which a life becomes, or fails to become, a publicly grievable life" (Butler 34). In *Temblor*, those who get remembered are not truly lost, so they are not grieved as painfully, but those who are not remembered are not worth remembering and therefore not worth grieving, at least not on a public level. Agua Fría grieves her mother's loss far more than her Anterior's, because her mother was not chosen to be in the Casa de los Grandes. Her house dissolves because no one used the Mirada Preservativa to prevent it from fading. Grief is not publicly distributed, and so Agua Fría is forced to grieve alone, though she is discouraged from doing so at all. Butler writes, "if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life; it does not qualify as a life and is not worth a note. It is already the unburied, if not the unburiable" (Butler (2004) 34). The question of who receives rituals of death, grieving, and burial shows whose life matters most in a society and to the institutions of that society.

Discipline of Non-normative Behavior

The Magenta priestesshood maintains its power by strict adherence to discipline and punishments to deter any non-normative thought or behavior. Such tactics extend to the death penalty, a practice which Montero finds atrocious. In "Los señores de la muerte," her column from 14 June 1992, she writes about the death penalty in the United States:

Si institucionalizamos la atrocidad, si consensuamos la ferocidad y la barbarie, lo pagaremos caro; quiero decir que las ejecuciones y la brutal violencia de Los Ángeles, por ejemplo, forman un todo coherente. No se puede ser señores de la

muerte impunemente. [If we institutionalize atrocity, if we consent to ferocity and barbarity, we will pay for it dearly; I mean to say that the executions and the brutal violence of Los Angeles, for example, form a coherent whole. It is impossible to be lords of death with impunity.] (*La vida desnuda* 23)

The reference to Los Angeles refers to the 1992 LA uprising after the police who severely beat Rodney King on 3 March 1991 were acquitted on 20 April 1992. The connection Montero draws between the violence of the death penalty and the violence in LA points to the systemic nature of oppressive violence. Officially sanctioned violence in the form of the death penalty and policing, with a refusal to listen to marginalized people and enact justice, inevitably leads to more violence. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr stated that “I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard” (“The Other America”). While public executions are not common within the United States, public violence against marginalized individuals is. Both forms of violence are systemic and serve as mechanisms of control. The society Montero depicts in *Temblor* makes free use of the spectacle of public executions of dissidents, and they do pay dearly for their inability to recognize their flaws and prevent the literal end of the world.

When they pass by the temple outside the Talapot, the priest pauses for a public ceremony that has begun as they arrive. Agua Fría is at first caught up in the affective sensations of the scene: “La ceremonia, fuera la que fuese, ya había comenzado. Un batallón de guardias púrpura desfilaba con las corazas resplandecientes y las banderas desplegadas. [The ceremony, whatever it was, had already begun. A battalion of purple

guards paraded with their breastplates shining and flags waving.]” (*Temblor* 38). Agua Fría is swept away by the glorious music, the pageantry of the scene, and she feels at peace with her place in the world and her destiny to become a priestess of the Crystal in the Talapot. The ritualized affect of the religious scene brings her comfort. She feels ecstasy at being part of a whole that makes sense. Then the music stops. Piel de Azucar, one of the highest-ranking priestesses in the matriarchal priesthood, appears. Drums begin to sound, with a “barbarous, solemn beat” as a group of four guards escort a woman to the center of the arena (*Temblor* 40). Agua Fría’s mood changes in accordance with the music. The fear and uncertainty that she now feels are affective. These new sensations indicate that something is wrong, despite the joy she just felt.

The proceedings continue without any sort of dialogue. The reader sees Agua Fría’s experience as filtered through the third person narration. Agua Fría observes as the condemned woman is tied into a machine with two large wheels and a series of weights by the guards and priests. After the woman is in place, everything appears to freeze, and the priestess raises her arm. She brings her arm down violently, as if cracking a whip, and on her signal, priests throw a lever and the condemned woman is ripped apart, her dismembered head rolling on the ground in a pool of blood. The violence of this description and its vividness contrasts with the glorious affective sensation that had swept Agua Fría up only moments before and gives the girl pause:

Era la primera ejecución pública a la que asistía; no eran sucesos habituales, porque éste era un mundo apacible. ¿O quizá no lo era? Se dobló sobre sí misma, sacudida por imparables náuseas, y vomitó sobre la tierra parda y pisoteada. [It was the first public execution she’d attended; they weren’t common events, because this was a

peaceful world. Or perhaps it wasn't? She doubled over, shaken by unstoppable nausea, and vomited on the brown and trodden ground] (*Temblor* 41).

Her reaction to the sensation of wrongness produces unstoppable physical illness. Vomiting is a sensational reaction to the multitude of sensations that Agua Fría experiences. Agua Fría's sudden doubt, planted by Corcho Quemado before her death is now brought up again as Agua Fría vomits, affected by what she has witnessed.

In a demonstration of the regulatory education and discipline that the hierarchy employs to maintain its power, Agua Fría's doubt is then interrupted as soon as she voices it. When she questions the harshness of the sentence, the priest who leads her to her fate at the Talapot responds that heresy would be enough for a severe punishment, but that the woman had also committed worse crimes against the norm: "En su necedad soñaba con cambiar el mundo, cuando el mundo es, como de todos es sabido, un continuo inmutable. [in her foolishness she dreamed of changing the world, when the world is, as everyone knows, an unchangeable continuum]" (*Temblor* 42). The narrative that the world has always been the same and that it is impossible to change is part of the dogma of the priestesses, who teach a flattened form of history. Their *now* is the same as the past and the future. They violently reject any deviation from that norm. In Jasbir Puar's words, "This is akin to what Giorgio Agamben perceives as the difference between regulating to produce order (discipline) and regulating disorder (security)" (Puar 21). The state in which Agua Fría lives attempts to produce order, and when it cannot, it regulates the disorder.

The public execution which Agua Fría witnesses is not legally murder, any more than any legal execution is. This is not to say it is not atrocious, merely that the legal system requires it to occur as a technology of discipline and control employed by the state to

produce order and maintain control. Legality does not make execution any less violent; in fact, it *must* be violent to perform its function. The act of execution makes the executed life *ungrievable*. Patricia Lopez and Kathryn Gillespie describe this violence in other contexts: “Certain human lives are made not grievable through racialized violence in the spectacle of lynching and the erasures of human life and death in the wake of Shining Path violence in Peru” (Lopez 10). Montero opposes the death penalty and her inclusion of this kind of execution as a disciplinary technology in the world of *Temblor* illustrates her feelings about it by the horrific detail that Montero includes in the execution scene (*Temblor* 41). The death of a person convicted of a capital crime is made not publicly²⁹ grievable because it fits the narrative of a just punishment, a deserved fate.

In a willful, killjoy moment, Agua Fría questions why, if what the priests teach is true, there is a need to enact such a harsh punishment for those who futilely teach something different. This is willful as it goes against the flow of what society expects of Agua Fría. Humo de Leña flags the strangeness of Agua Fría’s questioning, but he excuses it by framing her as intelligent but uninformed “eres una muchacha inteligente, pero te equivoca la ignorancia. [you are an intelligent girl, but you err in your ignorance]” (*Temblor* 42). To explain the violence of the sentence, the priest states that although the woman was insignificant and could not harm the Law itself, she could have hurt the primitive souls of the mortal people by confusing them, contaminating them with her ideas, which would only lead to more executions. He goes on to teach Agua Fría that intelligent people, like her, need discipline and Law more than anyone else to avoid becoming contaminated by

29 This is not to say that this violent erasure of public grieving rituals means that private individuals and family members will not mourn the loss of their loved ones. It may in fact intensify private grief if one is not allowed to mourn.

heretical doctrines. He promises that she will receive that discipline in the Talapot. Finally, he tells her that everything the priests do is out of love. (*Temblor* 42). The idea of heresy as a contaminating disease and the suggestion that the priestesses enforce violent reprisals for any breaking of the norm out of a sense of duty and love is disturbing. It infantilizes the population of “primitive” souls who need guidance. It is the rhetoric used to justify conquest and oppression in colonialism and neocolonialism, though it is precisely those colonizing systems which deliberately maintain the ignorance of oppressed populations by withholding education.

Humo de Leña’s explanation turns the violent execution into a lesson for Agua Fría. Sara Ahmed writes that “Violence becomes instruction when it is accompanied by a narrative, an explanation. When you have learned something, when you have received the message of this instruction, your feelings are given direction and shape” (Ahmed 25). Such instruction continues in the Talapot, where Agua Fría finds that she cannot ask questions or think for herself or even build relationships of solidarity or love with her fellow students without receiving harsh punishments. Such debilitating treatment works to create model priestesses and priests, who will go on to enforce rules in the rest of the citizens of the empire. Jasbir Puar argues:

that debilitation and the production of disability are in fact biopolitical ends unto themselves, with moving neither toward life nor toward death as the aim. This is what I call ‘the right to maim’: a right expressive of sovereign power that is linked to, but not the same as ‘the right to kill.’ Maiming is a source of value extraction from populations that would otherwise be disposable.” (Puar xviii)

Agua Fría and her companions in the Talapot are tortured with strict, menial, meaningless tasks specifically designed to maim their ability to think for themselves and thus extract their full potential value as subjects of their society. The bodies of the adolescent students become sites of discipline.

Humo de Leña, as their teacher, explicitly states that they are being disciplined for their own good, to make them into good priestesses and priests in the future. He follows up his instruction to abandon curiosity and to subject themselves to discipline works with harsh action. In one instance, he says he will choose two rods from a basket. He then holds up three rods and asks Agua Fría how many there are. She answers that there are three. He hits her across the face with his staff, knocking her to the floor and cutting her eyebrow. He asks Opio, another novice, to tell Agua Fría how many rods there are, and she says two. Agua Fría, stunned and sobbing, finally says that there are however many rods as Humo de Leña says there are (52-54). Such violent tactics work, for Agua Fría eventually represses her desire to question.

This process of discipline resonates with Jasbir Puar's work on debilitation. She asks, "Which bodies are made to pay for 'progress'? Which debilitated bodies can be reinvigorated for neoliberalism, available and valuable enough for rehabilitation, and which cannot be?" (Puar 13). The children selected as novices are deliberately debilitated, reinvigorated, and rehabilitated as part of the disciplinary system of the priestesshood. Agua Fría and her fellow novices subject themselves to the system which they cannot escape and learn to avoid stepping outside of the norm to avoid corrective punishment. Agua Fría has the choice to stick out or to become an instrument of corrective violence as she trains to be a priestess. She and the other novices who survive the training learn to

“[b]ecome the rod as a way of avoiding the consequences of being beaten” (Ahmed 158). And not all of them survive. There are two sapphic³⁰ girls among Agua Fría’s fellow novices in the Talapot, who may have been sent to the Kalinin had they been outed prior to becoming novices. Humo de Leña discovers them kissing in a bunk one night and Opio chooses to jump from one of the windows and die rather than face the priest’s punishment. Opio and Viruta de Hierro’s bodies fit the norm, but their orientation and behavior do not, and the consequences for standing out are severe (*Temblor* 60). The harsh corrective punishments administered by the priestesses and priests are accompanied by always-future promises of understanding. When they finally leave the first stage of instruction, their next teacher, Duermevela, invites them to ask any questions they wish. Agua Fría breaks down in tears and asks why they could not ask questions and what the point of such torturous treatment was. Duermevela only says that the discipline is necessary to

doblegar la voluntad al buen camino. Del mismo modo que los rosales deben ser podados para que crezcan y se fortalezcan, así vuestros espíritus han de ser limpiados de las impurezas de los bajos instintos, para que luego florezcáis en el seno de la Ley. Siempre ha sido así. [bend the will to the right path. In the same way that roses must be pruned to grow and become strong, thus your spirits must be cleaned of the impurities of base instincts, so that later you may flourish in the bosom of the Law. It has always been so. (*Temblor* 63-64)

The continually deferred, always future, promise of understanding and enlightenment hangs over them as another disciplinary technology. The priestesses deploy this

30 Sapphic describes any woman who is attracted to women.

unobtainable future to simultaneously soften and back up the violent threat of all-too-present punishments and surveillance.

Despite everything, Agua Fría is unable, or unwilling, to submit herself entirely to the Talapot. This refusal to accept the “truths” they feed her brings her into conflict with her teachers, as in the episode with the rods. As described in chapter two, when Agua Fría arrives at the Talapot, she sees that there are one hundred floors in the building and only the top three are in use. The students learn that they must pass through the three levels of the *Círculo Exterior* [Exterior Circle], then the three of the *Círculo de Sombras* [Circle of Shadows], then the three of the *Círculo de Tinieblas* [Circle of Darkness]. Once in the *Círculo de Sombras*, time passes, and they arrive at the second level of that circle. Duermevela eventually tells them that they must prepare to transfer to the *Círculo de Tinieblas*, and Agua Fría remembers that Humo de Leña, their first teacher, told them there were three floors in each floor. She asks why they aren’t going to the third level and Duermevela replies that there are only two and there have always been only two. Agua Fría replies that Humo de Leña taught them there were three, and Duermevela tells her she is mistaken. Agua Fría experiences a strong sense of cognitive dissonance at this gaslighting, designed to manipulate her sense of reality: “La muchacha sintió que la habitación giraba en torno a ella y que a sus pies se abría un abismo. [The girl felt that the room was spinning around her and that at her feet an abyss opened]” (*Temblores* 75). This time, however, Agua Fría refuses to accept the alternative facts presented by her teacher, favoring the evidence of her own capacity to remember. She continues to argue, despite the debilitating training she has received:

Sólo hay dos niveles, repitió la voz *de la disciplina* en los oídos de Agua Fría. Y todas las células de su cuerpo, entrenadas en la obediencia, aceptaron automáticamente las palabras de Duermevela. ... Un extraño sopor invadía su mente y sus recuerdos se desdibujaban y confundían. ¡Pero no! Agua Fría agitó la cabeza. No era cierto. ¡No era cierto! Los tres niveles existían. La muchacha se aferró desesperadamente a esa pequeña certidumbre y poco a poco la memoria volvió a hacerse nítida y el sopor comenzó a desvanecerse. [There are only two levels, repeated the *voice of discipline* in Agua Fría's ears. And all the cells in her body, trained in obedience, automatically accepted Duermevela's words. ... A strange torpor invaded her mind and her memories blurred and mingled together. But no! Agua Fría shook her head. It wasn't true. It was not true! The three levels existed. The girl clung desperately to that small certainty and little by little the memory became clear and the torpor began to vanish. (*Temblor 75*, emphasis mine)]

At Agua Fría's insistence, Duermevela asks the other students to tell her how many floors there are. Every one of them agrees that there are two floors only (*Temblor 75*). Agua Fría, indignant, persists in her refusal to rearrange her memory to fit in. She deliberately becomes an unruly, willful figure in that moment. Her willfulness brings the realization that the world was indeed changing, but it also brings the consequence of losing the little finger on her left hand to the maiming discipline of Duermevela. She sorrowfully hides her face in her hands, then lectures the students, saying,

El error, cuando se apodera de la mente, se convierte en una enfermedad del alma. Queridos niños, Agua Fría está enferma. Insiste en el error, y con ello comete una falta muy grave. [Error, when it gains power over the mind, becomes a sickness of

the soul. Dear children, Agua Fría is ill. She persists in her error, and therefore she commits a grave fault.] (*Temblor* 76-77)

Her performative sorrow at Agua Fría's supposed sickness and nonconformity fits the narrative of loving teachers disciplining a group of intelligent but naive novices for their own good. The punishments inflicted, however, have the effect of debilitating the novices and forcing them into conformity. After her lecture, Duermevela hypnotizes Agua Fría with her gaze, paralyzing her then forcing her to walk forward against her will to a chopping block, where a male priest³¹ waits to cut off her finger. She is forced to lift her own hand into place on the chopping block, then Duermevela freezes her in place. Agua Fría cannot move and cannot speak. As she loses her finger, she is also stripped of the capacity to express her pain vocally in that moment. This is a double maiming in which her teachers take away both her voice and part of her hand, leaving a visible sign of rebellion while providing a strong incentive to step back inside the norm. Both are examples of Magenta society's violently established right to maim its citizens to extract the most possible value from them.

Limiting care as a control tactic

Montero writes about active punishment, but also about the people that society allows to die through inaction. Oxígeno, a leader of the rebellion against the priestesses, informs Agua Fría that her mother died not because Magenta didn't have the ability to heal her but because they chose not to. Within the inner circle of the Talapot, it turns out that the priestesses have access to luxuries which they deny to the general public. They have

31 Women, in this society, are privileged and are held up as too pure to commit violence, though they are the ones who are authorized to order violence.

knowledge of many technologies that they have likewise kept from the population of commoners they rule over:

En el interior del Talapot hay maneras de curar los más extraños y terribles males...

Un saber antiguo que sólo conocen unos cuantos cuando un Anterior enferma o resulta herido es curado por medio de esa sabiduría milenaria. [In the Talapot's interior, there are ways of curing the strangest and most terrible ills... An ancient knowledge that only a few know When an Anterior gets sick or is wounded they are cured by means of this age-old knowledge] (*Temblor* 33).

They also have hoarded technical and mechanical knowledge, reserved in the libraries of the priestesses and not available to anyone else. For the novices, healthcare is limited to the intendente who bandages them after punishments that leave them bleeding and distributes basic hygiene necessities, which include soap and clean clothes. The truly advanced healthcare and other technologies are reserved for the inner circle, for those who the leaders trust to obey the established rules. From those who break the rules, the hierarchy both actively punishes them with maiming and also withholds vital resources such as proper palliative care (*Temblor* 159-160). Ultimately withholding care in order to punish a disobedient priest or priestess has the same effect as an execution. Montero's description of the inequitable distribution of healthcare condemns this kind of consistent withholding of care as much as her vivid descriptions condemn the less-frequent executions.

The priestesses and priests justify this hoarding of knowledge resources by emphasizing that such knowledge is too much for the general populace. Maintaining such exclusive access to knowledge is a technology of debilitation. As noted before, the priestesses teach that the "primitive" souls of the general populace are not suited for

learning, infantilizing them and incapacitating them. The priests maintain that only they are capable of learning and comprehending the knowledge they jealously guard.

A veces, cuando Agua Fría alcanzaba a comprender alguno de estos tremendos secretos, dudaba de sí misma y pensaba si no tendrían razón los sacerdotes, si, en definitiva, estos saberes no serían demasiado poderosos como para dejarlos al alcance de cualquiera. Y era en esos momentos cuando Agua Fría se sentía más cerca de la norma y más conforme con sus hábitos. [At times, when Agua Fría achieved understanding of one of these tremendous secrets, she doubted herself and wondered if the priests weren't right, if, all in all, this knowledge wouldn't be too powerful to leave in reach of just anyone. And it was in those moments when Agua Fría felt closest to the norm and happiest with her habit.] (*Temblor* 81)

I read this as both an example of Agua Fría's desire to belong in the Talapot, to *fit* the norms they teach, and also as an example of the way the priestesses maintain their monopoly on education. All adults are taught how to use the Mirada Preservativa to prevent the world from disappearing, but the memory work of education is reserved for the priestesses, and to a lesser extent, the priests. Questioning the norm is not permitted at all, for anyone.

Non-normative bodies

Non-normative bodies are those bodies that society does not accommodate in systemic and structural ways. Agua Fría's behavior is non-normative, but prior to her punishment in the Talapot, her body fit the norm. As a cis girl raised in a heteronormative matriarchal dystopia, Agua Fría's views on gender are molded by the dogma of the hierarchy she has internalized. Some of these beliefs resonate with what Montero writes in

her non-fictional work. Montero's writing on gender includes some elements of gender essentialism. For example, Montero writes in her column "Padres," from 24 Oct 1992:

Hoy la mujer posee todas las llaves de la maternidad: tiene y mantiene a sus hijos sola, y, como dice Sullerot, puede negarle la paternidad a un hombre que la desea y hacer padre a un hombre que no quiere serlo. Quizá fuera ese último poder femenino, *el control total de la función reproductora*, lo que los varones temieron desde siempre en nosotras y por lo que se crearon, hace una nebulosa de milenios, las estructuras del machismo. [Today woman possesses all the keys of maternity: she has and maintains her children alone, and, as Sullerot says, she can deny paternity to a man that desires it and make a father of a man who does not wish to be one. Perhaps it is this last feminine power, *the total control of reproductive function*, which men have always feared in us women and the reason for which were created, misty millennia ago, the structures of misogyny.] (*La vida desnuda* 231-232, emphasis mine)

She decried the criminalization of abortion prior to its legalization on 5 July 1985. Coming seven years after abortion was legalized, the quote from the column above celebrates the advance in reproductive rights. Stating that reproduction is the ultimate feminine power, however, conflates feminine identity with reproduction and reinforces a binary view of parenthood. It also elides cis women who struggle with fertility and erases the existence of trans men, nonbinary people, and intersex people (who may be of any gender) who bear children. Finally, it implies that women already have control over their reproductive rights, which is not yet the case, at least in my home country. The struggle for reproductive justice within the US continues as access to sex education, birth control, fertility treatments, pre-

and post-natal health care, and abortion continue to be restricted, by legislation, by cost, or both. In her introduction to *Nosotras*, published 2018, Montero writes:

Como es obvio, el cambio del rol de la mujer supone un cambio equivalente del rol del hombre, de manera que estamos hablando de un nuevo tipo de sociedad, de una nueva forma de vivir que nos afecta y nos debería interesar tanto a unas como a otros. [As is obvious, the change in women's role supposes an equivalent change in men's role, so that we're talking about a new type of society, a new form of living that affects and should interest all of us.] (*Nosotras* 15-16)

I agree with Montero that greater freedom for women has changed the world for the better and like her, I argue that such changes can and should continue. I want the world to be equally free for people of all genders. In her worldbuilding in *Temblor*, Montero contrasts a problematic patriarchy in the Uma society with the totalitarian matriarchy of the Magenta priestesshood. One important distinguishing feature is that the Uma people are still able to have children, whereas the birth rate in Magenta has dropped severely because of widespread sterility. Within Magenta's dystopic matriarchy, Agua Fría has learned that specifically because of their capacity for motherhood, cis women are better than cis men. This gender inequality functions as a sign of the dystopian nature of the society. The fact that no one has been able to have a child for years problematizes this dogma, which echoes contemporary "radical feminist" discourse surrounding women's identity and pseudo-biological essentialism which excludes trans women and men, non-binary people, and cis women who experience infertility. J.K. Rowling and other proponents of this "gender critical" perspective perpetuate this harmful, transphobic rhetoric with the consequence that it permeates our society in similar fashion to other manifestations of bigotry (Stack

“J.K. Rowling Criticized”). In the nonfiction quotes above, I question Montero’s mention of men and women and the exclusion of people of other genders, but in *Temblor*, Montero’s ascription of the belief in women’s superiority to men based on reproductive capacity condemn that viewpoint along with the other aspects of the dystopian hierarchy.

Montero’s worldbuilding of the Magenta priestesshood and their dogma inverts real world patriarchy. In the Uma society, she crafts a stereotypically “primitive” patriarchal order which serves as a foil for Magenta’s priestesshood-matriarchy. Both societies are flawed, though the Magenta matriarchy is more so; it is just as dystopic as real-world patriarchy, with inequities built into the system and hierarchical controls based on artificial gender roles. Many real-world stereotypes transfer over to the novel’s dystopia, but what the society values most changes. For example, cis women are framed as pure and incapable of violence. Agua Fría’s second teacher, Duermevela, tells her and the other novices that she, “al ser mujer, no puedo ejercer la violencia [being a woman, I cannot exercise violence]” (*Temblor* 77). In private, Agua Fría’s friend Pedernal protests the inequality and he and Agua Fría experiment: she teaches him some of the things she is learning as a priestess, which they have both been told men are physically incapable of learning, and they discover that at least this part of their education was a lie: “Para sorpresa de Agua Fría, [Pedernal] no parecía tener ninguna dificultad genética para dominar el secreto de la hipnosis. [To Agua Fría’s surprise, {Pedernal} seemed to have no genetic difficulty in dominating the secret of hypnosis]” (*Temblor* 82). Both she and Pedernal must keep these extracurricular lessons secret, as they would both be punished severely. When Agua Fría’s non-normative thinking is marked with punishment, which leaves her with nine fingers as a sign that she disobeyed by questioning, Pedernal and the other novices say nothing. This

type of harsh punishment both enforces the norms that the priestesses teach and leaves marks which serve as a sign of non-normativity.

Agua Fría's body is a partial example of non-normativity, as her loss of a finger is a direct result of punishment, a debilitating tactic used to reinforce the norm. It also outs her as a priestess once she leaves the Talapot. After her escape, she encounters others with non-normative bodies due to birth differences and other causes. One of these people is named Doble Pecado. Doble Pecado belonged to one of the religious orders, the *kalinin*. This group, subordinate to the priestesses and the priests, is made up of

los hermafroditas, los homosexuales, que *abandonaban* sus familias en cuanto advertían sus tendencias y se integraban en esta orden menor, cuya función consistía en bailar y cantar en los actos religiosos y las celebraciones públicas. [hermaphrodites, homosexuals, that *abandoned* their families as soon as they noted their tendencies and integrated themselves into this minor order, whose function consisted in dancing and singing at religious acts and public celebrations.] (*Temblor* 39).

While Agua Fría has clearly been taught that the *kalinin* abandon their homes and families voluntarily upon realizing their identities, the truth is that there is no other place in society that recognizes LGBTQIA³² people as people. The two groups that Agua Fría knows about who are relegated to this exceptional space and role in society are intersex people and homosexual people. The society does not acknowledge the existence of trans people or bisexual people, probably conflating their identities with those they do recognize. They are all collected into a group that passes for a minor religious order and made to serve and

32 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual

entertain the “higher” orders of priestesses and priests. Doble Pecado reveals that “como orden menor, [los kalinin] hemos tenido que sufrir a bastantes sacerdotisas caprichosas, y necesitábamos defendernos de algún modo. [as a minor order, {we kalinin} have had to suffer many capricious priestesses, and we needed to defend ourselves somehow]” (*Temblor* 185). It is not difficult to see that abusive priestesses took advantage of their power and of the kalinin’s marginalized status for generations. Agua Fría sees a group of kalinin dance prior to the execution ceremony just before she enters the Talapot for the first time, but she never meets any of them personally (*Temblor* 39). In the fortified city of Daday, Agua Fría encounters the kalinin Doble Pecado, an intersex person who has become a sex worker after the collapse of the priestesshood in their city. The setting has an esperpentic tone, similar to Baba’s encounter with sex workers in her unnamed city in *Bella y oscura*, which the next section of this chapter explores. Agua Fría arrives in Daday as night is falling. As she navigates a steep street, she observes other people, who the third person limited narration describes as “tipos extraños [strange folks]” (*Temblor* 179). The narration also describes them as lacking

algún pedazo de su anatomía: aquél era tuerto; éste, manco; y el de más allá, que a primera vista parecía *completo*, mostraba una horrorosa cicatriz tajando ambas mejillas. Eran gentes *duras*, de eso no cabía duda alguna. Supervivientes de circunstancias extremas. [some piece of their anatomy: that one was one-eyed; this one, one-armed; that one over there, that at first glance seemed *complete*, had a horrible scar which cut across both cheeks. They were *hard* people, of that there was no doubt. Survivors of extreme circumstances.] (*Temblor* 179, emphasis mine)

The description of varying disabilities or non-normative appearances as a *lack* is typical of ableist societies that view anatomical differences as deficiencies. The way that these people stand out to Agua Fría as strange, hardened, and incomplete calls attention to the former priestess's perspective on the bodies of others. She is unused to seeing or interacting with people with non-normative bodies aside from a few priests with missing fingers, like herself. This indicates that people with these kinds of disabilities either were sequestered to someplace Agua Fría never went or that people who experienced traumatic, disabling injuries did not survive them because the hierarchy denied them access to adequate healthcare. In either case, these people do not fit into Agua Fría's idea of a normal world. None of these people reappear after this paragraph, and none have names. They become part of the apocalyptic scenery in which Agua Fría meets Doble Pecado.

When talking about Doble Pecado in English, I use the gender-neutral singular they, as the character states that they themselves do not know whether they are a man or a woman, and they express indifference. Doble Pecado makes up the right half of their face in feminine style, and the left half in masculine style, dressing the rest of their body accordingly. They first show the masculine half when confronting Agua Fría on the street, then the feminine half, then they face her. Agua Fría's reaction is one of shock: "Visto de frente, el efecto era *monstruoso*, casi *insoportable*. [Seen face-on, the effect was *monstruous*, almost *unbearable*]" (*Temblor* 180-181, emphasis mine). Agua Fría, shocked by their appearance, asks, "Pero ¿quién eres, *qué eres*?... ¿Eres hombre o mujer? [But, who are you, *what are you*?]" (*Temblor* 181). Doble Pecado notes her shock and explains that they have breasts but that "mi sexo es de varón" (*Temblor* 181). Although intersex people are born with a diverse range of genital appearance and a variety of different secondary sex

characteristics such as breasts, facial hair, etc., Doble Pecado's description matches stereotypical ideas about what an intersex person's body looks like. Doble Pecado's description also includes more detail than anyone would have the right to ask for, especially on a first acquaintance. The ex-kalinin then notes Agua Fría's discomfort with their appearance and says, "Pero como parece que a ti eso te preocupa mucho, pongamos que para ti puedo ser hombre todo el rato. [But as it seems that this worries you greatly, let's say that for you I can be a man all the time]" (*Temblor* 181). They then proceed to use masculine adjectives for themselves throughout most of their conversation with Agua Fría, correcting themselves when they call themselves "la más imaginativa, uy perdón, el más imaginativo [the most imaginative {woman}, oh sorry, the most imaginative {man}]" of the former kalinin who have become sex workers (*Temblor* 181). At least some of Montero's characterization of Doble Pecado and the broad descriptions of the other kalinin are due to the dystopic worldbuilding in the novel. Doble Pecado's relegation to the spaces allotted to the kalinin resonates with the all-too-common experience of LGBTQIA people who have been disowned and pushed out of their families' homes. Doble Pecado, like their fellow kalinin, was confined to a limited space because of their misfitting into the rest of society. Agua Fría's othering gaze and her shock at meeting the kalinin in Daday demonstrate how the kalinin have been othered in Magenta society. The former priestess's training and limited exposure to anything and anyone outside the Talapot explains her reaction, but do not excuse it.

Another character whose body does not fit the norm is Torbellino, a Little Person who Agua Fría meets in the settlement of Renacimiento. Montero writes a Little Person into several of her novels; in her autofictional work *La loca de la casa* she comments on

the affinity she feels for these individuals and states that she noted their prevalence in her novels after writing *Bella y oscura* (*La loca de la casa* 68-72). In the *Bella y oscura* section I will return to this topic as I discuss Airelai's portrayal in that novel. In English, I use the term Little Person to talk about these characters when they appear, though dwarf, person with dwarfism, and Little Person or LP are all acceptable, and individual people will differ on their preferred terminology. Montero uses "enano/a [dwarf]." cursory research suggests a similar variation in preference among Spanish-speaking Little People.³³ In descriptions of Torbellino's person and her belongings, the narrative emphasizes their diminutive size with adjectives like "pudorosa [modest]" and phrases like "el techo estaba demasiado cerca [the ceiling was too close]". From Agua Fría's perspective, Torbellino's size is far beyond the norm. Torbellino's choice to live in Renacimiento signals that she was viewed as a misfit in broader Magenta society. Torbellino rescues Agua Fría from the disappearing landscape. In Torbellino's descriptions, the choice of in Agua Fría's first meeting with Torbellino emphasizes what to the former priestess is non-normative. Torbellino is the only Little Person in the novel, and though she is a hero while Doble Pecado is an antagonist, having a single character as a token representative of an entire group of people is still problematic. Torbellino is telepathic and her magic power allows her to save Agua Fría and the world. In this and *Bella y Oscura*, we have the descriptions of Little People, written by a person of average height, which focus on their non-normative qualities. The viewpoint characters may not reflect Montero's own views, but they are similar to each other and to

³³ Prior to any publication of this work, I would want to research this further and hire at least one Spanish-speaking Little Person as a consultant and sensitivity reader.

Montero's description of her fascination with Little People in *La loca de la casa*, which is also fiction but which is more solidly rooted in Montero's real life than her SF work.

The last group of people with non-normative bodies represented in *Temblor* are fat people. There are two fat women in the novel, Océano and Oxígeno. They are sisters, matriarchs of opposing political groups. Océano is the High Priestess in Magenta while Oxígeno lives in exile in the far north and manipulates events via her telepathic powers. Both are described with an emphasis on their bodies, but Océano in particular is described as gluttonous, signaled by her gobbling up candy while the world falls apart around her (*Temblor* 303, 308). Océano's characterization, as the principal human antagonist in the narrative, invokes fatphobic tropes. Fiction often portrays villains with non-normative bodies and non-normative identities. Non-normativity serves as a symbolic shorthand for a villainous nature. Queer-coded villains abound in Disney films. *Detective Pikachu's* (2019) Howard Clifford uses a wheelchair and his disability is written as part of the film's foreshadowing that he is the villain and as his motivation for his harmful actions, which draws on the "Evil Cripple" trope (TV Tropes). This trope shows up in the third book in the Bruna Husky series, where the evil mastermind has kept himself alive with adaptive technologies which add to his sinister depiction (*Tiempos* 366). Like disabled bodies, fat bodies also all too often signal evilness, as in the depiction of Harry Potter's Uncle Dursley, whose depiction draws on fatphobic tropes, as does Marvel comics usual depiction of The Kingpin, one of Spiderman's antagonists, and DC comics' portrayal of The Penguin, and *The Maltese Falcon's* (1941) villain, named Kasper Gutman and referred to as The Fat Man (*TV Tropes*). Tropes about disabled people and fat people saturate Western society and can be difficult to avoid without consistent conscious effort. Océano's portrayal falls

into the fatphobic trope of the fat, gluttonous villain. For example, the narration reads that Océano “se encaramó con *pesado bamboleo* en una pequeña escalerilla que tenía junto a la cama y, dejándose caer sobre el lecho, se desparramó entre los cojines. [climbed with *heavy wobbling* up a small stair that she had next to the bed and, letting herself fall onto the mattress, she spilled into the cushions]” (*Temblor* 297, emphasis mine). Also, when she tells Agua Fría that she had to execute one of her daughters,

Una lágrima pugnó por emerger de los profundos pozos de sus ojos pero se evaporó antes de coronar *los formidables montículos de grasa*. [A tear fought to emerge from the deep wells of her eyes, but it evaporated before crowning *the formidable mounds of fat*.] (*Temblor* 297, emphasis mine)

The stereotypes about fat people and gluttony continue as Agua Fría frantically questions Océano about the fate of the world.

La Gran Sacerdotisa escudriñó atentamente el platillo de dulces y escogió uno con su *manaza de gigante*. Se lo metió en la boca y empezó a rechupetearlo con entusiasmo, sus carrillos hinchándose y deshinchándose como los de *un gran batracio*. [The High Priestess attentively examined the plate of sweets and chose one with her *giant paw*. She popped it into her mouth and began to suck at it with enthusiasm, her cheeks inflating and deflating like those of *a great frog*.] (*Temblor* 299).

Comparing people with non-normative bodies to animals is often a means of dehumanization. Other fat characters appear in Montero’s SF work, and even when Montero describes sympathetic fat characters, her narration fixates on their bodies and their weight. In a column about Montero’s memories of Desiree, a woman who she met in Paris,

Montero describes Desiree's "cuerpo torpe y dilatado de la extrema vejez [clumsy and expanded body of extreme old age]" and writes,

Quiero decir que era coqueta, y que le seguía sentando bien la ropa, pese a sus piernas hidropésicas y al cuerpo enorme y *deformado*, a ese *cuerpo traicionero* que era *la cárcel* de su voluntad y de su cabeza. [I mean to say that she was charming, and that her clothing continued to fit her well, despite her hydropic/swollen legs and her enormous and *deformed* body, that *traitorous body* which was *the prison* of her will and her head.] (*La vida desnuda* 107)

The medicalization of fat bodies is highly prevalent in Western society, and this is an example: calling a fat person's legs hydropic (swollen due to an edema or similar illness) is inaccurate and emphasizes Montero's perception rather than Desiree's will, identity and intellect, which Montero perceives as trapped inside what she terms the prison of Desiree's body. Montero also terms the body an antagonistic prison when referring to herself, but the context of describing a fat person's body changes the connotation of Montero's oft-used metaphor. In her column, Montero goes on to mention Desiree's "corpachón bamboleante [large wobbling body]" while describing how Desiree served her and her friend a delicious dinner (*La vida desnuda* 108). Her descriptions of Océano and Oxígeno, as well as other fat characters throughout her SF, make use of similar language.

Negative perceptions of fat, queer, and otherwise non-normative bodies have proliferated through our world in much the same way that the toxic beliefs about the eternal nature of the world saturate Magenta's culture. The only way for readers, scholars, and writers to avoid such harmful tropes is to recognize their existence, pay attention to them when they appear and avoid perpetuating them or letting them pass without comment.

Conclusion

As Agua Fría interacts with the oppressive systems, she experiences material bodily consequences as a result of her those systems. Agua Fría's actions make her an unruly figure for the ruling hierarchy. Because of this, she experiences misfitting and acts as a killjoy, an interruption, when she refuses to simply stop thinking and expressing her thoughts. When she persists in her own observations, she experiences misfitting and when she persists, she experiences the disciplinary technology of her society. Echoing the sentiment of several of Montero's journalistic columns, Agua Fría observes the debilitating effects of classism, especially in regard to the inaccessibility of knowledge and resources to the majority of the population. Agua Fría's world also reflects Montero's concerns about oppressive governments and her opposition to harsh punishments, especially the death penalty. Both Montero's journalism and her worldbuilding in *Temblor* express Montero's ethical stance against repressive hierarchies. The priestesses and priests live under a repressive system of hierarchical control, but as long as they obey, they can benefit from their privileged status. As a killjoy, Agua Fría repeatedly goes against the norm. To quote Ahmed, "She is doing more than saying the wrong thing: she is getting in the way of something, the achievement or accomplishment of the family or of some *we* or another, which is created by what is not said" (Ahmed 37). Agua Fría is not the only one of Montero's characters to interrupt the systemic norm; Montero's protagonists are often killjoys who learn to look beyond their own privilege and their own learned obedience. Agua Fría's growth as a character makes *Temblor* highly relevant to today's world in which many readers must recognize and navigate oppressive hierarchical systems in various aspects of their lives. In *Temblor*, Montero crafts a narrative in which Agua Fría rejects the

systemic problems of both the Uma patriarchy and the Talapot matriarchy as she goes to find her own place: ultimately, Agua Fría takes her unborn child and her reborn dog Bruna and leaves Magenta for somewhere else.

Abuse, Misfitting, and Debility in *Bella y oscura*

In *Bella y oscura*, Montero writes about a girl growing up in an urban environment and the struggles that girls face as they navigate the world around them. The protagonist of *Bella y oscura* reads as the youngest of Montero's SF protagonists for adults; Montero's children's books also feature young girls. She is a girl of unspecified age whose name is never explicitly stated in the text. Because Montero has chosen to leave the protagonist's given name out of the text, I call her Baba to provide a legible referent and to avoid a too frequent repetition of the phrase "the main character." I chose "Baba" because this is the "secret word" that she repeats to herself whenever she feels anxious and needs to calm herself: "Suspiré y musité mi palabra talismán, baba-baba-baba [I sighed and muttered my talisman word, baba-baba-baba]" (*Bella y oscura* 123). Her grandmother is called Doña Bárbara, and it is likely that Baba is a nickname, a shortened form of Bárbara. She is her grandmother's favored grandchild, possibly because she is her namesake, and possibly due to her gender and her status as the daughter of Bárbara's favorite son, Máximo. Baba is also the narrator of the novel, for all but the brief sections in which her cousin Chico relates events that Baba did not witness personally. Baba's lack of a given name allows her to represent any girl in a situation like hers, and she becomes an every-girl character. She lives in the nameless Barrio on the margins of the also-unnamed Ciudad Bonita, during the Capitalocene, specifically after the development of commercial airplanes. The story likely takes place during the mid-1990s near the date of the novel's publication in 1995, but the Barrio would not feel out of place in any period after commercial air travel became common. Baba inhabits the Barrio by learning the rules that permit her to navigate her surroundings. Montero told me that while designing Baba's Barrio, that "no tenía ninguna

ciudad en la cabeza, es una ciudad imaginaria, literaria [had no city in mind, it is an imaginary city, literary]" (Email "Re: *Bella y oscura*"). The only names for landmarks that the reader learns are those which Baba provides, and they are descriptive, not specific, as if the *Ciudad* were the only one that existed. As far as Baba's experience and her narration is concerned, the only geographical locations that exist are the ones that she encounters after her arrival in the *Ciudad*. The Barrio, separated from any specific geographic referent, becomes every neighborhood, any neighborhood. Its set apart nature makes it a heterotopia, a place connected to the world only tenuously. Montero describes the Barrio with a mix of detail and detachment that I read as a part of the Capitalocene's anonymizing forces which shapes inhabitants of the city into homogenous groups rather than individual beings. Human inhabitants of the city then become a generalized source of labor that serves to make the city function. The specific details of Montero's novel take a close-up view of one child in one Barrio in a narrative that combats the depersonalization inherent to the Capitalocene.

Montero's writing in *Bella y oscura* coincides with some of her own life experiences recorded in her introduction to *Nosotras* as well as her pointed writing about how societies around the globe treat girls and women. In this chapter, I look at the material impact of Barrio spaces and systems on Baba and her family members. Baba, Chico, Amanda, and Airelai experience different marginalizations as they inhabit different identities. The oppression each of them experiences as they inhabit the Barrio affects them all collectively and individually. The world they live in is not entirely accessible to any of them due to their identities. Each of them has an unruly body to some degree, especially Airelai. None of them has easy access to necessary resources and they all struggle to survive. Montero's

portrayal of their plight through Baba's perspective is as affective as any of her columns. Her columns are often close-up shots, essays which examine the case of particular individuals or families, highlighting the difficulties marginalized people face or containing detailed portraits of people Montero admires. Such detailed descriptions highlight the inequities and misfits between spaces and individual needs. Baba's remembered and narrated child's-eye view does something quite similar, allowing an adult reader to read between the lines of Baba's narration and comprehend the difficulties that Baba faces growing up in a Barrio where she has to find her own space.

Where Girls Belong

The space within the Barrio is segregated by gender, age, and class. Various spaces are deemed safe for girls to exist, while other spaces are prohibited to them. Henri Lefebvre writes that capitalist society

practices segregation. This same rationality which sees itself as global (organizing, planning, unitary and unifying) concretizes itself at the analytical level. On the ground it projects separation. It tends (as in the United States), to form *ghettos* or parking lots, those of workers, intellectuals, students (the campus), foreigners, and so forth, not forgetting the ghetto of leisure or 'creativity', reduced to miniaturization or hobbies. *Ghetto in space and ghetto in time*. In planning, the term 'zoning' already implies separation, segregation, isolation in planned ghettos. The fact becomes rationality in the project. (Lefebvre 144, emphasis mine)

The Barrio is one such planned marginal space. The Real Academia gives the etymology of barrio as “Del ár. hisp. *bárri 'exterior', y este del ár. clás. barrī 'salvaje’” (“Barrio” rae.es). The Barrio then has a marginalized, segregated significance. Set apart by economic

class from the Ciudad Bonita, the whole barrio experiences similar financial difficulties. However, within the Barrio, there are other intersecting inequalities. People of all genders can technically be present anywhere, but their roles and the relative safety of people varies based on their gender and age. One way to categorize the spaces within the novel is into the categories of domestic space and public space. Another way to categorize space would be to think of adult space and child space, as there are spaces that are not safe for Baba because of both her age and her gender. I will focus principally on the gendered nature of the spaces, but these categories intersect, as no identity is formed on a single axis. The division of spaces in the novel has to do with people's relative safety in those spaces, with more marginalized individuals being safer in domestic spaces than in public spaces, though no space is ever entirely safe.

Domestic spaces are often framed as women's place, and women are kept in place by social norms that confine their influence to the domestic sphere, but which also dismiss domestic work as less important than more visible work that takes place in public. Women and girls who are perceived to have "left their place" become willful subjects, as Sara Ahmed discusses in her text *Willful Subjects*, and I discuss this aspect more in chapter three. Baba does not have the freedom of movement that more privileged girls do. Her movements are restricted to the Barrio itself. As a poor white girl, she experiences two axes of marginalization: class and gender, while she is privileged in terms of race and able-bodiedness. Baba experiences the effects of societal norms that confine women and girls to specific times and places. Baba knows the rules and that following them is a matter of self-preservation: "las niñas, sabía yo, no podían estar por la noche en las calles [girls, I knew, could not be in the street at night]" (*Bella y oscura* 8). The women in Baba's family

enforce the rules that they hope will keep her safe, reproducing the restrictions that they themselves would have faced growing up. Like Agua Fría in *Temblor*, they have been trained by society to follow social norms and are then deployed to reproduce the status quo in the next generation of girls.

Public spaces are often framed as masculine spaces, and girls are considerably less safe in those spaces which privilege men and the male gaze. Rather than making public spaces safer for girls, girls are told to stay out of those spaces because they do not belong there. Baba's street, particularly at night, is not equally friendly to people of all genders. The description of Barrio streets as unsafe for girls resonates strongly with Montero's description of her own girlhood, when she traveled to school via the metro. Her journey to school was fraught with the challenges of travelling through a male-dominated space. She writes:

Es probable que no me librara ni un solo día de que me tocaran el culo o se restregaran contra mí al menos una vez entre los cuatro trayectos [del metro]. Sobre todo en los primeros años, cuando era más pequeña y más indefensa. Recuerdo que una vez --debíamos tener unos once años-- una amiga protestó, y el pedófilo le pegó una bofetada. Nadie en el atiborrado vagón nos ayudó. Quiero decir que, por entonces, tu aprendizaje de la vida incluía tácticas de defensa y huida ante los depredadores. [It's probable that I didn't spend a single day free of them grabbing my ass or grinding against me at least once during the four {metro} trips. Above all in those first years, when I was smaller and more defenseless. I remember that one time – we must have been about eleven – a friend protested, and the pedophile slapped her. No one in the crowded metro car helped us. I mean to say that, in those

days, your study of life included defense and flight tactics to use in the face of predators.] (*Nosotras* 20)

The ominous, threatening space that Baba experiences seems to draw on Montero's own experiences with predatory men. The Barrio is largely composed of male-dominated spaces. When Baba and Amanda first arrive at the Barrio, Baba picks up on Amanda's silent anxiety at walking through the dimly lit zone where men lurk under lightbulbs and call out.

Subimos por la calle y nos decían cosas. Hombres extraños que había debajo de las bombillas y que nos invitaban a pasar. Y por las puertas entreabiertas salía humo y un resplandor rojizo, *un aliento de infierno*. [We walked up the street and they said things to us. Strange men that were beneath the lightbulbs and invited us to come in.] (*Bella y oscura* 10, emphasis mine)

Baba does not specify what the men say to her and Amanda, but there is a threatening tone to the whole scene. Sara Ahmed describes the "Reclaim the Night marches that are still going on (violence against women is still ongoing). Reclaim the Night marches are willed and willful acts of populating the streets by and for women, a claiming back of a time as well as a space that the reality of sexual violence has taken from us" (*Willful* 163). Baba's nighttime Barrio has not been claimed or reclaimed for women, aside from certain exceptional spaces such as the Calle Violeta where sex workers ply their trade. And in that space, the sex workers inhabit the margins of the street, with the center reserved for men. The men who inhabit the Barrio at night are free to go to the sex workers or to the clubs, and to call out to women who pass by, like they do to Amanda when she brings Baba to the Barrio. The presence and actions of these men make the nighttime Barrio

uncomfortable at best and dangerous at worst for women and girls to inhabit or pass through. This is Baba's first introduction to the Barrio, and it primes her to be cautious, to confine her actions within the limits her family sets. There are only a few exceptional occasions when Baba goes beyond those limits. Compliance with social norms is one of many survival strategies, "tácticas de defensa y huida ante los depredadores [defense and flight tactics to use in the face of predators]", which women and girls employ in Montero's texts (*Nosotras* 20). Montero's girlhood is not unique to her, and her writing reflects that fact. Many girls before and since have had to develop similar survival tactics. In 2004, Spain's Congress approved a law against gender violence (*El País*, 22 Dec 2004). This law, relatively recent, purports to protect people from assault, but the enforcement of the law has varied. In 2018, the government of Spain made modifications to strengthen the law (Sanmartín). In other texts, Montero creates characters who are strong enough to stand up directly to predatory men, such as Bruna Husky, whose combat droid body can withstand a great deal more than Baba's, or Leola, whose male disguise and ability to fight protect her. Baba must rely on her ability to pass unnoticed and follow the rules, and even this is not a guarantee that she will not be harmed.

Domestic space, though safer, is never a completely safe place for Baba or her cousin Chico, whose childhood experiences include abuse. Although the women in Baba's family shelter her as much as they can from the adult men who might cause her harm, their restrictions do not prevent a neighbor boy from assaulting her. Baba sits on her front steps, on the border of public space and domestic space, in a place where she was allowed to be, accompanied by Chico. The doorstep is a liminal space, on the border of indoors and outdoors. It acts as a transitional space between domestic and public space. This border

space could have functioned as a protective space, as an extension of the children's limited domestic refuge into the public street. Instead, it is exposed to the public. Because of that exposure, the neighborhood bully Buga and two other neighborhood boys invade the space. The three boys harass Chico as he and Baba pass the time. Buga demands Chico share his candy with them, then when the quantity of candy is less than he'd hoped, he grabs Chico and turns him upside down (*Bella y oscura* 31). Baba objects to their mistreatment of her cousin. Despite her fear of the bully, she quietly says "'Déjale ya' ... Pero para mi desgracia me habían oído. ['Let him go now' ... but to my misfortune they had heard me]" (*Bella y oscura* 31). Buga, annoyed at her intervention, drops Chico on his head and turns to her. He reaches up her dress and grabs her genitals, then lets go, looking disgusted by her lack of pubic hair. Buga and his two accomplices then depart. Baba does not report her assault at Buga's hands to any of the adults around her, possibly because she feels that she bears responsibility for his actions. Chico's anger at her reinforces this. After the three older boys leave, Chico reprimands her, because she has upset the natural order of things by standing up for him. "¡Porque tú te equivocaste, todo es culpa tuya, no conoces el Barrio! [Because you messed up, it's all your fault, you don't know the Barrio!]" (*Bella y oscura* 32). He blames her "mistake" in defending him on her lack of knowledge of the human geography of the Barrio, though he does not use those terms. Chico's pragmatic acceptance and reinforcement of the way things are is a survival strategy, one of the defense tactics that Montero mentions in her prologue to *Nosotras* (20). Chico's set of survival strategies has been formed in a lack of other options. Chico's abusive father, Segundo, beats him. Segundo's abuse takes place in private, within the home, and mostly outside of the text, with the scars on Chico's back providing the only evidence of the boy's suffering. Neither

Chico nor Baba have anywhere else they can go to escape from the arbitrary and senseless abuse they experience in places that should be safe for them.

The landscape of Montero's own girlhood resonates with Baba's girlhood. Not the physical landscape, but the geography of sexism and patriarchy that surrounded her and her friends from school and which shapes Baba's life, permeating both public and private spaces. Montero writes, in her prologue to *Nosotras*, that

Todo esto formó parte del paisaje de mi infancia desde los diez años; las niñas éramos como gacelas asustadas que intentan escapar de los leones, resignadas ante una realidad aterradora y humillante, pero por desgracia *normal*. [All this made up part of the landscape of my childhood from ten years on; we girls were like frightened gazelles who try to escape from lions, resigned before a terrifying and humiliating, but disgracefully *normal*, reality.] (*Nosotras* 21, italics original, underline mine)

This terrifying, humiliating reality informs the world in which Baba grows up as well. One difference is that the perpetrators which Montero describes from her childhood were generally adults, while the perpetrator of Baba's assault is Buga, an adolescent boy. This awful state of the world is hellish for the marginalized, including for girls like Baba. It is also, as Montero writes, *normal*. According to a UNICEF report, which cites a 2015 survey, ten percent of girls in Spain "report experiences of contact and non-contact forms of sexual violence before age 15" (UNICEF 77). Baba's narration does not treat any of her experiences as abnormal. The fantastic, speculative part of the story is her hope for something better, based in the fairy tales that Airelai tells her to help ease the difficulties of reality.

Baba's reality is shaped by the unspecified period in which she was locked in the orphanage. This time is in turn locked in the memory gap in her story. She does not talk about the time in the orphanage. She has repressed it from the narrative. In her column "Vis-a-vis" published on 18 Jan 1984, Montero writes,

De mis escasas visitas a las cárceles recuerdo, sobre todo, los silencios. Los centros penitenciarios son un rincón sin nombre de la geografía social, un agujero en el espacio. [Of my few visits to prisons, I remember, above all, the silences. The penitentiary centers are an unnamed corner of social geography, a hole in space.]
(*La vida desnuda* 147)

Prisons, like orphanages, and like the Talapot where Agua Fría's teachers molded her into a priestess in *Temblor*, are heterotopias, to return to Foucault's term to describe places which "are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality ... [and] are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about" (3-4). Montero writes that within the walls of the prison,

la vida queda fuera, tan lejana, tajado el bullicio, borrada abruptamente su existencia. Atraviesas el portón y te engulle el colosal silencio carcelario, que es un producto de la ausencia del tiempo y no del ruido. Ahí dentro, los días se detienen, las horas se derriten, las noches son eternas. [life remains outside, so distant, the noise cut off, its existence erased. You cross the gate and the colossal carceral silence swallows you, which silence is a product of the absence of time not of noise.

There inside, days stop, hours melt, nights are eternal.] (*La vida desnuda* 147)

This space beyond time is a disciplinary space. When Montero talks about the silence within the prison, she is speaking about all the prisons she has had occasion to visit as if

they were one. They have their silence in common. The orphanage that Baba's silence hides and reveals is like the prisons that Montero has visited. It is set apart from the rest of Baba's world, just as the prison where her father is incarcerated and kept apart from his family. Baba's orphanage as a disciplinary space shapes and reflects her current life. Like Montero and her fellow schoolgirls who ran the gauntlet of the groping men in the metro on their way to school, Baba's idea of normality is shaped by her experiences, and her experiences have been harsh. Baba relates, "Las niñas no preguntan, y menos si vienen *de donde yo venía*. [Girls don't ask questions, and they're even less likely to if they come *from where I come from*]" (*Bella y oscura* 7, emphasis mine). The orphanage resides in an "agujero en el espacio [hole in space]" of the narrative. Baba's time there forms a backdrop to her life in the Barrio, shaping her sense of what is normal which influences her experiences of the other spaces she encounters.

Baba's departure from the orphanage takes place before the beginning of her narrative, which is what separates it in time and space from the rest of the story. She begins the narrative on the train, during her journey to the nameless City. Montero writes about characters on journeys. In her introduction to *Nosotras*, Montero retells an old joke: "las chicas buenas van al cielo y las malas van a todas partes. [Good girls go to heaven and bad girls go everywhere]" (*Nosotras* 16). Montero's women characters, collectively, "van a todas partes [go everywhere]," both metaphorically and physically. Baba herself goes everywhere she can reach on foot, tracing the boundaries of the Barrio with her wandering. With her feet and her imagination, she finds spaces that give her some respite from the reality in which she lives. French Jesuit scholar Michel de Certeau writes that "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements

uttered” (97). Baba’s passage through the city and the Barrio stitches the various spaces together in the imagination of the reader, doing the work of a speech act with no dialogue, only Baba’s observations of the journey through the City. Her walk also signals her lack of belonging: “To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper. The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place” (Certeau 103). Baba, as a girl child in a large city, has no place that she can call her own, and no permanent refuge that she can run to. Although she is physically present, trapped in the Barrio, she is also absent from the city, in that none of it properly belongs to her, nor does she belong there. Montero writes in “La calle [the street]”, published in *El País* on 24 Nov 1984, “yo prefiero seguir creyendo que la calle es también mía, que ése es precisamente mi derecho. Y ejercerlo. [I prefer to keep believing that the street is also mine, that that is precisely my right. And to exercise it]” (*La vida desnuda* 202). Reclaiming the streets as a generally accessible public urban space is part of Baba’s story, in which she takes advantage of warm days when others stay inside to map out a space for herself within the Barrio’s limits. Throughout the narrative, Baba pushes increasingly at her boundaries, even venturing out alone at night and discovering an entirely different Barrio than she knows during the daytime. If the places she should be safe are unsafe, she has little incentive to keep herself confined there.

There are two nighttime spaces that I want to analyze. One is the house at night, the other the street at night. One domestic, the other public. Both spaces and Baba’s experience of them revolve around Airelai, the little person who lives with Baba’s family and whose labor as a sex worker supports the others. From her subaltern position, Airelai works to make life livable and bearable for those she lives with. Airelai shares a fantasy world of

her own making with Amanda, Chico, and Baba, helping make their everyday, daytime lives more bearable. She weaves together moments when the rules are suspended, creating ludic spaces where fantasy can exist via stories and games. Montero, in “Sueños [dreams]”, a column from 16 Nov 1991, writes about dream spaces, which she describes as mirrors of daytime existence.

Cada día me parece advertir más claramente que hay un nexo que une las fantasías nocturnas, un hilván de memoria y de casualidad enhebrado entre los distintos sueños que nos van ocupando. Como si por las noches fuéramos otros y viviéramos, sin saberlo, una doble existencia. [Every day I seem to realize more clearly that there is a nexus that unites nighttime fantasies, a thread of memory and of chance strung between distinct dreams that occupy us. As if by night we were other and lived, without knowing it, a double existence.] (*La vida desnuda* 19)

Although Montero is writing about literal dreams, her words extend to the dream-like space which Airelai creates and shares with her adopted family. One of the games she creates takes place when Doña Bárbara and her son Segundo, matriarchal and patriarchal symbols of order and obedience, are out of town for the night. Airelai takes advantage of their absence to invite Amanda, Chico, and Baba to explore the night within the house. Indoors, nighttime has the potential to be a carnivalesque site of refuge, a ludic space where the rules are suspended, and roles are reversed.

The concept of carnival as an analytical tool comes from philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais's novels, and works to examine spaces that create exceptions to everyday rules. The rule for Baba is that nighttime is for sleeping, as it is for most children even though they may not sleep on their parents' desired schedule. On one

exceptional night, that rule changes when Airelai and Amanda come to wake Baba and Chico: “por la noche cuando Chico y yo ya estábamos dormidos, Airelai entró en nuestro cuarto y nos despertó. [at night when Chico and I were already asleep, Airelai entered our room and woke us up]” (*Bella y oscura* 46). With Airelai’s influence, the nighttime house becomes a liminal, ludic space, carnivalesque, both exciting and a bit scary. Roles are suspended, if not reversed, shaking Baba’s sense of normality:

Amanda asomaba por encima de los hombros de Airelai, con el pelo alborotado y sofocada por un ataque de risitas nerviosas; *parecía una niña y no una madre*, la madre de Chico como era, y *eso resultaba turbador y me irritaba*. [Amanda peered over Airelai’s shoulder, with her hair disheveled and out of breath with an attack of nervous giggles. *She seemed like a girl and not a mother*, the mother of Chico that she was, and *that was disturbing and irritated me*.] (*Bella y oscura* 46, emphasis mine)

The suspension of roles provides a carnivalesque quality and a dreamlike color to the night. Baba, Chico, Amanda and Airelai laugh as they dance around through the empty rooms of the nighttime house. Airelai leads them in what feels like a religio-spiritual procession through the house. Within the house, through her words and actions, Airelai claims the night as belonging to the four of them. She says, “La noche es de las mujeres. Y también de los niños, hasta que se hacen hombres y se olvidan quiénes son. [The night belongs to women. And also, to boys, until they become men and forget who they are]” (*Bella y oscura* 47). The house is dark except for the light of the moon, which adds to the surreality of the setting.

La casa estaba a oscuras y en silencio; y por la ventana abierta de par en par entraba el resplandor de la luna llena. El mundo parecía otro envuelto en ese aire de plata tan limpio y tan ligero. [The house was dark and silent; and through the wide-open window poured in the splendor of the full moon. The world appeared other wrapped in that silver air, oh so clean and so light.] (*Bella y oscura* 47)

Unlike the daytime safety of the sun and the nighttime danger of the streetlights, the moon entering the house contributes to the transformation of Baba's world:

todo se veía más bonito y más nítido. Dulce y sin peso, como la sustancia de los buenos sueños. Y en verdad parecía que seguíamos en la cama y que todo lo que hacíamos no era sino soñar. [everything seemed prettier and clearer. Sweet and weightless, like the substance of good dreams. And truly it seemed that we were still in bed and that everything we did was nothing but a dream.] (*Bella y oscura* 47)

The nighttime creates a different place in the same house, making it into a site of refuge. Like a heterotopia, the brief present nighttime romp extends to eternity, until the spell breaks with the roar of a plane overhead.

The dreamlike night is filled with mixed joy and sorrow. Baba feels the magic that Airelai weaves together out of the nighttime as they move through the house: “corrimos o quizá volamos hasta la cocina, en donde devoramos una miel. [we ran or perhaps flew to the kitchen, where we devoured honey]” (*Bella y oscura* 48). Eating together is often symbolic of communion, of a ritual coming together, similar to the rituals which Bakhtin describes as part of Carnival time and space: “Carnival festivities and the comic spectacles

and ritual connected with them had an important place in the life of medieval man” (5). When the group moves to Doña Bárbara’s room,

la enana abrió el cajón inferior de la cómoda y sacó la caja cuadrada de las pastas de piñones. Todos cogimos una y, sentándonos en semicírculo en el suelo, la comimos a la vez y a mordisquitos, como si fuera un *rito* [the Little Person opened the lowest drawer of the dresser and took out the square box of pine nut cookies. We each took one and, sitting in a semicircle on the floor, we all ate them at the same time by nibbles, as if it were a *rite*.] (*Bella y oscura* 49, emphasis mine)

The whole night is a heterotopic time and space with the narrative weight of ritual, which culminates in the eating of the pine nut *pastas* (cookies or cakes) after which the magic starts to fade. Baba sees the scars Segundo has left on Chico’s back while Amanda rocks him. Where Amanda had seemed girlish at the beginning of the night, which Baba found uncomfortable and irritating, at the end of the night Amanda “ya no parecía una niña sino mucho más vieja de lo que en realidad era. [no longer seemed a girl but much older than she really was]” (*Bella y oscura* 50). The strangeness of the entire night mixes excitement and sadness, as Baba feels what seems to be a lack of belonging as she watches Amanda and Chico together. This lack of belonging indicates a misfit between Baba and her relatives, even on a night when normality is temporarily suspended.

The identity of those who own the night according to Airelai differs from those who actually inhabit the nighttime streets of the Barrio. Women, girls and boys may find freedom in domestic spaces granted the absence of patriarchal figures, but this freedom does not extend to the street, especially not the street at night. Outside the house, the typical order of things reasserts its categorical hierarchies. There are two scenes in which Baba

ventures outside at night. The first time she goes with Airelai on an errand that Airelai tells Baba is to place a magic spell on a family enemy, but which the reader can tell is a sort of spy exercise (*Bella y oscura* 98-99). Airelai's presence lends Baba confidence and protection: the little person carries what she tells Baba is a magic spell of protection and forbids Baba from going down what Baba thinks of as the Calle Violeta. The next time, Baba wanders the street alone and her feet take her down that street. Baba discovers that the street is crowded with men and lined with windows where women sex workers sit and offer their services. The violet lights and the atmosphere make the street feel unreal. Baba recounts, "parecía distorsionarse la imagen de las cosas: la realidad que yo veía no era firme. [the image of things seemed to distort: the reality which I saw was not firm]" (*Bella y oscura* 168). The street is arranged to accommodate and cater to the male gaze, with the display windows elevated on either side of the street and men occupying the space of the audience. The setting has an esperpentic tone as the narration highlights the strangeness of the scene via Baba's perspective. Baba is out of place as the only girl of any age in the street audience. She observes both the men around her on the street and the women in the windows, drawn to the spectacle that the sex workers create. As she wanders down the street, she discovers Airelai working in one of the windows, just as one of Airelai's clients arrives. Airelai sends the man, Matías, away, explaining that Baba has come to visit her unexpectedly. Matías mistakes Baba for another little person sex worker, but once Airelai corrects his misconception, he says, "Éste no es un sitio para niñas. [This is not a place for girls]" (*Bella y oscura* 169). He then departs. His statement matches the warnings that Airelai and Baba's other women family members had given her, telling her that the night and especially this street was no place for girls. Up until now, Baba had respected the

gendered and aged prohibition, but her curiosity leads her to explore the entirety of the Barrio, crossing into a space reserved for adult men and the women who work there. Before leaving, Matías pats Baba’s cheek: “Lo hizo con afabilidad, pero me dio asco. [He did so with affability, but it made me feel sick]” (*Bella y oscura* 169). His casual intrusion into Baba’s personal space, recalling the more violent touch of the men who grabbed at young Montero and her fellow schoolgirls on the metro. After Airelai sends Matías away, she gets Baba out of reach of the men in the street by bringing her into her window and drawing the curtain, which places Baba in another space reserved for adults. Although Baba, as a young girl, is expected to remain in her place by remaining outside places where girls do not belong, her personal space is treated as nonexistent or as trespassable.

In her excursion into the Calle Violeta, Baba discovers a part of the Barrio that she had never imagined existed, although she knew something was there. The reality of her passage through the street, a place that *is no place* for little girls, replaces the mystery shrouded in violet light that had previously been left up to her imagination to solve. The nighttime in the Calle Violeta and Baba’s experience of that time and place is opposite in many ways to her nighttime romp through the safety of the house. Both spaces are set apart from the daylight world of the Barrio by their respective lighting and by the events that take place within them. The light of the moon shining into the house contrasts to the violet neon lights here, which make Baba feel ill. Airelai and Amanda invite Chico and Baba to get up and play in the house, but Baba wanders into the Calle Violeta alone, drawn by her own curiosity, and when Airelai sees her there, she becomes angry and asks if Baba followed her. Baba’s previous experience of the Barrio had all taken place in spaces where she was allowed by the regular norms or by special invitation to be. Here, she intrudes into

a place that none of the adults that care about her would think to let her go under any circumstances. Her own curiosity and ignorance take her there, completing her exploration of the Barrio.

Misfitting and abusive environments

Baba experiences misfitting in her environment because of the way others perceive her age and her gender. There is not a single defining event that teaches her how to be compliant, but rather she lives in a debilitating abusive environment. Jasbir Puar writes that

the term “debilitation” is distinct from the term “disablement” because it foregrounds the slow wearing down of populations instead of the event of becoming disabled. While the latter concept creates and hinges on a narrative of before and after for individuals who will eventually be identified as disabled, the former comprehends those bodies that are sustained in *a perpetual state of debilitation* precisely through foreclosing the social, cultural, and political translation to disability. (Puar xiii-xiv, emphasis mine)

Baba’s life in the orphanage prior to her move to the city and the Barrio has worn her down. The abusive environment in her family’s home continues the process. As Baba is young and a girl, her family monitors her activities more than her cousin Chico’s. Though both children would benefit from more support and less control. While both children have to navigate a world built for adults, Baba experiences different kinds of abuse than Chico does. Their experiences are different and particular to them, but they face some similar challenges due to their age. Children experience misfitting when adults treat them as willful subjects who deliberately cause problems rather than as people with specific desires and emotional and physical needs. Though Baba’s family meets the children’s physical needs,

for the most part, they do not treat her or Chico as people who have their own emotional wants and needs. The two children are instead expected to go along with what is most convenient for the family. When Baba's emotions conflict with adult wants, she experiences misfitting and her body and her needs bump up against familial expectations. The adults in Baba's life have not treated her as a whole person. Instead, they have taught her that girls should not ask questions or express opinions. A large part of the text takes place within Baba's mind, looking at the world around her through her eyes and her thought processes. Baba observes without speaking up about what she sees. The occasions when she does speak up are swiftly punished, as in the instance when both Buga and Chico discipline Baba for her attempt to prevent Buga from bullying Chico further. Buga's assault and the blame that Chico directs at Baba for Buga's escalation in violence both reinforce the lesson that intervening will make things worse and that it is better not to say anything.

Baba's story in *Bella y oscura* is a story of generational abuse, played out on the stage of her family's home within the larger setting of the Barrio. Baba is a young girl who deals with an oppressive family environment. As the person in her family with the least power, she receives the least positive attention and the greatest number of arbitrary behavioral rules. Some of the rules have good reasons, but no one explains those reasons to her when they enforce the rules, and she faces ridicule if she questions or fails to follow them. For example, Airelai tells her to stop asking questions while they walk past the Calle Violeta: "No se puede entrar en esta calle por las noches, ¿es que aún no te lo has aprendido? [You can't go in this street at night, haven't you learned that yet?]" (*Bella y oscura* 96). When Baba asks why the street is forbidden at night, Airelai says, "'Tú quieres saber mucho' se burló la enana. 'You want to know a lot,' mocked the Little Person]"

(*Bella y oscura* 96). She then tells Baba that everyone has secrets and that those secrets are sometimes terrible. In addition to the spoken expectations, everyone in the family expects things that they do not express directly. The result of this abundance of unspoken desires is that Baba must feel around at the borders of the limits that her family does tell her about. As those limits and her family fall apart, she pushes further and further, exploring the night and learning things that she isn't supposed to know about, like Airelai's actual occupation as a sex worker.

When Baba first arrives at the Ciudad's train station, her willfulness has already been quashed by her treatment in the orphanage. The timelines are fuzzy, as they often are in childhood and indeed in any memory, but readers learn that she went to the orphanage after her mother died in a fire that Segundo probably set and her father went to prison for an unspecified crime. Elizabeth Jelin, scholar of memory discourses, writes that “

Locating memory in time implies making reference to the ‘space of experience’ in the present. Remembrances of the past are incorporated there, although in a dynamic manner, since experiences incorporated in a given moment can be modified in subsequent periods. (Jelin 3)

Baba's narrator self relates and reacts to two time periods: the period of her life in the orphanage, largely related via silence and its effect on Baba, and the period she spends in the Barrio after leaving the orphanage. The disciplinary processes within the orphanage likely followed a similar pattern to that which the reader witnesses in *Temblor*, during Agua Fría's education in the Talapot. The narration never describes the events within the orphanage directly. Instead, the reader sees the results of Baba's experience in her behavior.

When Doña Bárbara first arrives, Baba is sleeping, and she wakes up frightened and crying. Her grandmother grabs her by the shoulder, drags her out from under her sheets, and tells her, “Basta de *tonterías* [Enough *nonsense*],” and that “Aquí no te van a servir *todas esas mañas* [Here *all your tricks* won’t work]” (*Bella y oscura* 15, emphases mine). Doña Bárbara’s hand on her shoulder produces “un instante de infinito terror [an instant of infinite terror]” for Baba (*Bella y oscura* 15). Instead of trying to comfort her granddaughter, Doña Bárbara reacts to Baba’s crying by attributing the girl’s expression of terror to a silly, willful attempt to trick or manipulate the adults in her life. This is one of the ways adults assign willfulness to children, particularly to girl children, as Sara Ahmed describes in an endnote: “I will address the willful child in this book as “she” because I would argue willfulness tends to be registered as a feminine attribute” (Ahmed *Willful* 205). I turn to Ahmed’s description in my analysis of Baba’s situation because her relationship with her grandmother is one of willfulness. Baba realizes that as long as Baba accepts Doña Bárbara’s authority, she remains safe from harm. Baba narrates that Doña Bárbara’s power over her is “tan absoluto que no necesitaba hacerme daño [so absolute that she didn’t need to harm me]” (*Bella y oscura* 15). This realization calms her somewhat, and Doña Bárbara acts pleased as she introduces herself: “Yo soy doña Bárbara. No te acordarás de mí. Yo soy tu abuela. De ahora en adelante estás a mi cargo y tendrás que hacer todo lo que te diga. ¿Me has entendido? Soy quien manda aquí [I am doña Bárbara. You won’t remember me. I am your grandmother. From now on you are in my charge and will have to do whatever I tell you. You understand? I am in charge here.]” (*Bella y oscura* 15-16). To have someone in your charge is to be responsible for their care. To be in charge is to have authority over someone or something. Rather than taking responsibility for

Baba's emotional well-being, Doña Bárbara presents her responsibility towards Baba as authority over her and presents Baba's role as one of a responsibility to obey that authority. Establishing her authority over Baba is Doña Bárbara's first priority in their first meeting. In context beyond her own household, Doña Bárbara can also read as a willful subject, a powerful woman who rubs people the wrong way. However, she has control and authority within her family, which she exercises. Her commanding presence in her relationship with Baba does not read as willful but as authoritative. Ahmed writes, "If authority assumes the right to turn a wish into a command, then willfulness is a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given" (Ahmed *Willful* 1). Authority figures label marginalized people as willful as a means of modifying their behavior. Such a narrative of willfulness inverts the facts by describing children's reactions as deliberate attempts to obtain a specific result, rather than as human reactions to stimuli and emotions. Such a narrative dehumanizes children and subordinates their needs to adult wants. Children like Baba and Chico need adult care and concern. They do not require adult control over all their actions, which is what the narrative of willfulness seeks to produce as seen in Doña Bárbara's first interaction with her granddaughter.

Doña Bárbara maintains her control over the family by manipulating their emotions, mainly fear, and through the force of her own will. When she issues a command, she expects to be obeyed. Perhaps her own tactics lead her to mis-identify Baba's reaction of terror as an attempt to manipulate her. She identifies with her granddaughter, possibly because Baba is her namesake, but also because she is her favorite son's daughter. Doña Bárbara thus projects her own motivations onto her granddaughter and plays favorites with her and her grandson, Chico. She did the same with her own sons, Máximo and Segundo.

In *Nosotras*, Montero's biography of Irene de Constantinopla describes another woman who manipulated those around her in a search for power and authority at the expense of her son Constantine VI (*Nosotras* 203). Montero's interest in powerful women antagonists who contradict feminine stereotypes has much to do with the characterization of Doña Bárbara in this novel, with Océano and Oxígeno in *Temblor*, and with Dhuoda in *Historia del Rey Transparente*. Montero's exploration of debilitating authoritative systems includes powerful women and men who take advantage of their own privilege and perpetuate oppressive conditions for less privileged people.

Montero describes Baba's everyday childhood as normal, from Baba's point of view, but Baba has a clear hope for a different, better normal which stems from her belief in Airelai's stories about the Star. In her non-fiction writing, Montero spotlights the social problems she sees in the world and often calls for improvements, changes to what many accept as normal. Like Baba, Montero has a hope for a better future. In her introduction to *Nosotras*, for example, she calls for a worldwide change in the treatment of women. After she recounts her girlhood experiences, she writes "El mundo, nos decían y nos decíamos, es así [The world, they told us and we told each other, is like this]" (*Nosotras* 21). The "nos" refers to Montero and her fellow schoolgirls, who navigated the man-infested metro on their way to and from school. Who, then, is the "ellos"? There is not an immediate referent to clarify who else was telling these girls that the world was simply set up that way, and the general "they" must then refer to society in general, to their families, to the way that no one in the crowded metro reacted when they saw young girls harassed by adult men. Montero counters this childhood lesson with the assertion that

no. Resulta que el mundo no es así. Y resulta también que depende en buena medida de *nosotras* que lo cambiemos. Así es que, hermanas, abramos nuestras fauces de dragonas y escupamos fuego [no. It turns out that the world is not like this. And it also turns out that it depends in large measure upon *us {women}* that we should change us. Therefore, sisters, let us open our dragon's jaws and spit fire.] (*Nosotras* 21, emphasis mine)

Here the “nosotras” refers to Montero and her sisters, fellow women, who she calls upon to take action and change the world. Historically speaking, it has depended on marginalized groups to make social changes that would carve better and safer spaces out of the world. Patriarchal and kyriarchal structures have no incentive to change the status quo without significant pressure from the marginalized. I read Montero's claim that no, the world is not like this, as a recognition that there are good people and spaces within the world as it exists today, but I see it as a hope for the future more than a statement of fact about the present. Much like Baba's belief in the star that will come and change the world for the better, but with a call to act and make the world better, it is fiercely optimistic.

Reading Montero's call for women to act, I feel it is important to note that the context in which she writes does not make it safe for every woman or girl to spit fire and bring about change. Montero's introduction to *Nosotras* does not explicitly state this, but she touches on it in other columns. Victims of violence are often blamed for their behavior as much or more than the perpetrators of the violence, as in the scene where Chico blames Baba for trying to help him and for “provoking” Buga into assaulting them both, rather than letting the blame rest on Buga for choosing to mistreat them (*Bella y oscura* 32). Chico has learned through his own harsh experiences that it is normal for more powerful people

to mistreat weaker people, and he in turn teaches that lesson to Baba, instead of empathizing with her over their mutual marginalization. In her columns, Montero particularly takes issue with cases in which women and girls are charged with the crime of abortion when the men who raped them are given an extremely light sentence or no sentence at all (*La vida desnuda* 45-46, 87-88, 95-96). Women and girls who report their rapists to the authorities often face the trauma of a patriarchal judicial system as well as the victim-blaming of society in general. Enrique García, of the Department of Social Psychology at the University of Valencia, writes in his report on preventing intimate partner violence for the World Health Organization that “If people blame the woman who is the victim of the violence, they are likely to place the responsibility for solving the problem – at least partly – on her shoulders as well” (García 381). Chico’s anger at Baba for getting out of her social place stems from growing up in a sexist, victim-blaming society, and he puts pressure on her to conform to expectations and not call attention to him or to herself, as do her women family members. Older women are often conscripted to support and perpetuate the sexist status quo for younger generations. Montero recognizes that women can be complicit in the oppression of other women, as we see in *Temblor*’s matriarchal oppression. In *Bella y oscura*, Montero shows three generations of women who navigate the sexist world in which they live. Doña Bárbara, Amanda, and Airelai all have survival strategies for dealing with the sexism they encounter daily. As part of two older generations, these women impose the rules they have learned through experience upon Baba, teaching her how to be a woman in the world and perpetuating the sexism they have experienced personally. Montero’s representation of this generational sexism speaks to her own lived experience.

As Doña Bárbara's child, Segundo chafes at her favoritism, her mistreatment, and her autocratic behavior. He has been at the receiving end of her abusive behavior. Segundo is also, like his mother, an abuser. He works with her when his interests align with hers. Segundo's presence is so overbearing that when he disappears for some time, Baba's relief is evident: "Teníamos dinero y no estaba Segundo, así que vivíamos, por así decirlo, en *el mejor de los mundos*. [We had money and Segundo wasn't there, so we lived, to put it that way, in the *best of all worlds*]" (*Bella y oscura* 65, emphasis mine). His absence improves the entire family's quality of life. Segundo's actions throughout the novel, including his abuse of his wife Amanda and their son Chico, have no excuse. He persists in abusive behavior with his mother's support. Doña Bárbara allies herself with her son to manipulate Amanda into staying with them. Their abusive treatment compounded over time has a debilitating effect on Amanda. They send her to pick up Baba and hold Chico hostage to guarantee that she will do what they say. She meets Baba at the train station and stumbles through a greeting. She says,

Soy tu tía Amanda, la mujer de tu tío... Antes, hace años, vivíamos juntas. Antes de que te llevaran al orfanato. Tu madre y yo éramos muy amigas ¿Te acuerdas de tu madre? Ay, me parece que *tampoco debería hablarte de eso...* [I'm your aunt Amanda, your uncle's wife...Before, years ago, we lived together. Before they took you to the orphanage. Your mother and I were great friends. Do you remember your mother? Ay, I think that I *probably shouldn't talk to you about that either.*]" (*Bella y oscura* 6, ellipses original, emphasis mine)

The hesitation in Amanda's uncertain speech results from the disciplinary processes that Segundo and Doña Bárbara employ to keep her under their control. Her apparent internal

debate about what she should say, what she is allowed to say, leads to her saying very little as she journeys with Baba through the city. In her concern for Chico's well-being and her own safety, she accedes to Doña Bárbara's and Segundo's control.

Máximo, who is Baba's father, Segundo, and Doña Bárbara all have some kind of connection to criminal activity, and the family fends off shady characters from time to time. The specifics of the crimes are never revealed to Baba or Chico and thus the reader can only guess. The one event that Segundo mentions is a fire for which he denies any guilt: "Y si la mujer de mi hermano murió [en el incendio], yo no tengo la culpa. [And if my brother's wife died {in the fire}, it's not my fault]" (*Bella y oscura* 38). The woman who died was Máximo's wife and Baba's mother. Though Segundo's protestations of his lack of guilt are unconvincing, he seems confident in his ability to continue to escape punishment. Amanda tells Baba that she was good friends with her mother when she first collects her from the train station (*Bella y oscura* 6). Amanda's brief statement and Segundo's denial of blame for her death are the only references to her, and she remains unnamed. A number of people are searching for a suitcase full of money which Segundo claims burned in that first fire. Another fire occurs during the course of the novel under similarly mysterious circumstances. The family has to flee the house in the middle of the night, and everyone except Airelai, whose luggage made it out of the building ahead of time, and Segundo end up with nothing but the night clothes on their backs:

El más absorto en el espectáculo era el propio Segundo, que, un paso más delante que todos, parecía quererse beber esa atmósfera de infierno. [the most absorbed in the spectacle was Segundo himself, who, a step ahead of everyone, seemed to want to drink in that hellish atmosphere.] (*Bella y oscura* 109)

Segundo may or may not have set the fire himself. Because of the limitations of Baba's perspective, her narration never settles the question of Segundo's guilt in that matter definitively.

Chico suffers Segundo's abuse directly and indirectly. He has scars from Segundo's physical abuse. He also suffers mentally and emotionally, at Segundo's treatment of him and at Segundo's treatment of Amanda. Childhood abuse and other childhood trauma has a severe impact on brain development and can affect the rest of a child's life (Teicher). Baba's narration describes Chico's attempts to block out the painful sounds of Segundo's mistreatment of Amanda.

A veces se les oía gritar y se escuchaba después un llanto entrecortado. Y en esas ocasiones, Chico se metía en la cama y apretaba los puños y los párpados. Y decía: 'Estoy dormido. Estoy completamente dormido.' Aunque aquello sucediera en la mitad del día, con el sol entrando a borbotones por la ventana con su aliento de polvo incandescente. [Sometimes you could hear them scream and then a faltering sobbing. And on those occasions, Chico got into bed and squeezed his fists and eyelids shut. And he would say, 'I am asleep. I am completely asleep.' Even though that happened in the middle of the day, with the sun pouring in through the window with shining dust motes.] (*Bella y oscura* 23)

Chico's objection to Baba interfering in Buga's bullying may well stem from the lesson that he has learned from watching Segundo abuse his mother: no one intervenes or attempts to protect Amanda, just as no one has ever protected him. This is his normal, and he has developed coping mechanisms to deal with that brutal normality. The only thing Chico can

do is pretend he cannot hear the abuse that he has no power to stop. Hiding in his bed is one survival tactic. Being as quiet as possible is another:

La mayoría de las veces Chico era invisible. Quiero decir que, aunque estuviera ante ti, no le veías. Poseía una rara habilidad para permanecer quieto y callado, como oculto o diluido en los pliegues del aire. Se encogía sobre sí mismo y disminuía de tamaño; y así pasaba las horas, hecho un ovillo, sentado en el peldaño del portal. No tenía amigos y casi nunca jugaba. [Most of the time Chico was invisible. I mean to say, even if he was in front of you, you didn't see him. He had the rare skill of remaining still and quiet, as if hidden or diluted in the folds of the air. He folded in on himself and shrunk; thus, he passed hours, in a ball sitting on the doorstep. He had no friends and almost never played.] (*Bella y oscura* 28)

Segundo's abuse leaves scars on Chico's back, and when Baba sees them she realizes why Chico behaves the way he does: "Comprendía por qué era tan cuidadoso al desnudarse, con lo que yo creí eran pudores de varón. Comprendí el pavor que le tenía a Segundo. [I understood why he was so careful as he undressed, with what I had believed was male modesty. I understood the terror he felt towards Segundo]" (*Bella y oscura* 50). Chico eventually runs away from home, but Amanda finds him and brings him back. When Chico relates his thoughts about his life goals to Baba, his main goal is to be strong and able to defend himself,

Así que he decidido que voy a ser como la abuela, pero como la abuela antes del Gran Fuego, cuando era tan alta y mandaba tanto: como cuando sacó la pistola aquella con el Portugués y el Hombre Tiburón. [So I've decided that I'm going to be like grandmother, but like grandmother was before the Great Fire, when she was

so tall and controlling: like when she took out that pistol with the Portugués and the Hombre Tiburon.] (*Bella y oscura* 137-138).

In Chico and Baba's world, the only way to avoid oppression is to be strong enough to command others. Because they don't have the strength to avoid mistreatment, they have to develop other survival strategies.

Non-normative bodies

Doña Bárbara's depiction recalls the descriptions of Océana and Oxígeno in *Temblor*. Baba's viewpoint shows her grandmother as a woman of absolute power, so much power that she does not need to hurt Baba even though she could. Baba describes her grandmother sitting in the bed in her room as an iconic figure:

Parecía una diosa en su capilla; y por eso la única vez que entré en la vieja iglesia del Barrio creí que el retablo del altar mayor, brillando en la penumbra en oro viejo, con sus velas perfumadas y goteantes, sus claveles y su Virgen en medio, no era sino un homenaje a doña Bárbara, un recuerdo de su poder y de su gloria. [she seemed a goddess in her chapel; and therefore the only time that I entered the old Barrio church I thought that the largest altarpiece, shining old gold in the shadow, with its perfumed and dripping candles, its lilies and its Virgin in the middle, was nothing but an homage to doña Bárbara, a reminder of her power and her glory.] (*Bella y oscura* 24-25)

Like Océano, Doña Bárbara centers her own wants and needs. She tells Baba that "Cuando yo nací, comenzó el mundo. [When I was born, the world began.]" (*Bella y oscura* 24). Unlike the high priestess in *Temblor*, Doña Bárbara works to protect her family as an extension of herself. She is self-interested, like Océano and her sister Oxígeno, though her

power is over a much smaller number of people. Also, like the two leaders from *Temblor*, Doña Bárbara is fat. Doña Bárbara's representation brings up similar concerns regarding non-normative bodies. Fat people in fiction are rarely presented as heroic figures, especially when the authors describing them are of average size. Montero's portrayal of fat people gets somewhat more benevolent with time, progressing from Océano and Oxígeno to Doña Bárbara to Oli Oliar in the Bruna Husky trilogy. Doña Bárbara's size corresponds to her power and control over her family. As she ages and as her authority slips, her relationships shift, Baba perceives her grandmother shrinking physically.

As a person of color and a Little Person, Airelai also has a non-normative body. In *La loca de la casa*, Montero writes that “la protagonista de [*Bella y oscura*] es una liliputiense llamada Airelai, uno de los personajes que más quiero de todos cuantos he imaginado. [the protagonist of {*Bella y oscura*} is a Lilliputian called Airelai, one of the characters that I most love of all the ones I've imagined]” (*La loca de la casa* 67-68). Up until I found that phrase in *La loca de la casa*, I had read Baba as the sole protagonist of *Bella y oscura*, because of her role as narrator. Thus, in my analysis so far, I mainly focus on Baba's perspective. Both Baba and Airelai are key characters. A different study could center entirely on Airelai. At this point I want to center Airelai's character and analyze Montero's representation of her as a Little Person and as one of the author's most beloved characters. She notes in *La loca de la casa* that she noticed the frequent appearance of Little People in her texts only after writing *Bella y oscura*: “Asombrada de no haber notado antes esa asiduidad de los pequeños, me puse a reflexionar sobre el porqué de esa manía. [Astonished at not having noticed earlier this affinity for the little ones, I started reflecting on the reason for this obsession]” (*La loca de la casa* 68, emphasis mine)

Writing Airelai in this novel, Torbellino in *Temblor*, and Violante in *Historia del Rey Transparente* as metaphors for liminality is a questionable choice. They are each the only Little Person in the novel and they thus take on a burden of representation.

Montero identifies with Little People as a metaphor, which she explains in her book *La loca de la casa*. As *La loca de la casa* is a work of autofiction, rather than a strict autobiography, the episode that Montero relates cannot be read as factual. In the same work, Montero tells the same story three times with wide variation. She also relates stories about a sister, Martina, to whom the book is dedicated and “que es y no es [who is and is not]” (*La loca de la casa* 7). These stories, like Airelai’s own life story, may or may not have a strong basis in fact. The stories all tell us something about Montero’s view of herself, crafted through recreated memory. In this vein, Montero writes that during a trip to Cologne in 2000, she saw a film about a circus, including the sideshow. And in that documentary,

de pronto la vi. Me vi. Era una liliputiense perfecta, rubia, muy coqueta, una indudable estrella del espectáculo. [suddenly I saw her. I saw myself. She was a perfect Lilliputian, blond, elegant, an undeniable star of the show]” (*La loca de la casa* 70).

Montero continues, writing that the performer

Hubiera podido pasar por una cría de no ser porque tenía algo definitivamente dislocado en el semblante, la edad sin edad del liliputiense, esa inquietante expresión de vieja en el rostro pueril, la sonrisa siempre demasiada tensa, los ojos desencajados bajo sus cejas negras de falsa rubia. Tenía un aspecto muy triste con

su disfraz de fiesta. Daba un poco de angustia. Daba un poco de miedo. (*La loca de la casa* 71)

While this story may be entirely invented, Montero's choice of language to describe Little People remains consistent in descriptions of Torbellino, Airelai, and this unnamed circus performer. Montero likely would have given the name had she been able to find the documentary again, but her search was unsuccessful. In descriptions of these Little People, Montero uses the term "liliputiense" to refer to Little People, a term derived from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, in which the Kingdom of Lilliput's inhabitants measure less than 13 centimeters. She also tends to use infantilizing language, such as her implication that Little People are not fully adults, that

el enano es *un ser crepuscular y fronterizo a medio camino entre la niñez y la adultez*, una indeterminación temporal que, por lo visto, simboliza mucho para mí. [Astonished at not having noticed earlier this affinity for the little ones, I started reflecting on the reason for this obsession. My laborious reason proposed various reasonable explanations, such as for example, the fact that the dwarf is *a twilight and frontier being halfway between childhood and adulthood*, a temporal indetermination which, apparently, symbolizes a great deal for me.] (*La loca de la casa* 68)

Montero's fictionalized self in *La loca de la casa* recognizes herself in the circus performer. She says that the woman's appearance is identical to her own in a photo at four or five years of age "en la que soy exactamente igual que la liliputiense alemana [in which I am exactly the same as the German Lilliputian]" (*La loca de la casa* 71). She says that she never before recognized herself in that childhood photo, but that "ahora que sé que es una

enana, me he reconciliado totalmente con la niña de la foto [now that I know she is a dwarf, I have reconciled totally with the girl in the photo]" (*La loca de la casa* 72). In Airelai's description of people like her, she says, "Somos tristes los liliputienses, no sé si lo has notado [We Lilliputians are sad, I don't know if you've noticed]" (*Bella y oscura* 177). She also tells Baba, "Te recuerdo que los liliputienses no somos enanos vulgares: somos seres menudos pero en todo perfecto [I remind you that we Lilliputions are not vulgar dwarfs: we are small beings but perfect in everything]" (*Bella y oscura* 178). The implication that "vulgar dwarfs" are somehow imperfect while the Little People like Airelai are perfect is another problematic element. All the Little People in Montero's SF novels, Torbellino, Violante, and Airelai, are described as delicate and fine, which only represents some of the Little People who live in our world. Additionally, when a Little Person like Airelai appears in one of Montero's novels, they appear alone, surrounded by people with normative bodies, though in Airelai's case she describes other Little People who exist but who don't make an appearance in the novel's present. The two she names are real people: Lucía Zárate, a Mexican sideshow performer whose photo Airelai keeps among her belongings, and Miguel Soplillo, whose portrait alongside Felipe IV before Felipe's ascension to the throne forms part of the Prado's collection (Museo Nacional del Prado). These real-life people with non-normative bodies existed because they were born with their particular genetic code. They were not created as a metaphor or to inspire people with normative bodies, any more than women exist for the inspiration of men or BIPOC exist for the inspiration of white people. Airelai and Montero's other Little Person characters exist as characters because Montero wrote them into existence.

Airelai is the only Little Person who appears in the pages of the novel. Nonetheless, she finds kinship and meaning with other Little People throughout history. She traces a genealogy back to an Eden in which Little People played an important role, similar to that of Eve in the biblical origin story. In Airelai's story of this paradise, no one was alone because everyone had a life partner:

Nuestros antepasados, las criaturas que habitaban aquel mundo feliz, eran seres dobles compuestos por un enorme y robustísimo gigante que siempre llevaba, cabalgando sobre sus hombros, a un delicado y bello enano. [Our ancestors, the creatures who inhabited that happy world, were double beings composed of an enormous and robust giant who always carried on their shoulders a delicate and beautiful dwarf.] (*Bella y oscura* 178)

The narrative ascribes the qualities “enorme” and “robusto” to the giants and the qualities “delicado” and “bello” to the Little People. This story repeats in the Bruna Husky series, in the second volume *El peso del corazón*, in which it appears as a story which Bruna invents and relates for Gabi, a child she rescued from a zero zone. The narrative description of Airelai's appearance from Baba's perspective focuses on her clothing and her size. Baba relates, recalling her first glimpse of Airelai, that the woman

Llevaba una boina de fieltro negro adornada con una pluma azul brillante, una malla negra y una falda corta de gasa del mismo azul resplandeciente que la pluma. Toda ella, desde sus zapatitos planos de charol hasta lo más alto del sombrero, debía de medir menos de un metro. A mí me llegaba al pecho y yo aún era una niña. [She wore a black felt hat adorned with a brilliant blue plume, a black top and a short gauze skirt of the same resplendent blue as the feather. All of her, from her little

patent leather shoes to the top of her hat, must have measured less than a meter. She came up to my chest and I was still a girl.] (*Bella y oscura* 40)

For Baba, Airelai's arrival is an important occasion (*Bella y oscura* 41). Torbellino in *Temblor* and Airelai in *Bella y oscura* are both exceptional beings whose magic plays a vital role for the other characters. Torbellino's telepathy saves Agua Fría and the world. Airelai's emotional labor and her physical labor support Baba, Doña Bárbara, Amanda, and Chico. Her stories make life more bearable for the children in her life. In her origin story Airelai says she chose magic over normality while in her mother's womb: "preferí la gracia; porque prefiero el conocimiento [I chose grace; because I prefer knowledge]" (*Bella y oscura* 56). She also tells them that this choice came at the "cost" of a small body: "empleé tantas energías en decidir la mejor opción, que descuidé el acabado final de mi anatomía [I spent so much energy deciding the best option that I neglected the final touches of my anatomy]" (*Bella y oscura* 56). She adds that others whose bodies are different from established norms "probablemente están así porque poseen la gracia [probably are like this because they possess grace]" (*Bella y oscura* 57). She also relates that she and other Little People are the inheritors of Paradise. Throughout literary fiction, it is not uncommon for people with non-normative bodies to be portrayed as special because of or to make up for their non-normativity. The "super cripp" trope in Science Fiction and superhero comics is one example (Allan), and Airelai's narration implies that she and others like her are blessed to compensate for their perceived lack. This ties into the use of characters with non-normative bodies as metaphorical figures, whose bodies must carry symbolic weight as they move through the world.

Survival through fantasy

Unlike Torbellino and her telepathy, in my interpretation of the text, Airelai does not actually have the powers that she tells Baba and Chico about. Unlike *Temblor*, *Bella y oscura* is set in the real world, without supernatural magic. However, Baba interprets Airelai's actions as magical, even when they are not.

Yo supuse que la razón de su comportamiento era la magia, y que si se iba de casa todas las noches era para poder hacer conjuros a la luz de la luna. Porque Airelai volvía siempre con dinero, pequeñas montañas de billetes arrugados que dejaba sobre la mesa del cuarto del sofá antes de irse a la cama, y a mí me parecía imposible que alguien pudiera encontrar todo ese dinero en las noches oscuras si no era a través de algún hechizo. [I supposed that the reason for her behavior was magic, and that if she left the house every night it was to do conjures by the light of the moon. Because Airelai always returned with money, small mountains of wrinkled bills that she left on the table before she went to bed, and it seemed impossible to me that someone could find all that money in the dark nights without the use of some spell] (*Bella y oscura* 64).

Baba's interpretation of Airelai's nightly departures fills in a gap in the information she receives from the adults around her. The magic that Airelai works is based in the power of storytelling, the optimism of fantasy, and her own hard work to support the family she lives with.

Montero draws on her travel experience as she crafts the life story which Airelai narrates to Chico and Baba. In her column "El poder de los viajes" from 26 Jan 1992, Montero writes about her own visit to the temple of the goddess Kumari.

Uno de esos templos era el de la diosa Kumari. El panteón hindú tiene más de cuatro mil dioses; pero la Kumari es única, porque está viva. Es una niña escogida desde los cuatro años por su perfección física y su vigor mental. Vive en el templo, y será la Kumari hasta que lleguen sus primeras sangres; entonces regresa al mundo y es sustituida por otra pequeña. [One of those temples was that of the goddess Kumari. The Hindu pantheon has more than four thousand gods; but Kumari is unique, because she is alive. She is a girl chosen from four years old for physical perfection and mental vigor. She lives in the temple and will be the Kumari until her first period; then she returns to the world and is replaced by another child.] (*La vida desnuda* 164)

This column was published the year before *Bella y oscura*, which came out in 1993, and signals that Montero drew on her travel experience for both her nonfiction opinion column as well as for her worldbuilding in *Bella y oscura*. The temple of Kumari forms part of Airelai's life story, though she became is called "katami" within the novel (*Bella y oscura* 77): "En aquel patio sombrío y lúgubre yo conseguí ser una diosa. [In that dark and dismal patio, I became a goddess] (*Bella y oscura* 83). Airelai's storytelling is survival, for herself and for Baba and Chico. Telling stories is a survival strategy which many of Montero's characters employ. There are two stories that stand out to me among all the things Airelai tells Baba. One is the story of her own life, which may or may not be embellished with her own imagination, and which encompasses both the past and the future. In stories about the future, Airelai describes the eventual arrival of a Star which will herald a better life for her, Baba, Chico and Amanda. The Star is the story which Baba clings to:

Ésa era la Estrella, me explicó Airelai, era una foto de la Estrella; me aprendí su aspecto gracias a esa imagen y por eso cuando la vi más tarde pude reconocerla. [That was the star, Airelai explained, it was a photo of the Star; I learned its appearance thanks to that image and therefore when I saw it later, I was able to recognize it.] (*Bella y oscura* 41)

Her belief in Airelai's stories strengthens her own sense of childhood optimism.

Yo tenía ilusiones y deseos; yo esperaba, esperaba la llegada de mi padre, o al menos la llegada de la Estrella, que anunciaría nuestra felicidad inevitable. [I had illusions and desires; I hoped, waiting for the arrival of my father, or at least the arrival of the Star, which would announce our inevitable happiness.] (*Bella y oscura* 66)

The use of the term *ilusiones* and its double meaning of both “Concepto, imagen o representación sin verdadera realidad, sugeridos por la imaginación o causados por engaño de los sentidos [concept, image or representation without true reality, suggested by imagination or caused by tricking the senses]” and “Esperanza cuyo cumplimiento parece especialmente atractivo [Hope whose fulfillment appears especially attractive]” (RAE.es) is significant. It signals the strength of Baba's hope and the improbability that her hope will be realized. In Airelai's stories, both the story and the act of telling it serve as a way for adults to comfort and connect with children, to build a relationship. The story of a giant and a dwarf pulling apart and then finding new ways to connect appears as a metaphor for romantic love but also for familial connection. As it appears in *Bella y oscura*, the parable narrates the breakdown of communication between a big person and a little person, and *Bella y oscura* is the story of a small human girl trying to find hope in the future without

much support from the adults around her. Airelai serves to some extent as a guide to the adult world for the children in her life, as she has spent years living with the misfittings and difficulties that arise from existing as a person with a non-normative body in a normative world. Airelai is the most active character in the book, taking steps to survive and to protect those she cares about. When she begins to work at night and sleep during the day, it diminishes Baba's and Chico's world:

Sin la enana, sin sus ideas, sin sus historias, sin sus palabras, la vida era mucho menos divertida. Y así, Chico y yo nos pasábamos los días aplastados por el peso del verano, solos y aburridos. [Without the Little Person, without her ideas, without her stories, without her words, life was much less fun. And so, Chico and I passed our days crushed by the weight of summer, alone and bored.] (*Bella y oscura* 65)

Airelai offers Baba something more, teaching her to believe in magic and fantasy in addition to the realities of everyday life, but ultimately, she also reinforces the rules of society. Baba's belief in Airelai's power and in the future she dreams about help her survive the present and the difficulties she faces.

Conclusion

The residents of *Bella y oscura*'s Barrio are framed as misfitting the rest of the city, not because of their bodies but because of their class. The city is beautiful, modern, with glittering shops and important officials. The Barrio is poor, marginalized, filled with lower-class people who have fewer opportunities to advance in comparison to the people who visit to open up the new park, the police detective who harasses neighborhood residents, or the workers who begin construction of the fountain that remains unfinished and becomes progressively filthier after the workers are reassigned. Montero writes about marginalized

spaces and about unjust court systems, and here in the Barrio she writes an example of unjust policing. Rita, the store owner, the new police detective who has been assigned to the Barrio as brutally violent: “ha tenido un montón de problemas por dejar destrozados a los detenidos. Le llaman el Martillo. [has had a ton of problems for beating up detainees. They call him the Hammer]” (*Bella y oscura* 162) and states that the man has been assigned to the barrio not because he will help the neighborhood but because that assignment is a punishment for him “Tiene su gracia pensar que para el comisario somos un castigo [It’s funny to think that for the commissioner we’re a punishment]” (*Bella y oscura* 162). When writing about the justice system in Spain, Montero writes about judges whose judgments against poor girls and women are particularly unfair compared to their treatment of men who perpetrate crimes against women (*La vida desnuda* 45-46, 87-88, 95-96). About the class divide between rich and poor, Montero writes:

En cuanto a los ricos, e intentaré no hacer demagogia, no es que odien a los pobres, sino que me parece que la mayoría son unos marcianos que ignoran por completo la realidad española. Además, es fácil olvidar a los paupérrimos porque desaparecen: al final no salen de sus casas ni para protestar porque no tienen para el billete de metro. La verdadera marginación es invisible. [Regarding the rich, and I will try not to do demagogy, it’s not that they hate the poor, but that it seems to me that the majority are Martians who completely ignore the Spanish reality. Moreover, it’s easy to forget the extremely poor because they disappear: in the end they don’t leave their homes even to protest because they don’t have enough for the metro ticket. The true marginalization is invisible.] (“Pobreza” 14 Oct 2013)

Much like Chico's well-honed ability to disappear, aided by adults who consider him unimportant and are busy thinking about other things, the poor escape the notice of the rich, whom Montero describes as Martians who lack compassion. In this description, she emphasizes the lack of concern that it takes to notice other people and take helpful caring action. Montero ascribes poor people's invisibility and a lack of protest to a lack of funds for the metro, but the willingness to forget about the needs of the poor rests solely with the rich. The Barrio is like the spaces which Jenna Loyd describes in *Health Rights are Civil Rights*. Loyd takes race and class into account in her geographical analysis of East Los Angeles and the dearth of healthcare facilities within specific neighborhoods. With an emphasis on "broken windows" policing that purported to take the place of needed resource allocation, racist systems actively harmed the inhabitants of these zones. The only health care professional Baba observes is the doctor who comes to visit before Doña Bárbara's death: "un médico joven que se rascó la oreja muy azorado y confesó que no le encontraba nada malo. [a young doctor who scratched his head in embarrassment and confessed that he saw nothing wrong with her]" (*Bella y oscura* 121). His inability to help is representative of a general lack of resources and systemic care. Due to this scarcity of resources, the Barrio is a space in which Baba's family members continue to abuse her and Chico.

The Material Impact of Violent Systems in the EUT

In this section, I examine the misfits that occur between Bruna's body, the unruly, non-normative bodies of Bruna and her chosen family, and the systemic inaccessibility built into the state apparatuses of the Estados Unidos de la Tierra (EUT). As Rosemary Garland-Thomson writes,

Misfitting serves to theorize disability as a way of being in an environment, as a material arrangement. A sustaining environment is a material context of received and built things ranging from accessibly designed built public spaces, welcoming natural surroundings, communication devices, tools, and implements, as well as other people. (Garland-Thomson (2011) 594)

Bruna's character arc throughout the series takes her from an egocentric perspective in which she first learns to see her own marginalization as part of a systemic inequity to a broader view of the systemic misfitting that plagues the other inhabitants of the EUT. She learns that even though she is marginalized in her android identity, she exists among many similarly marginalized people. She comes to understand that humans' birth privilege doesn't prevent them from being marginalized in other ways. EUT material spaces and systems are made accessible or inaccessible to people depending on their economic class, ability, and neurotypicality, factors which also determine whether an individual body is unruly or normative, and whether individuals may access necessary resources such as healthcare, food, and water.

Material impacts

Bruna and her found family live in a Capitalocene world. In the last chapter I focused on the geography of Bruna's world. Here I examine the way that a desire for capital

and power moves those who already have power to manipulate the status quo and take advantage of the inequities built into the world. The hierarchical systems shape the world and impact Bruna and those around her, especially those with varying marginalized identities and vulnerabilities. Jenna Loyd writes in *Health Rights are Civil Rights* that

Foucault emphasized that *power is not a one-way street* of bosses or the state repressing workers and citizens. Even at their most daunting or apparently complete, power relations are always uneven and contradictory. They can organize violence, oppression, and repression, and they can create the possibilities for personal and collective fulfillment, expression, the marking of time, and collective projects for freedom” (Loyd 14, emphasis mine)

In Bruna’s world, the power relations are demonstrably uneven. As powerful systems combat each other, they both oppress the marginalized and leave gaps in which people like Bruna have possibilities to build personal and collective connections which lead to greater quality of life. In each of the novels, Bruna’s choices and her actions impact not only those in her immediate circle but also have ripple effects which push for improvement in the larger world. Bruna’s story is a story of a detective trying to do her job and live her life in the middle of global events beyond her control. Her limited choices and her search for knowledge, as well as the manipulation of powerful shadowy figures, consistently put her in the middle of events that affect the entire Estados Unidos de la Tierra [United States of Earth] (EUT). The uneven, contradictory struggle for power by movements at a global scale do leave space for Bruna to make a difference. She has no real desire to save the world, but her grudging care for those she grows close to pushes her to try to protect them.

That desire to protect motivates actions that have a global impact, though she has to push against enormous material inequities.

Those inequities are, for the most part, economic inequalities and species inequalities. There are different human races present, and on the floating world of Labari, for example, white supremacy reigns. On the Earth, however, racial differences are present but are not a main factor in Montero's worldbuilding. Instead, the marginalized are extraterrestrial aliens, androids (cloned humans), and the poorest classes. Montero has written against racism in multiple forms. In her column "Odio" from 28 Sept 1991, she writes that

Ahora que andan rematando el último lote de migas de muro [de Berlín] para hacerse pendientes, hete aquí que estamos levantando con toda presteza *otro muro interior*, una dura frontera que linda con la ferocidad y la burricie. Estoy hablando del racismo, esa gran batalla que se acerca. [Now that they're finishing off the last lot of crumbs from the {Berlin} wall to make pendants, behold that we are raising with all haste *another interior wall*, a firm frontier that borders on ferocity and stupidity. I'm speaking of racism, that great battle that approaches.] (*La vida desnuda* 156, emphasis mine).

She treats racism as an obstacle to be overcome, similarly to how she weaves the anti-alien and anti-android sentiment into the social systems in Bruna's world, which Bruna struggles to understand. Bruna's struggle to learn about systemic discrimination is influenced by her strong dislike of thinking about it. She despises thinking of herself as a victim and she is furious about her own situation and her impending death (*Lágrimas* 63). However, as time progresses, she learns to see beyond herself and starts to care about the systemic problems

that affect other androids and humans, particularly poor economically disenfranchised humans. Both androids and poor humans have a shorter life span, though poor humans still tend to live longer than androids. Her job as a detective takes her to the floating kingdom of Labarí in *El peso del corazón*. As she tours the world with a man who she later learns is a spy from the upper caste of Labarí itself, she expresses disgust that he seems to understand the world's more visible inequalities too well. Keeping his cover, he replies,

¿de qué estamos hablando? ¿Te repugna el sistema de castas? De acuerdo, a mí también. Y en la Tierra, ¿qué sucede? No tenemos castas, claro; somos mucho más demócratas, más civilizados. Pero hay ciudadanos de primera y de segunda y hasta infraciudadanos que malviven en territorios tan contaminados que los tóxicos ambientales los están matando porque no pueden pagar los impuestos de las zonas de aire limpio. Por no hablar de la marginación de los tecnohumanos y de los alienígenas. [what are we talking about? Does the caste system disgust you? I agree, me too. And on the Earth, what happens? We have no castes, of course; we are much more democratic, more civilized. But there are citizens of first and second class and even subcitizens that scrape by in territories so contaminated that the toxic environments are killing them because they cannot pay the taxes of zones with clean air. Not to mention the marginalization of technohumans and of aliens.] (*Peso* 207)

Though he says what he does to maintain his cover and continue spying on Bruna, none of what he says about the EUT is incorrect. Both worlds are unjust, simply in different forms. The shortened lifespans are an expression of unfreedom, as Loyd writes: "Premature death and health inequalities are bodily expressions of unfreedom at its most intimate and abstract" (Loyd 12). At the end of *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, the government declares it illegal

to charge for air and water, but afterwards “las Zonas Verdes impusieron enseguida un impuesto de residencia que los más pobres tampoco podían pagar. [the Green Zones immediately imposed a residency tax that the poorest couldn’t pay either]” (*Peso* 13-14). This puts the poorest inhabitants of the earth in the most contaminated zones where their bodies suffer exposure to severe pollution. Androids’ lifespan resides in their creation and the way their bodies are designed:

Al ser clones madurados aceleradamente, los reps tardaban catorce meses en gestarse; el término *fabricarse*, ofensivo y despectivo, solo lo usaban los supremacistas especistas. [Being rapidly matured clones, reps took fourteen months to gestate; the term *manufacture*, offensive and derogatory, was only used by species supremacists.] (*Tiempos* 23)

They mature until their bodies are equivalent to a 25-year-old human. Yiannis tells Bruna that human brains reach full maturity at age twenty-five and she wonders,

Entonces, ¿Era por eso por lo que los tecnohumanos se activaban a los veinticinco años? Todo parecía estar pensado hasta el más mínimo detalle para potenciar el rendimiento del producto, se dijo la detective con amargura. [Then, was that why technohumans were activated at the age of twenty-five? Everything seemed thought out to the tiniest detail to strengthen the product’s performance, the detective said to herself bitterly.] (*Tiempos* 65)

The way the corporations who make androids create and control their bodies affects their entire life and their death. These corporations view androids as products, not as people, and they are thus a source of capital.

Other bodies materially impacted by capitalist systems are those of adolescent humans. They are subject to more laws than adult humans, which intensify in *Los tiempos del odio* when young people form a large percentage of a terrorist group and kidnap a number of hostages. The government responds in part by implementing a curfew:

Ningún menor de dieciocho años podía estar en la calle desde las diez de la noche hasta las seis de la mañana, salvo que estuviera acompañado por una persona mayor de treinta años. [No one younger than eighteen could be on the street from ten pm until six am, unless they were accompanied by someone older than thirty] (*Tiempos* 64-65).

The young people have reasons to want changes in their planet's government. They have access to the news and can see the inequalities that affect them. The police system has a division of fiscal police tasked with enforcing the residency taxes. Their targets are necessarily the poor who have made their way into a zone they cannot afford but whose air and water will prolong their lives. Their methods are severe:

Una docena de policías fiscales, los temibles *azules*, habían entrado en el local y estaban desplegados en posición de defensa, armados con subfusiles de plasma y protegidos con esas corazas metalizadas azul brillante que les hacían parecer escarabajos. Uno de los *azules* sujetaba por el antebrazo a la adolescente de los zapatos grandes con la que Husky había estado hablando. La niña se retorció, lloraba y casi colgaba en vilo atrapada por la zarpa del policía ‘...Y ha sido identificada como ilegal, por lo que se procede a su retirada’ decía el *azul*. ‘Cualquier intento de impedir el cumplimiento de la Ley será considerado un delito.’ [A dozen fiscal police, the feared *azules* {*blues*}, had entered the place and

were arranged in defensive position, armed with plasma guns and protected with brilliant blue metallic breastplates that made them look like beetles. One of the *azules* held by the arm the adolescent with big shoes with whom Husky had been talking. The girl squirmed, cried and almost hung completely trapped by the paw of the police officer. ‘...And she has been identified as illegal, therefore she must be taken away,’ the *azul* was saying. ‘Any attempt to impede the fulfillment of the Law will be considered a crime.’] (*Tiempos* 124-125, italics original)

Bruna watches as the girl attempts to escape. Her body, vulnerable to the pollution of the contaminated zones, struggles as the *azul* holds her fast. Her punishment for the crime of existing without money to afford the residency tax:

Si no tenía antecedentes, la deportarían. La segunda vez, multa, o *trabajos forzados hasta poder pagarla*; a la tercera incursión ilegal en un sector limpio se acababa en la cárcel. [If she had no priors, they would deport her. The second time, fine, or *forced labor until she was able to pay it*; on the third illegal incursion in a clean sector she’d end up in prison.] (*Tiempos* 125, emphasis mine)

Those who immigrate without money into the Green zones provide a source of labor if they are caught twice. There is no incentive for the government to pay them a fair wage for their forced labor. Their economic disenfranchisement affects every area of their life. In a world where basic necessities are commodified, a lack of funds means a vastly diminished quality and length of life. If they are caught a third time, their poverty and their desire to live a longer life become a crime that merits the loss of freedom.

Fits and misfits

As Bruna and the other inhabitants of the EUT move through their world and encounter obstacles, whether material or intangible, they experience varying degrees of misfitting. The socially acceptable body, capacitated for a good fit with the world, is rare. Jasbir Puar writes in *The Right to Maim* that

what constitutes the able body is ever evolving, and its apparent referents are ever shrinking. What is an able body in this context? What is a non-disabled body, and is it the same as an able body? Layers of precarity and vulnerability to police brutality, reckless maiming and killing, deprivation, and destruction of resources that are daily features of living for some populations must not be smoothed over by hailing these bodies as able-bodied if they do not have or claim to be a person(s) with a disability. (Puar xxiii)

Ability, disability, capacity, and debility intersect within different embodied identities. Systemic technologies can debilitate populations of marginalized peoples in varying ways. The way that bodies fit or misfit in social and political settings is related to their privilege, made up of a number of intersecting factors.

Montero's SF work involves dystopian systems partly because her worldbuilding reflects her observations of the world in which we live. In her column "Diablos," from 25 Oct 1986, Montero writes that we humans "estamos viviendo en un infierno. Las guerras, las matanzas, las torturas, las hambrunas, la explotación bestial del ser humano. [are living in a hell. The wars, the killings, the tortures, the famines, the beastly exploitation of the human being]" (*La vida desnuda* 17-18). Bruna makes a similar observation as she considers humans' reaction to a series of terrorist attacks:

Los humanos, eso había aprendido Bruna en su breve vida, eran especialistas en *el arte de deshumanizar a otros humanos*. Pronto la mitad de los terrícolas serían capaces de asistir en directo a las degollinas de los terroristas sin parpadear [Humans, Bruna had learned in her short life, were specialists in *the art of dehumanizing other humans*. Soon half of the earthlings would be able to watch the terrorists' slaughter without blinking.] (*Tiempos* 146, emphasis mine)

Montero's Bruna Husky novels, like her other SF work and many of her columns, focus on individual people and rehumanize them, or at least re-*personalize* them, in the case of her non-human characters. Bruna and her family of choice live in a dystopian near future world in which the hierarchical systems, like the geographies explored in chapter two, are mostly recognizable to the twenty-first century reader. Bruna and those she cares about experience both overt discrimination and implicit, systemic discrimination. In Bruna's case, anti-android sentiment shapes the opportunities and even the life span that she and her fellow replicants have access to. Human supremacist groups play an antagonistic role in both the first novel, *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, and the third, *Los tiempos del odio*. The rhetoric they employ is similar. A man accosts Bruna in her friend Oli's bar, asking

¿Te molesta saber que estamos hartos de aguantaros? ¿Que no vamos a dejar que sigáis abusando de nosotros? y, además, ¿qué haces tú aquí? ¿No te has dado cuenta de que eres el único monstruo? [Does it bother you to know we're sick of putting up with you? That we're not going to let you keep taking advantage of us? And, for that matter, what are you doing here? Don't you realize that you're the only monster here?] (*Lágrimas* 207)

The man, puffing himself up to face Bruna, “vestía pobremente y tenía pinta de obrero manual. Cuando hablaba tensaba *todo el cuerpo* y se ponía de puntillas, como si quisiera parecer más grande, más amenazador [was dressed poorly and looked like a manual laborer. When he talked, he tensed *his whole body* and he stood on tiptoe, as if he wanted to seem larger, more threatening]” (*Lágrimas* 207). The man’s economic situation, his bigotry, and the narrative spread by human supremacist media combine and when he encounters Bruna, he sees someone who appears a viable target for his aggression. His bigotry is inexcusable, no matter what his own marginalization. His economic marginalization and his social status are still real, and the rhetoric he hears from those more powerful than himself pushes him to blame the also-marginalized androids instead of those who are above him in the social, political and economic hierarchy. In *Los tiempos del odio*, a rich man gains political power by employing the same type of rhetoric. He praises humanity and uses androids, aliens, and human mutants as scapegoats for the social problems that have arisen:

Ni en el frente de Ceres, en donde todo sigue congelado, ni contra estos terroristas que no son más que un puñado de fanáticos asesinos adolescentes pero que han puesto en jaque a la Humanidad. ¿Y por qué pasa eso? Pues porque hace mucho que esta sociedad ha perdido los valores que siempre la vertebraron. Porque hemos roto con *nuestra tradición*. Porque no sabemos quiénes somos. ¿Somos andróides, somos alienígenas, somos mutantes? ¡No señor!, ¡Somos humanos! ¡Humanos! Y tenemos que recuperar el orgullo del largo legado de nuestra Humanidad. [Neither on the Ceres front, where everything continues frozen, nor against these terrorists that are no more than a handful of murderous adolescent fanatics but who have put

all of Humanity in check. And why does this happen? Well because for a long time this society has lost its values that always supported it. Because we have broken with *our tradition*. Because we do not know who we are. Are we androids, are we aliens, are we mutants? No sir! We are humans! Humans! And We must recover the pride of the long legacy of our Humanity.] (*Tiempos* 143, emphasis mine)

This type of us vs them rhetoric sets up a dichotomy between human and non-human, placing human mutants in the non-human category. This false dichotomy adds to the oppression of those whose bodies are already vulnerable, encouraging those who hear it to act out their aggression towards marginalized people rather than look towards the hierarchy as part of the problem. Achille Mbembe writes in “Necropolitics” (2003) that

The perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security ... is one of the many imaginaries of sovereignty characteristic of both early and late modernity itself. (Mbembe 18)

The anti-replicant rhetoric employed by human supremacists throughout the series perceives anyone “Other” as a danger to humanity. This perception adds to the marginalization of vulnerable characters. Those whose vulnerability lies in their biodivergence, neurodivergence, or both, experience misfit as they move through the world. Those bodies and identities then become labeled as unruly and unwelcome when accommodating their needs would be inconvenient to a world built to accommodate able-bodiedness and neurotypicality. Yiannis, who was Bruna’s only friend for some time, cares for her and for other found family that she brings home, including Gabi who he adopts. Yiannis’s son passed away long before he met Bruna. His body misfits with those around

him because unlike the majority of people in their world, he has opted not to obtain aesthetic plastic surgery. His face therefore shows his age.

Montero's characters embody identities as complex individuals, with both privileges and disadvantages. They bump up against the debilitating technologies of society and they are capacitated in ways that profit social and corporate systems. Jasbir Puar writes that "Capacity is not discretely of the body. It is shaped by and bound to interface with prevailing notions of chance, risk, accident, luck, and probability, as well as with bodily limits/incapacity, disability, and debility" (Puar 19). As a combat android, Bruna is designed to have excellent health, quick reflexes, superhuman strength, and the ability to think clearly under extreme circumstances. Androids' creation dates to the expansion of space exploration, and the Archives reveal that

los proyectos de explotación geológica de **Marte** y de dos de las lunas de **Saturno**, **Titán** y **Encelado**, impulsaron la creación de un androide *que pudiera resistir las duras condiciones ambientales de las colonias mineras*. [the projects of geological exploitation of **Mars** and of two of the moons of **Saturn**, **Titan** and **Enceladus**, impelled the creation of an android *that could resist the harsh environmental conditions of the mining colonies*.] (*Lágrimas* 22, bold original, italics mine)

Androids began as a product designed to meet a need, but they are "prácticamente idéntico[s] al ser humano [practically identical to the human being]" (*Lágrimas* 22) and have thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs. They are all capacitated in specific ways to serve a function. Bruna has no control over the traits that she was created with, but she is free to choose how to dress and what to do with her body once she completes her military service. Like many combat androids, Bruna has a tattoo that she chose during her military service.

It is a line that encircles her body vertically, including her shaved head, crossing over her left eye:

Bruna había comprobado que la línea que parecía cortarle un tercio de la cabeza y que desaparecía ropa abajo producía un innegable impacto en los humanos. Además delataba su condición de rep combatiente: en la milicia casi todos se hacían elaborados tatuajes. [Bruna had noticed that the line which seemed to cut through a third of her head and that disappeared beneath her clothing produced an undeniable impact on humans. Moreover, it gave away her identity as a combat rep: in the military almost everyone got elaborate tattoos.] (*Lágrimas* 30)

She enjoys the effect her appearance has on others, even when it produces fear. She appreciates the fear, counting it as an advantage: “Era una de las pocas ventajas que tenía el hecho de ser distinta: era despreciada por ello, pero también temida. [it was one of the few advantages of being different: she was despised for it, but also feared]” (*Lágrimas* 36). This is one of the ways in which her identity misfits with those around her. Garland-Thomson writes that while “variations and limitations in functioning are often the core experience of disability, appearance tends to be the most socially excluding aspect of disability. Bodies whose looks or comportment depart from social expectations—ones categorized as visually abnormal—are targets for profound discrimination” (Garland-Thomson (2003) 1579-1580). Androids in Bruna’s world are recognizably different, and their appearance makes them targets for discrimination. Bruna’s eyes, like those of other replicants in her world, have vertical pupils like those of a cat. When Bruna moves through public spaces, the gaze of strangers takes in her obvious android identity. As a result of their perception of her appearance, they treat her differently than they treat their fellow

humans. Her fellow androids also make assumptions about her based on her appearance. Myriam Chi, surprised that Bruna quotes from Shakespeare, says it is a

cita muy culta para alguien como tú. [...] Una detective...Una rep de combate...Una mujer con la cabeza rapada y un tatuaje que le parte la cara. [quite a cultured quote for someone like you. {...}] A detective... A woman with a shaved head and a tattoo that divides her face.] (*Lágrimas* 62)

Bruna cultivates her appearance carefully and knows the impact it has on those who see her, but it nonetheless pains her to be different. She experiences loneliness and feels that she is the only one like her.

Another aspect of Bruna's identity that separates her both from humans and from other androids is the source of her congenital depression. Her fellow combat androids tend to have situational depression and traumatic stress, which they manage via automated pill dispensaries run by rudimentary artificial intelligence (*Lágrimas* 150-151). Bruna experiences traumatic stress as well as depression, but not simply from her combat experience. Her depression originates in the memories which Pablo Nopal, a *memorista* and novelist, wrote for her. Bruna's memories, unlike the other memories he wrote, are drawn from his own life experiences:

Pablo Nopal era rico y era desdichado. La desdicha formaba parte de su estructura básica, como los cartílagos son parte de los huesos. La desdicha era el cartílago de su mente. Era algo de lo que no se podía desprender [Pablo Nopal was rich and he was unhappy. Unhappiness was the cartilage of his mind. It was something he could not rid himself of.] (*Lágrimas* 28)

With Bruna, Nopal shared the trauma from the murder of his father and gave her many more memories than the standard replicant receives. Her mind is thus modeled after his. In many ways, this was a cruel choice. He inflicted the trauma he experienced on another living being, something that went against his own ethical code as a memorista:

Nopal siempre había actuado del modo que explicó a la rep en el Museo de Arte Moderno: intentaba construir existencias sólidas, compensadas, con cierta apariencia de destino. Vidas de algún modo consoladoras. Sólo una vez se había saltado *esa norma personal no escrita*, y fue en el último trabajo que hizo cuando ya sabía que le expulsaban de la profesión. Y esa memoria la llevaba Bruna. [Nopal had always acted the way he explained to the rep in the Museum of Modern Art: he tried to construct solid existences, compensated, with a certain appearance of destiny. Lives that were in some way consoling. Only one time had he broken *that personal unwritten norm*, and it was in the last job he did when he already knew they were about to expel him from the profession. And Bruna carried that memory.]

(*Lágrimas* 195, emphasis mine)

There is a clear difference between Bruna's mental health and her sister Clara's, who she meets in *El peso del corazón*. Clara and Bruna have much in common but unlike Bruna, Clara is not plagued by the countdown until death that Bruna has running through her mind every day. She is surprised to learn of Bruna's fixation on the number of years, days, and hours remaining: "¡Qué bárbaro, tía! ¿Vas bajando día a día? Pareces una jodida rep de cálculo. [Wow, tía! You count down day by day? You're like a fucking accounting rep]" (*Peso* 280). Nopal wrote Clara's memories as well, but she received a more standard set, the consoling, solid life that he tried to produce for everyone except for Bruna, who

received a novel instead of Clara's short story. Clara describes her set of memories, reacting to Bruna's question of whether her remembered father was murdered, too.

¿Un padre asesinado? ¿Dónde se ha visto eso? Ponen siempre memorias felices e insípidas. Mis padres de mentira me querían mucho, me regalaron un perro por mi décimo cumpleaños, los fines de semana nos íbamos a pasear por el monte con el perro y mi hermana. Ya ves, eso es lo que más echo de menos. A mi maldita falsa hermana y a mi jodido falso perro. A veces me acuerdo de ellos. Y me irrita haberlos perdido. [A murdered father? When has that happened? They always put happy insipid memories. My fake parents loved me very much, they gave me a dog for my tenth birthday, on weekends we went to hike in the mountain with my dog and my sister. See, that's what I miss. My damn fake sister and my fucking fake dog. Sometimes I remember them. And I get mad I lost them.] (*Peso* 281-282)

She also seems to lack Bruna's sense of creativity. Nopal believes that Bruna's creativity resides in the complexity of the memories he wrote for her, if not in the trauma some of them hold. He asks Bruna, "¿De dónde sale ese cuento que le cuentas a la niña rusa? ¿Tú ves a Clara capaz de inventar una historia así? [Where does that story that you tell the Russian girl come from? Do you think Clara is capable of inventing a story like that?]" (*Peso* 287). Bruna considers what she knows of Clara: "¿Con ese sentido directo y literal de la vida que parecía tener? No. Probablemente no. [With that direct and literal sense of life that she seemed to have? No. Probably not]" (*Peso* 287). Bruna does note that Clara's state of mind is healthier than her own, though she does not want to trade places with the other replicant. However, both she and Nopal struggle to feel at home in their own identities. Neither of them wants to be who and how they are most of the time (*Peso* 287).

They both experience misfitting with the world due to their mental health. Despite his unhappiness with his own identity, Nopal finds some consolation in the existence of someone else like him. Once he meets Bruna, he recognizes his pain in her: “Algo de esa desesperación adivinaba en Bruna, algo de esa pena pura que abrasaba como un ácido. [Some of that desperation he sensed in Bruna, some of that pure anguish that burned like acid]” (*Lágrimas* 194). It seems that writing what became Bruna’s memory was an attempt to build a kind of family for himself, to create at least one person who could understand him.

Bruna experiences a similar loneliness. At the beginning of *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, Bruna’s only friend is Yiannis. She lives alone and enjoys solitude, but her independence is also a result of the misfitting she encounters in relationships with other people. Her partner Merlin died of TTT and her grief at his death also severely impacts Bruna’s desire to build more connections. Bruna and other replicants are not told who their memoristas are and what Nopal did in giving her part of his own trauma is so unusual that she had no idea until he told her:

Cuando Bruna se enteró de que arrastraba el pasado de Nopal a sus espaldas, comprendió por qué ella siempre se había sentido diferente, *un monstruo entre los monstruos*. [When Bruna found out that she was dragging Nopal’s past behind her, she understood why she had felt different, *a monster among monsters*.] (*Tiempos* 33, emphasis mine)

Nopal’s choice to write Bruna’s memory the way he did affects her ability to connect with others as well as her mental state, but she eventually manages to create connections and build a family of choice, much like Nyneve and Leola do in *Historia del Rey Transparente*.

Bruna manages her depression via talk therapy, which she does not enjoy, but which she continues throughout at least the first two books. She also self-medicates with alcohol, her drink of choice being white wine, and occasionally with recreational oxytocin. The oxytocin is an interesting choice as it creates a sense of connection to others, one of the things Bruna struggles to maintain on her own. Her frequent and large alcohol use in particular takes a toll on her body and more often than not she wakes up with a hangover and a hole in her memory: “El cuerpo le recordó, antes que su memoria, que una vez más había tomado demasiado alcohol la noche anterior. [Her body reminded her, before her memory, that once more she had drunk too much alcohol the night before]” (*Lágrimas* 400). Bruna’s embodied identity is that of an individual who works to survive in the Capitalocene.

Despite the marginalization which Bruna and other androids face because of their identity as androids, that marginalization usually is not economic. Bruna’s work as a detective gives her the funds to pay for therapy, alcohol, food, rent and other expenses. She is well-enough off to afford to live in the Green zone, to travel, and to access necessities without major inconvenience. When she finds Gabi while crossing from a Zero zone back to her home Green zone, Bruna has the funds available to buy Gabi three months of Green zone residency (*Peso* 20). Bruna realizes the economic privilege she experiences more fully in the third novel as she watches humans protest the rising costs of basic necessities and the government’s inaction:

Pobres humanos, pensó Bruna; sobre todo, pobres humanos pobres. Al menos a los replicantes no solía faltarles el trabajo, gracias a sus capacidades genéticamente potenciadas. La mayoría no se hacían ricos: no tenían tiempo para ello y había

demasiado discriminación. Pero se ganaban la vida con comodidad. ... Los humanos, en cambio, soportaban una tasa de desempleo del... ¿de cuánto era? La rep pulsó su móvil: 46% en los EUT, 33% en la región de España. [Poor humans, thought Bruna; above all, poor *poor* humans. At least replicants usually didn't lack for work, thanks to their genetically enhanced abilities. The majority didn't become rich: they didn't have time and there was too much discrimination. But they earned a comfortable living. ... The humans, on the other hand, dealt with an unemployment rate of... how much was it? The rep tapped her mobile: 46% in the EUT, 33% in Spain.] (*Tiempos* 87)

Bruna's sense of empathy grows throughout the series as she continues to interact with other marginalized people. It especially changes as she builds a relationship with Gabi, the girl who she rescues from the border of a Zero Zone.

Like Bruna, Gabi embodies a life in the Capitalocene. Their lives are shaped by those who stand to gain financially from keeping marginalized people vulnerable instead of allocating necessary resources to those who need them. Gabi lived in a Zero zone that contains the area currently known as Russia until Bruna found her. Like Baba in *Bella y oscura*, Gabi recalls several of Montero's columns and writings about the plight of young girls. In her young life, Gabi has already survived rape, radiation poisoning, and the loss of her birth family (*Tiempos* 45). Bruna identifies with the girl as she contemplates their shared short life expectancy. Androids are designed to die of a kind of cancer, Tumor Tecno Total, after ten years (*Lágrimas* 25). Radiation poisoning may also cause cáncer, which it does in Gabi's case. The EUT has outlawed nuclear power and nuclear weapons to avoid this, but there is a black market for nuclear waste. Bruna cannot change her own body's

life expectancy, but she works to make sure that Gabi has the healthcare she needs. Gabi's body, like Bruna's, is shaped by the Capitalocene society they inhabit. The environment influences Gabi's body on a cellular level. Gabi gives a name and a face to the number of people who inhabit the Zero zones whose bodies experience "Chemical and radiological violence [... which] is driven inward, somatized into cellular dramas of mutation that--particularly in the bodies of the poor--remain largely unobserved, undiagnosed, and untreated" (Nixon 6). Bruna has already seen the larger-scale effects of this violence as she encounters "polillas [moths]" who flee into the Green zones to escape it. In *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, she and Yiannis see the fiscal police capture a mother and her child from a more contaminated zone:

'Polillas. Pobre gente,' dijo Yiannis a su lado. Bruna cabeceó, asintiendo. Casi todos los polillas tenían hijos pequeños; si se arriesgaban a vivir de modo clandestino en zonas de aire limpio que no podían pagar, era por el miedo a los daños innegables que la contaminación producía en -los críos. Como las polillas, abandonaban ilegalmente sus ciudades apestosas de cielo siempre gris y venían atraídos por la luz del sol y por el oxígeno, la inmensa mayoría para quemarse, porque la policía fiscal era de una enorme eficacia. ['Moths. Poor people,' said Yiannis at her side. Bruna nodded in agreement. Almost all the moths had small children; if they risked living clandestinely in clean air zones that they couldn't afford, it was out of fear of the undeniable harm that the contamination caused in their offspring. Like moths, they illegally abandoned their smelly cities with always-gray skies and came, attracted by the light of the sun and by the oxygen, the immense majority to burn up, because the fiscal police were extremely efficient.] (*Lágrimas* 209)

At the border where she finds Gabi, Bruna observes the efforts a group of desperate Zero zone inhabitants make to cross into the Green zone. They come in a large group, a

masa de individuos que se acercaba al muro a todo correr. Eran muchos, muchísimos, trescientos, cuatrocientos, quizá más. Hombres y mujeres. Llevaban escaleras, mochilas, bultos, maletas, niños a la espalda. [mass of individuals that approached the wall at a full run. They were many, so many, three hundred, four hundred, perhaps more. Men and women. They carried ladders, backpacks, bundles, suitcases, children on their backs.] (*Peso* 15).

Their effort to escape present and future harm to their bodies involves a bodily effort, which is disciplined immediately. They weigh the risk of continuing to live in the Zero zone with the risk of crossing the wall and choose to try to cross. The disciplinary technology of the wall pushes their bodies back, thwarting their efforts:

Alcanzaron los primeros la pared transparente *como una ola de mar* que rompe contra un dique: el muro los escupía, los despedía, porque estaba electrificado. [The first ones reached the transparent wall *like an ocean wave* that breaks against a dike: the wall spat them out, threw them off, because it was electrified.] (*Peso* 15, emphasis mine)

The narration describes the numerous bodies of the Zero zone inhabitants with a simile from nature: they are like a wave breaking against a dike. News reports on immigrants often speak of waves, avalanches, floods, and other natural phenomena (Nash). This can be dehumanizing in news reports, but the details that Montero provides above include the men and women with their belongings and their children on their back which reinforces the humanity of these people as Bruna watches them. Gabi's appearance contributes to the

humanization of the Zero zone inhabitants, particularly as time goes on and Bruna realizes what the girl's life has been like.

Gabi embodies the willful child described by Sara Ahmed. When Bruna first sees her, fighting with a guard to stay on the less contaminated side of the wall, she appears to be about nine or ten years old (*Peso* 19). She fights the guard with her entire body, trying to kick her way free from their grasp. Gabi also struggles against Bruna and Yiannis. Bruna is appointed as Gabi's legal guardian and she struggles to balance her responsibility to the girl with her job as a detective and her personal mental health. Yiannis takes Gabi into his apartment and Bruna visits when she can. Bruna and Yiannis work to earn Gabi's trust over time. She runs away from Yiannis's apartment. Bruna's search for Gabi demonstrates the way that the EUT state surveillance functions. There is a tracking device which the border guards implanted in Gabi's body as part of her immigration process. In order to trace Gabi's steps, Bruna calls Paul Lizard, a police officer who Bruna met while working the case in *Lágrimas en la lluvia*. She asks him to connect her to the tracking signal, which he sends to her phone, allowing her to see exactly where Gabi is for the next hour (*Peso* 34). This kind of surveillance, using an implanted device, entwines technology and the bodily control the state can exercise over its inhabitants. Bruna finds Gabi in a parque pulmón begging for money, which is a crime for a minor. Angry, and worried about her legal liability and the permanent loss of her detective's license, she grabs Gabi: "Agarró al *monstruo* de un brazo y lo levantó de un tirón del suelo. La niña chilló [She grabbed the *monster* by one arm and lifted it with a jerk from the ground. The girl howled]" (*Peso* 38, emphasis mine). Bruna's behavior towards Gabi is that of someone trying to solve a problem. She has sympathy for the child's situation but does not at first feel a specific connection to Gabi as

a person. As she waits for Gabi to gather her things, she sees a cord of things knotted together inside the girl's backpack. She pulls on it, curious, and "Gabi le arrebató la mochila de un tirón y echó a correr" (*Peso* 38). Gabi's reaction to Bruna touching her belongings is immediate, and as when she was fighting the guard at the border, it involves her whole body. She takes off at a run, but Bruna quickly catches up. When Bruna reaches her and grabs her again, Gabi bites her in self defense:

La rep sintió los dientes de la niña hundirse en su carne, y sólo su reforzado control de combatiente evitó que diera un respingo para soltarse, lo cual sin duda hubiera desgarrado la herida mucho más. [The rep felt the girl's teeth sink into her flesh and only the reinforced combat control kept her from shaking her loose, which would undoubtedly have torn the wound much more.] (*Peso* 39)

If not for the reinforced combat instincts that she was created with, Bruna likely would have lost hold of Gabi. Both Bruna and Gabi are willful, both stubborn. The two remain locked together in an embrace, their bodies close together in a draw. Bruna returns Gabi to Yiannis's apartment and patches up her arm. Later, Yiannis calls Bruna when Gabi refuses to come out from under her bed. As she sits on the floor at the edge of the bed and talks to her, Gabi knots a small cord around the edge of Bruna's shirt. Desperate for a way to understand and rein in Gabi's behavior, Bruna calls her own psicoguía to understand why Gabi ties knots.

esa hilera de objetos parece importantísima para ella. ... Incluso me ha puesto un nudo a mí, en el borde de la camiseta, sin que yo me diera cuenta. Claro que yo no voy colgando de su hilo, en mi caso sólo se trata de un pedacito de cuerda. Pero el nudo está. No me he atrevido a desatarlo. No entiendo por qué lo hace. [That string

of objects seems incredibly important to her. ... she even put a knot on me, on the border of my shirt, without me realizing. Of course, I'm not hanging from her string, in my case it's just a piece of cord. But the knot is there. I haven't dared untie it. I don't understand why she does it] (Montero *Peso* 81)

The conclusion Bruna's therapist helps her reach is that Gabi ties her few belongings together "Para que no se pierdan. Eso es, Husky. Eso creo que es. Imagina qué pérdidas habrá sufrido esa niña en su vida para desarrollar una estrategia así. [So they don't get lost. That's it, Husky. I believe that's it. Imagine what losses that girl must have suffered to develop such a strategy]" (*Peso* 82). As Gabi's actions continue to pose a problem for Bruna as the girl's legal guardian, Bruna struggles between empathy for Gabi's situation and anger with the girl's behavior. As long as she sees Gabi as willfully acting out, it is difficult for Bruna to connect with the human girl. Unlike the adults in Baba's life in *Bella y oscura*, Bruna works to recognize her own willful behavior towards Gabi and to recognize the ways that Gabi suffers from severe trauma. By the end of *El peso del corazón*, their relationship is much better because of the way the two characters grow individually and the way that Bruna takes on the responsibility of caring for Gabi emotionally.

Unlike Baba, whose traumatic experiences push her into silence, Gabi is outspoken in her words and violent in her actions. She has developed different survival strategies than Baba and Chico needed in *Bella y oscura*. Where Baba and Chico learned to be quiet and pass unnoticed, Gabi has learned to fight. She continues to lash out at Bruna until Bruna demonstrates more than just frustration towards her. Gabi's life experiences shape her perspective on the events in the novels. The preteen girl knows first-hand the impact the commodification of air and water has on people. She surprises Bruna by saying that Paul

Lizard was captured by terrorists because he is on the wrong side. Gabi sees Lizard as collaborating with “Los que cobran por el aire limpio. Los que no curan a los niños si no tienen dinero. Todos los malos. [Those that charge for clean air. Those that don’t cure kids if they don’t have money]” (*Tiempos* 45), because of his work as a police officer. When Bruna asks, “Pero, ¿dónde has oído eso? [But, where did you hear that?]” (*Tiempos* 45), Gabi responds, “No lo he oído, estúpida. Lo he vivido. [I didn’t hear it, stupid. I lived it]” (*Tiempos* 45). Gabi’s childhood in a zero zone has as great an impact on her present identity as Baba’s experiences in the orphanage and the Barrio has on her. Gabi, like Bruna, experiences misfitting in the world and she needs the connection to Yiannis and Bruna as much as Baba needs care and concern from the adults in her life.

Through her association with Gabi and with other humans she cares about, Bruna becomes more empathetic to the problems that other marginalized groups face:

lo cierto era que, *desde que había rescatado a la niña rusa de una Zona Cero*, las fronteras que dividían el planeta en sectores más o menos contaminados le parecían más incomprensibles, y las violentas desigualdades que existían en los EUT se le estaban haciendo cada día más irritantes. [the truth was that *ever since she rescued the Russian girl from a Zero Zone*, the frontiers that divided the planet in more or less contaminated sectors seemed more incomprehensible, and the violent inequalities that existed in the EUT were more irritating every day.] (*Tiempos* 85-86, emphasis mine)

Her personal connection to Gabi changes Bruna’s perspective on the world and opens her eyes to the real impact that unjust systems have had on Gabi and others like her. Her change in attitude stands out in a conversation with Kai, an android who works as Paul Lizard’s

second-in-command at their division of the police. While discussing some of the young humans that they are investigating, Kai says,

‘Los humanos poseen la capacidad de ser unos mierdas a cualquier edad.’ Bruna sintió cierta incomodidad ante la acritud de las palabras de Kai, aunque *hasta hace muy poco hubiera compartido por completo esa frase*. [‘Humans have the ability to be pieces of shit at any age.’ Bruna felt discomfort at the bitterness of Kai’s words, even though *until very recently she would have shared that sentiment completely*.] (*Tiempos* 150, emphasis mine).

Bruna’s discomfort with something she would have said herself before meeting Gabi is telling. The connections she feels to Gabi, to Paul Lizard, and to Yiannis affect her significantly.

Access to necessary resources

The residency tax that charges for clean air and water is one way to limit access to vital resources through capitalism. Another is to distribute healthcare inequitably. The current COVID-19 crisis has both put additional pressure on healthcare systems and highlighted the lack of vital healthcare equipment in various sites. For example, healthcare workers in Britain are being told to “hold their breath to avoid getting infected because of persistent shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE)” (Campbell). Hospitals in the United States also face severe shortages of PPE and some have prohibited their workers from wearing PPE brought from home (Fadel). The idea of public health as a public good is still less than widespread in my home country, which has contributed to the severity of COVID-19’s impact: currently the John Hopkins COVID-19 dashboard shows 401,166 confirmed cases in the United States, which is the highest reported number globally. The

second highest number of cases is 146,690, in Spain (John Hopkins). In the United States, a shortage of tests for the virus means that the actual number of cases is likely quite a bit higher than the reported numbers. It also means that people may die of COVID-19 without ever being diagnosed or having their cause of death recorded accurately. The inaccurate statistics because of the shortage of tests leads to exponentially worse consequences: “Contacts of the deceased may not get the warnings they need to help keep the disease from spreading; families may be left not knowing what killed their loved ones” (Ellis, et al). This global crisis highlights the already prevalent inequity of the United States healthcare system on a national scale as well as part of a global system. When groups or individuals lack access to healthcare, it impacts their quality of life as well as their life expectancy. To recall Jenna Loyd’s definition of the importance of health, she writes that health is first “a state of being [which] refers to the embodied, lived effects of socially produced harms [and s]econd, ... a discourse [which] marks people’s desires for well-being, flourishing, bodily integrity, and self-determination” (Loyd 14-15). Loyd further writes that struggles for health “connect the necessity of meeting immediate needs and healing with long-term, broadscale organizing efforts to create *healthier, freer, and socially just relations and spaces* for living” (Loyd 14-15, emphasis mine). Where health and health care are commodified, there arise great obstacles to health, freedom, and socially just relations. Health, like clean air and water, is a commodity in Bruna’s world. Health and health care have also been commodified in the United States of America, the country whose healthcare systems I am most familiar with. The shortages I mentioned have produced a bidding war between state governments and the federal government, as well as profiteering (Soergel). The technologies to care for many problems are in place but remain inaccessible

for those who are underinsured or uninsured. They also become inaccessible to people who medical personnel discriminate against. Obstacles to healthcare are violence. Loyd writes, “Health and violence cannot be understood as mutually exclusive issues so long as there is social injustice” (Loyd 15). In *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, the reader learns that there are two tiers of emergency response teams. The openly available one, Samaritanos, is vastly overworked. When Bruna calls in an emergency, after ascertaining the age of the patient, the dispatcher asks, “¿Humana o tecnohumana?” (*Lágrimas* 19). Bruna responds, with anger, that “Esa pregunta es anticonstitucional y tú lo sabes bien” (*Lágrimas* 19). Nonetheless, she knows that Samaritanos

priorizaban a los humanos, por supuesto. No era una práctica legal, pero se hacía. Y lo peor, se dijo Bruna, es que tenía cierto sentido hacerlo. Cuando un servicio médico estaba desbordado, tal vez fuera sensato dar preferencia a aquellos con una esperanza de vida mucho mayor. [they prioritized humans, of course. It wasn’t a legal practice, but it happened. And the worst thing, Bruna said to herself, is that it made a certain sense to do it. When a medical service was overflowing, perhaps it was sensible to give preference to those whose life expectancy was much greater.] (*Lágrimas* 19).

The current world also prioritizes the health of some bodies over others. Within the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed and exacerbated what disabled people have already experienced: Triage becomes a way of discriminating against disabled bodies (Proulx et al). When ventilators and hospital beds run short, disabled people are deemed less likely to survive, and health workers prioritize the able-bodied. In theory, everyone has access to some level of healthcare, but whether they can afford it is another question

entirely. Bruna, as an android, was given the option of keeping her combat replicant health insurance or receiving a larger sum of money upon terminating her required military service. She chose the insurance (*Peso* 44-45). Without insurance, Gabi's treatment for radiation exposure would cost "un mínimo de doscientas mil gais [a minimum of two hundred thousand gais]" (*Peso* 50). This is a cost that Bruna cannot afford and which her insurance will not cover, as the doctor explains: "Tu seguro es tuyo, no de ella. [Your insurance is yours, not hers]" (*Peso* 50). The access to healthcare shapes people's lives, quite literally, like Yiannis's medicine pump does. Medical devices can be capacitating or debilitating. Bruna's prosthesis is much better than Yiannis's pump. It is visually and functionally indistinguishable from a biological arm, though it takes a few months for the neural connections to mature (*Tiempos* 370). Puar writes that "Access to health care may well become the defining factor in one's relationship to the non-disabled/disabled dichotomy" (Puar (2017) xvi). The degree to which someone is disabled by an event often depends on the access they have to healthcare and to social support systems. Loyd writes that

While ostensibly neutral, health discourses reproduced long-standing associations between densely crowded poor neighborhoods, racial differences, and disease. In this way, dominant geographies of health erased the relations of privilege and violence tying these places together and producing unequal life chances for their residents. (Loyd 17)

The geography of Bruna's world, discussed in chapter two, and the way healthcare is distributed are connected. The inequities in living conditions are directly related to the inequities of healthcare allocation. Bruna benefits from good insurance. As time passes,

she realizes how she does benefit from a number of economic privileges that others do not enjoy. She starts to see humans as a varied, diverse group rather than a monolith, particularly after she builds a relationship with Gabi. She recognizes that her own individual difficulties are part of the inequities inherent in the world around her.

Bruna's world, like 21st-century Earth, is divided between rich and poor. The main difference is that the gap between rich and poor has grown wider and vital resources have become even less equitably distributed. The rich in Bruna's world have access to healthcare, to clean air and water, and to a range of necessities and luxuries that are beyond the reach of the poor. These inequities and divisions have material consequences that impact the bodies of the world's inhabitants, especially the bodies of the multiply marginalized. Bruna learns to navigate the world and to recognize the violence inherent in the system that gives power and privilege to a select few while causing severe, often fatal, harm to the marginalized. Montero writes Bruna and many of her other characters in this novel as people with unruly, willful bodies. Therefore, Bruna experiences and observes the impact of harsh disciplinary technologies. Montero also creates antagonists with multiple privileges. These antagonists perpetuate harm that they themselves avoid due to their privileged positions. The systemic problems in Bruna's world are an extrapolation and an amplification of current pressing issues that will only become worse if left unchanged. The hope which Montero's writing offers is not that the world will become better with time but that personal connections and found family can make a cruel world more survivable.

Conclusion to Chapter Four

In each of her SF texts, Montero creates networks of marginalized characters who need each other. They especially need each other because Montero also creates hierarchical systems for them to inhabit and navigate. These systems have a profound material impact on the bodies of those who live with them. Montero's characters have to face spaces with varying degrees of accessibility while their bodies often read as unruly to normative regulatory systems. In this chapter I have dealt with the impact which oppressive systems inscribe on the bodies of their most vulnerable inhabitants. I have shown how Montero maintains a consistent ethics in both her SF novels and her journalism. Her concern for marginalized groups and individuals leads her to condemn harmful action on the part of powerful organizations and privileged people. I have examined the social systems within Montero's SF and journalistic writing by taking a feminist material-disabilities approach. I have looked specifically at the misfits that occur for people with unruly, non-normative bodies within those systems. Building on my analysis of the human geographies and ecologies of Montero's fictional worlds from Chapter Two, in this chapter I have looked at the spaces, systems, and resources of these same worlds and how the accessibility of these facets of daily life impact those who inhabit them.

As they inhabit repressive systems, each of Montero's characters builds relationships with other marginalized characters. Those interpersonal connections help Montero's characters survive uncaring economic systems that prioritize profit and power over people. In Montero's fictional worlds, characters often lack access to necessary resources, and they face systemic discrimination that becomes debilitating. These echo the social critique that Montero employs in her columns, where she often focuses on individual

people who navigate hierarchical systems, a task which becomes more or less difficult based on their embodied identities.

Chapter 5: Representational Shortcomings in Progressive Discourse

In the preceding chapters, by focusing on specific aspects of Montero's Speculative Fiction (SF) and its connections to her journalism, I have shown that this genre is central to Spanish literature, and that it allows authors to treat themes central to national and global problems. I have focused on human impact on ecology by examining the settings Montero creates and her ecological ethic that she expresses through her columns. Additionally, I have examined how her characters experience the material impact of inequitable systems and processes and the concern for classist and sexist inequity she demonstrates in her journalism. Both her periodical work and her SF work communicate serious concerns about these urgent contemporary Spanish and global issues. Montero's SF work, like Spanish SF in general, merits further study and recognition as a serious literary and social contribution, based on the ethical stances she expresses through the genre. In this chapter I outline some of the shortcomings of Montero's work as it relates to marginalized groups and individuals in our present world. Unlearning ableism, racism, sexism, transphobia, Islamophobia and other systemic discriminatory ideologies is the work of a lifetime. These ideologies permeate our world and for white progressive writers it is all too easy to fall into harmful tropes in well-intentioned writing. They require awareness and continual effort to overcome.

If, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, works of SF have great power to change the world for the better, they have equal power to effect negative change. Power and responsibility are tied together,³⁴ and it is our responsibility as authors, scholars, and

³⁴ The Peter Parker principle, "With great power comes great responsibility" applies here (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/With_great_power_comes_great_responsibility).

readers to educate ourselves about real world issues as they are reflected in fiction and nonfiction and to become aware of harmful tropes and then stop reproducing them. This is why I have highlighted problematic elements of Montero's work as well as the many positive aspects. Problematic elements include the underrepresentation of BIPOC³⁵ characters, stereotypical representations of indigenous people, the presence of fatphobic and queerphobic tropes and stereotypes, and ableist stereotypes about neurodivergent and mentally ill people. Often these tropes are dog-whistles, that is they are "coded messages communicated through words or phrases commonly understood by a particular group of people, but not by others" ("Dog Whistle"). The coded nature of such statements allows them to become part of the public consciousness. Well-meaning people often repeat such dog-whistles, which are metonymous for racist or otherwise bigoted discourse, without knowing or meaning to communicate the full context. That is part of the point, to spread the ideas via innocent-seeming code. The key for well-meaning people with good intentions is to learn what the dog-whistles are in order to recognize them and call them out as well as to avoid repeating them and reproducing the toxic notions they represent. Therefore, noticing dog-whistles, even when the person using them does not intend to perpetuate bigotry, matters. The repetition harms the members of the groups they are aimed at. As Judith Butler points out in *Excitable Speech*, language has power. "If we are formed in language, then that formative power precedes and conditions any decision we might make about it, insulting us from the start, as it were, by its prior power" (Butler (1997) 2). Transphobic statements by public figures contribute to violence against trans people. Islamophobic statements contribute to violence against Muslims, or against people of color

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who perpetrators of violence associate with Islam. Antisemitic statements and stereotypes contribute to antisemitic violence. Racist statements contribute to racist violence. This type of speech not only foments violence, it is violent in and of itself. Butler writes, “Charles R. Lawrence III refers to racist speech as a ‘verbal assault,’ underscoring that the effect of racial invective is ‘like receiving a slap in the face.’ The injury is instantaneous” (Butler (1997) 4). Writing counts as speech, particularly when one is addressing a large audience from a position of privilege.

As I have shown, many of Montero’s characters are drawn from real or fictional marginalized groups. Additionally, in her SF novels, one recurring sign of dystopia is the mistreatment of marginalized characters, representatives of groups that are marginalized in real life as well. In chapter four I discussed the problematic aspects of Montero’s portrayal of Little People and of fat people in *Temblor*, *Bella y Oscura*, and the Bruna Husky series. Despite the non-mimetic settings of some of her SF, the portrayal of marginalization makes her SF more realistic and less hopeful for queer readers, BIPOC³⁶ readers, neurodivergent readers, and other marginalized readers, many of whose identities reside at the intersection of multiple marginalizations. BIPOC readers will not find many characters who represent them in Montero’s work. I continue to argue that Montero’s SF work is a net positive for those who read it, and it has played a fundamental role in my personal education about the issues she approaches without flinching. While Montero is an author with a clear progressive agenda, she cannot escape the limits of language which is always already imbued with ideology, just as early French feminists pointed out. Marginalized readers are already accustomed to stories about their own oppression because they have lived them.

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Therefore, stories about marginalization and oppression may not be accessible to some of the very groups she represents, especially to multiply marginalized people. To people who are underrepresented in her work, her novels may be additionally harmful in that much of fiction already contributes to their erasure. I wish to be perfectly clear: I am not saying that Montero's work should not be studied, but the fact that it her SF reproduces real-life conditions of marginalization is both a strength and a shortcoming. A strength in that it can open privileged people's eyes to real-world conditions that their privilege protects them from, and a shortcoming in that it reproduces real-world conditions that marginalized people are already too familiar with.

In *Historia del Rey Transparente*, one of the most difficult elements for me is when Leola plans to take Nyneve's potion at the end of the novel. Before she takes it, she first administers it to Guy, her adopted adult son. Guy is intellectually disabled. To all appearances, the potion causes death. Nyneve took it first and as far as Leola could tell, she died. Leola had no idea whether her friend had reached the shores of Avalon or not. Ostensibly, Leola's choice to give Guy the potion was born from a trust in Nyneve's magic and medicinal power, along with a desire to protect him from the violence of the crusaders besieging their last hiding place. However, her choice also echoes far too many cases in which an abled person murders a disabled person for whom they are responsible in some way before dying of suicide themselves. There is a name for this: caregiver murder. Journalist and professor of history David Perry writes that

At least 219 disabled people were killed by parents and caregivers between 2011 - 2015 — an average of approximately a murder a week. This is a very conservative

number due to under-reporting and the fact that a victim's disability is not always made public. The real numbers are likely much higher. (Perry 1)

Within the United States science fiction fandom community, this has been an important conversation. A key award established via WisCon had long been named for James Tiptree, Jr, who was the author persona of Alice Sheldon: "The influence of Tiptree – the work published under the persona, Alice Sheldon's life, and the history of this award – is important to the history of gender and feminism" (Lothian "From Tiptree to Otherwise"). In the fall of 2019, after the Astounding Award changed its name from the Campbell Award in overdue recognition of John W. Campbell's fascism and his racist actions throughout his life and editorship (Libbey). Award winner Jeanette Ng's powerful acceptance speech³⁷ in 2019 provided much of the impetus for the change. The change added to a fandom-wide discussion of the importance of names and the way that choosing canonic figures of a genre shape the present and future of that genre ("A Statement from the Editor"): "In the wake of the Astounding Award's decision..., the Tiptree Motherboard began to hear [suggestions] that the James Tiptree Jr Literary Award ought also to change its name" (Lothian "From Tiptree to Otherwise"). The reason for this call to change the award name were the circumstances of Alice Sheldon's death and her last action before dying. The Motherboard wrote in their first response to these calls that "the science fiction community at the time — viewed this tragedy as resulting from a suicide pact: the desperate and tragic result of a combination of physical and mental illness and the Sheldons' desire to die on their own

37 "John W. Campbell, for whom this award was named, was a fascist. Through his editorial control of Astounding Science Fiction, he is responsible for setting a tone of science fiction that still haunts the genre to this day. Sterile. Male. White. Exalting in the ambitions of imperialists and colonisers, settlers and industrialists. Yes, I am aware there are exceptions." (Ng).

terms. He was 84 years old; she was 71” (“Alice Sheldon and the name of the Tiptree Award”). Nonetheless, more recent readings, including the call to change the name of the award, interpret the tragic events as “an act of caregiver murder: where a disabled person is killed by the person, usually a close family member, who is responsible for their support” (“Alice Sheldon and the name of the Tiptree Award”). The Motherboard recognized in their first statement that much of the conversation about Huntington Sheldon’s death and Alice Sheldon’s suicide centered Alice, not Huntington. Leola’s story does something similar. It is Leola’s story, not Guy’s story, and she is the narrator. Leola relates her decision to give Guy the potion and then drink it herself before the Crusaders break into their last refuge as an act of mercy and as an escape. Her last words promise the reader that she is going to the “Isla de las Manzanas [the isle of apples]” or Avalon, with Nyneve, and that they will someday return. Leola does not explain any of this to Guy. She describes him as

Canoso y calvo, con el rostro abotargado y estragado por la edad, mostraba sin embargo, en la somnolencia del duermeverla, una inocencia puramente infantil. Este viejo es un niño, era mi niño. [gray-haired and balding, with the face swollen and corrupted by age, he showed nonetheless, in the sleepiness of waking up, a pure childlike innocence. This old man is a child, he was my child.] (*Historia* 567)

Leola says he is the closest thing to a son she will ever have. She treats him as a child rather than an adult son. In her choice to give him the medicine without explanation, she takes away his ability to choose. When Leola wakes him to give him the potion, she tells him only that he must take “esta medicina [this medicine]” (*Historia* 567). He does so, and his body at least takes on the appearance of death. Throughout his life, Guy requires more care

than a non-disabled person, which leads his father and then Leola to treat him as a child and to take over all decisions that concern his life, and ultimately, his death. As he is the only intellectually disabled character in the novel, his treatment carries even more weight and it reflects the reality for many intellectually and physically disabled people, past and present.

In *Temblor*, there are two problematic aspects that merit further discussion. First, the portrayal of Doble Pecado, the intersex person who Agua Fría meets, falls into some transphobic and interphobic³⁸ tropes. Second, the portrayal of the Uma tribe falls into stereotypes about Indigenous people. To begin with Doble Pecado's depiction, I first should say that the appearance of an intersex person in a book published in 1990 is remarkable. Even writing now in 2020, I am aware of very few mainstream (within their countries of publication) novels that include intersex characters, whether or not they use the modern terminology instead of the outdated "hermaphrodite." *Temblor* is one; *Middlesex* (2002), by Jeffrey Eugenides, is another. When intersex characters written by non-intersex authors do appear, their descriptions and treatment often reproduce a number of tropes that have little to do with real-life intersex identity. Wikipedia has a list of intersex characters in English language fiction, both written and filmed ("Intersex Characters in Fiction"). Many of these characters, like Doble Pecado, are the only intersex person with a name in the work in which they appear or belong to an alien species in which everyone is intersex. Ursula K. LeGuin's alien characters in *The Left Hand of Darkness* are one example of an intersex species whose reproductive systems function differently to those of humans. As such, these aliens' physiology does not correspond to that of the wide variety

38 Relating to bias against intersex people.

of human intersex people. Doble Pecado is the only intersex character who appears in this or any of Montero's other SF novels. Though Natvel in the Bruna Husky series could arguably read as intersex, in my interpretation of the text Natvel reads as genderfluid. A fictional work, or a body of fictional work, which only includes a single person from a given group ends up making that character work and necessarily fail to represent all members of their identity group. For example, any novel that only has one named woman character cannot represent women well. Doble Pecado, like many other marginalized characters in works of fiction, is represented as occupying only one axis of identity. And as the only intersex person in the book with a name, the way Montero depicts Doble Pecado ends up speaking about all intersex people, regardless of what Montero may have intended in making this character intersex. Additionally, Doble Pecado's name means "Double Sin" which both demonstrates the bias of Magenta society against LGBTQIA people and draws on real-world interphobic stereotypes. When Doble Pecado tricks Agua Fría into staying the night with them³⁹ and then betrays her, it casts the only representative of a marginalized group as an antagonist, if not an outright villain. This has an effect like that of having the only woman in a film be portrayed as an antagonist, while all the other characters both bad and good, are men. Additionally, the narrative casts Doble Pecado as a trickster and a betrayer, someone who cannot be trusted. Both trans and intersex people have faced the accusation of trying to deceive people about their gender and having the singular intersex character play this role may perpetuate the stereotype.

39 As I explained in chapter four, I chose to use they/them pronouns for Doble Pecado. In their interactions with Agua Fría they use masculine adjectives after noting Agua Fría's discomfort with their gender presentation.

Similarly, in the characterization of the Uma tribe, Montero recreates stereotypes about Native American and First Nations peoples, like Jean Jacques Rousseau's "noble savage". In "Indios" from 3 May 1992, Montero writes that Native Americans "*Eran* naciones orgullosas, poseedoras de ricos y complejos conocimientos, de tradiciones remotas [*Were* proud nations, possessing rich and complex knowledge, from remote traditions]" (*La vida desnuda*, emphasis mine). The use of the past tense falls prey to the fallacy that these peoples only exist as groups in the past. Montero recognizes the influence of colonialism, writing that

Estados Unidos y Australia, en cambio, fueron países colonizados; los inmigrantes llegaban a miles ansiosos de plantar su propia granja, y era necesario matar a los antiguos habitantes para que los nuevos pudieran ser dueños de la tierra. [The US and Australia, on the other hand, were colonized countries; the immigrants arrived by the thousands anxious to establish their own farms, and it was necessary to kill the ancient inhabitants so that the new ones could take possession of the land] (*La vida desnuda* 226).

Montero does not intend to imply that colonialism was a good thing, using the "it was necessary" ironically, to decry the atrocities that the colonizers committed. However, there is a problematic element in this column: Montero's writing implies that all Indigenous cultural practices have vanished into the long distant past. She continues,

Canadá ofrece hoy el ejemplo más patético de este doble proceso: en el sur del país, donde se extienden las grandes llanuras cubiertas de cereales, zona agrícola por excelencia, las tribus autóctonas han sido *prácticamente exterminadas*. Los indios del norte de Canadá, en cambio, han sobrevivido: habitaban en los oscuros y

helados bosques, allí donde los granjeros no podían entrar, y fueron contratados (y explotados) como tramperos por la Hudson Bay y otras compañías peleteras. Vivían porque eran útiles. [Today Canada offers the most pathetic example of this double process: in the south of the country, where the great plains covered in grain spread out, a quintessential agricultural zone, the autochthonous tribes have been *practically exterminated*. The Indians⁴⁰ of the north of Canada, by contrast, have survived: they inhabit the dark and frozen forests, there where the farmers couldn't enter, and they were hired (and exploited) as trappers by the Hudson Bay and other fur companies. They lived because they were useful.] (La vida desnuda 226, emphasis mine)

The Uma, in *Temblor*, seem to draw principally on Montero's ideas surrounding Inuit groups, the First Nations in the north of the territory which Canada claims, which in some places she describes as the few groups who truly survive in the present day. The geography is vague and does not map onto 1990 Earth, when Rosa published *Temblor*, but situating the Uma in a remote northern location where they could have survived because they were unknown to the power-hungry leaders of Agua Fría's ancestors has parallels to Montero's descriptions in "Indios", published two years after *Temblor*. Montero has also visited the Inuit in the north of what are now Canada and Alaska, in the same year in which she published the "Indios" column. In "Todos somos esquimales [we are all Eskimos⁴¹]",

40 "indios" translates to Indians, though it is not the best term for the Inuit people who actually inhabit this area.

41 The term "Eskimo" is a slur and should be avoided, and Montero points out that it is the incorrect term in the column itself despite using it in the column's title. Inuit means "the people" and should be used to refer to Inuit languages and peoples. The singular is Inuk. ("Inuk, Inuit" <http://www.btb.termiumplus.gc.ca>)

which I cited earlier to talk about Montero's views regarding rapid technological development, she writes,

En 1992 estuve en el norte de Canadá, muy cerca del Polo, para hacer un reportaje sobre los inuits, mal llamados esquimales. Me fascinó ese pueblo de supervivientes, tenaz y creativo. Sobre todo me conmovió que hubieran sido capaces de pasar de la Edad del Bronce, en la que vivieron hasta después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, a nuestra sociedad hipertecnológica. Hablé con inuits que habían conocido los iglús de pequeños y que ahora estaban conectados a Internet en sus casas prefabricadas, *y ese viaje descomunal lo habían realizado en tan sólo 30 años*. Yo admiraba *su adaptabilidad y su inteligencia*, pero también me preguntaba por los precios que quizá estuvieran pagando, como la elevada tasa de alcoholismo o de suicidio, por ejemplo. [In 1992 I was in the north of Canada, close to the Pole, to do a report about the Inuit, badly called Eskimo. This town of survivors, tenacious and creative, fascinated me. Above all it moved me that they had been capable of passing from the Bronze Age, in which they lived until after the Second World War, to our hypertechnological society. I spoke with Inuit who had known igloos as children and that were now connected to the Internet in their prefabricated houses, and *they accomplished that enormous journey in only 30 years*. I admired *their adaptability and their intelligence*, but I also wondered about the prices they might be paying, like the elevated rate of alcoholism or suicide, for example.] (“Todos somos esquimales” *El País*, emphasis mine)

Montero's fascination with the Inuit seems primed by her preconceived notions about Indigenous peoples as portrayed in *Temblor* two years earlier. The Uma live in a cave.

They are a patriarchal society, a foil for the matriarchal hierarchy of Magenta. They are hunters and gatherers, whereas in Magenta the source of their food is not clear, but as it is an urban center, it would necessarily rely on agriculture.

The way indigenous peoples are portrayed inaccurately in the dominant Western imaginary as faded remnants of the past, rather than as vital inhabitants of our present world, has both real-world causes and implications. The colonialist narrative has a similar function to the portrayal of the Middle East as foundational postcolonial scholar Edward Said describes in his work, *Orientalism* (1978). Such narratives are a part of continued colonial practices. Despite the worst past and present colonial, exploitative, and assimilative efforts, there are still many Native peoples in the North American continent and in Australia who strongly object to being dismissed. Within the United States alone, there are five hundred and seventy-three “ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse” nations (<http://www.ncai.org/about-tribes>). These three countries are the sites of colonization which Montero mentions in “Indios” and which are the most likely sources of inspiration for the Uma in *Temblor*, though their home in a cave suggests some inspiration from the ancient inhabitants of Spain who left paintings like those in Altamira and other sites. In a 2008 speech, Wilma Mankiller, Cherokee activist, social worker, and first woman Chief of the Cherokee nation, stated, “This lack of accurate information leaves a void that is often filled with nonsensical stereotypes, which either vilify Indigenous Peoples as troubled descendants of savage peoples, or romanticize them as innocent children of nature, spiritual but incapable of higher thought” (*Cultural Survival*). Montero does not vilify Indigenous peoples in her journalism. Instead she condemns the colonizing forces which exploited them. However, she does fall into the second set of stereotypes which

Mankiller mentions: Montero portrays indigenous groups as passive victims of colonization who have now been stripped of all their former glory, including the memory thereof:

sus bisnietos, los *escasos* supervivientes que hoy quedan de aquella antigua gloria, *no son nadie*. Tan despojados están que *ni siquiera se recuerdan a sí mismos*. Son los desheredados de nuestra sociedad: viven en los márgenes. [their great-grandchildren, the *scant* survivors that today remain from that ancient glory, *are no one*. They are so dispossessed that they *do not even remember themselves*. They are the disinherited of our society: they live in the margins.] (“Indios” *La vida desnuda* 227, emphasis mine)

Here Montero portrays all the good parts of being Indigenous as past while she portrays the harmful effects of colonialism as the only remains of that past. It is an inaccurate generalization to say that Indigenous peoples have forgotten their own identities. Mankiller states, “One of the most common misperceptions about Indigenous Peoples is that they are all the same. There is not only great [economic and cultural] diversity among Indigenous Peoples, there is great diversity within each tribal community, just as there is in the larger society” (Mankiller). Montero’s portrayal of Indigenous peoples lacks nuance and suffers from a Eurocentric, colonialist perspective. She writes in her introduction to *El amor de mi vida* (2011) that

Conocemos la atrocidad de la esclavitud porque los nietos de aquellos negros cautivos se ocupan hoy de rememorar a sus mayores; pero *no queda nadie* para reivindicar la historia de los pueblos indígenas exterminados, para hablar por ellos de su heroicidad y su agonía. [We know the atrocity of slavery because the

grandchildren of those captive Black people busy themselves now with remembering their elders; but *no one remains* to revendicate the history of the exterminated indigenous peoples, to speak for them of their heroism and their agony.]" (*El amor de mi vida* 21, emphasis mine)

There are in fact many communities of Indigenous people who are working to pass their languages, memories, and cultures on to the next generation in the face of continuing colonial pressures and the Western conventional "knowledge" that situates these traditions in a far distant and long-lost past. It is unsurprising, given the ignorance of many members of dominant Western society and Montero's own writings on the subject, that Montero's fictional tribe of people, the Uma, falls into the stereotype of the noble yet "primitive"⁴² indigenous people who have ties to the land and who can be easily tricked. Montero "romanticize[s] them as innocent children of nature, spiritual but incapable of higher thought" (Mankiller). For example, Agua Fría is not honest with them, and the text explains her ability to get away with lying by emphasizing the Uma people's credulity:

En realidad, todo lo que [Agua Fría] les estaba diciendo era un engaño. Y, sin embargo, los Uma la creyeron. Así de *inocentes eran, así de nobles y de íntegros*. [In reality, everything which {Agua Fría} was telling them was a trick. And, nonetheless, the Uma believed her. They were *that innocent, that noble and full of integrity*.] (*Temblor* 242)

42 I question the binary of "primitive" vs "civilized" and remind the reader that these categories have been created by colonizing systems and societies which have vested financial interests, both historical and contemporary, in portraying the colonized as deserving of that fate. For example, Sarmiento's *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845) relies on this dichotomy.

Innocent, noble, and full of integrity, to the point that they cannot understand that Agua Fría would lie to them. Another example of the Uma's naivete is Urr, the person whom Oxígeno, the Gran Hermana, enslaves. She has electricity in her house, and Urr worships the electric lights: "cada vez que la estrambótica criatura encendía los soles, Urr se dejaba caer de bruces al suelo, enterraba su rostro en las baldosas y canturreaba *salvajes* salmodias. [Every time the bizarre creature lit the suns, Urr fell to the floor, burying his face in the tiles and crooning *savage/wild* psalms]" (*Temblor* 204, emphasis mine). The choice of the adjective "salvajes" to describe Urr's singing is additionally problematic, as the term "wild" or "savage" is often applied to native peoples to separate them from "civilized" peoples. These depictions are exactly the kind of stereotype that Mankiller pointed out in her speech. Montero's fictionalized representation of what she believes Indigenous peoples to be reads as a collection of stereotypes, a flattening and generalizing of the many living, heterogeneous Indigenous groups who have a wide variety of beliefs and practices. Regardless of Montero's intention, this adds to the cumulative impact of a literary and publishing landscape in which non-Indigenous authors writing about Indigenous peoples perpetuate stereotypical misrepresentations over and over again.

Montero also, to demonstrate the importance of a connection to nature, makes the Uma nature worshipers. This plays into the common tropes, dating back to Rousseau, of Indigenous people as naturally more attuned to nature. important to recognize the stereotype, rather than assuming all First Nations and Native peoples have an inherent, mystical understanding of all nature which takes no effort on their part. On the contrary, Wilma Mankiller states that

indigenous people have the benefit of being regularly reminded of their responsibilities to the land by stories and ceremonies. They remain close to the land, not only in the way they live, but in their hearts and in the way they view the world. Protecting the environment is not an intellectual exercise; it is a sacred duty. (Mankiller)

This is a much more complex spiritual relationship with the world than most Western portrayals would indicate. Combined with Urr's worship of the lightbulb, the description of the Uma's worship reads as reductive. However, it does contrast with the Magenta people's worship of the Crystal, that is, the nuclear residue. With Montero's concern about nuclear power and its dangers, having the Uma people worship things that actually sustain life does make sense, though it falls into a stereotype. Reading the Uma people as a foil for the Magenta people, we have two groups with two different cosmologies, whose respective objects of worship bring life and death. Neither group is described as ideal, but the Uma's relationship to the land is closer to Montero's ecological ethic. Nonetheless, the same goal could be achieved without reducing a wide variety of cultures and beliefs to a single set of stereotypes.

Like stereotypical representations of indigenous peoples, stereotypes about Islam and Muslims abound in Western cultures and infiltrate even liberal and leftist spaces. Montero objects strongly to hierarchical oppression and her experience interviewing the Ayatollah Khomeini in the seventies was a formative one for her. This may have influenced her view of Islam in general as well as of the Middle East. In Montero's introduction to *Nosotras*, her collection of women's biographies, she makes an impassioned plea for gender equality between women and men, a constant theme in her work. Her plea in

Nosotras falls into some Islamophobic tropes that have long permeated Western Feminism. I cited passages from this introduction in my analysis of *Bella y oscura*, because the sections that include Montero's personal experience navigating the world as a young girl resonate with her depiction of Baba's life in the Barrio. When it comes to generational sexism, I find that the instances outside of her own experience which Montero draws on in *Nosotras* make a less powerful statement than the fictional depiction of Baba's life. As I will explain here, this is due to the Islamophobic narratives which look at sexism in the Middle East as somehow worse than the sexism elsewhere in the world. For example, Montero problematically points to Muslim mothers whose daughters commit "*crímenes de honor* [honor crimes]" as complicit in their daughters' punishment and says that "a menudo es la madre quien prende la pira [often it is the mother who lights the pyre]" (*Nosotras* 19). Women worldwide can be and are often complicit in sexist and patriarchal systems. This reference relies on a Western Feminist perspective. Western-centric Feminism can easily fall into the trap of Islamophobia and racism as it pursues the goal of uplifting women around the globe. When Western Feminism focuses on the goal of "saving" women and girls without listening to and centering the priorities of women who inhabit majority Muslim countries, it often incorporates Islamophobic and orientalist talking points. Islamophobia has saturated the West since before 9/11 but has become more intense since then. In Islamophobic discourse, protecting Muslim and Middle Eastern women has been the justification for Islamophobic violence (Puar (2007) 173). It has also been deployed as an argument in favor of harmful colonialist interventions. Puar cites "Gayatri Spivak's famous dictum regarding the colonial project: 'white men saving brown women from brown men'" (Puar (2017) 98). Puar considers the way that western feminisms have

affected a state of being in which “present-day liberal feminist scholars ... have become the arbiters of other women’s modernity, or the modernity of the Other Woman. To reinvoké Spivak for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, then: white women saving brown women from brown men” (Puar (2017) 99). This is the context in which we live and the air we breathe. Islamophobic discourse saturates the media that surrounds us in much the same way anti-android discourse saturates Bruna Husky’s world in *Lágrimas en la lluvia*. Knowing Montero, I believe it was not her intention to perpetuate harm. Regardless, talking about honor killings in this way is a dog-whistle, a coded form of bigotry. In Western discourse, decrying “honor killings” and other violence against women as a phenomenon of Islam is a way to externalize gendered violence in the West. This type of speech is harmful to Muslims and Middle Easterners of all genders (Brief: “Honor Killings”). Thus, it is notable that when Montero continues her discussion on global sexism in *Nosotras*, it reads

Cada año les rebanan el clitoris a tres millones de menores; millones de mujeres carecen de los derechos más elementales, tienen que ir *veladas*, no pueden salir de casa sin la compañía de un varón y son privadas de la educación más básica (y a las que intentan escapar de esa brutalidad, les pegan un tiro en la cabeza, como a Malala). [Each year they slice the clitoris from three million minors; millions of women lack the most elemental rights, they must go *veiled*, they cannot leave home without the company of a man and they are deprived of the most basic education (and those who try to escape that brutality, they shoot in the heat, like Malala).] (*Nosotras* 18, emphasis mine)

While some of these issues are truly global, such as inequitable access to education which affects girls and women around the world, the framing implies heavily that the referent for these millions of oppressed women are not in fact all women, but a specific set of women. Montero begins by specifically decrying female genital mutilation (FGM), forced veiling of women, and when she mentions a lack of education, she cites Malala as a specific example. Veiling has become another common dog-whistle and “is usually cited as the most egregious example of Islamic fundamentalist misogyny” (Puar (2007) 59). Veiling is not the most violent of the things Montero cites, as she continues by condemning physical violence against women in the form of various forms of torture that women suffer, including being “quemadas vivas en los infames *crímenes de honor* por no querer casarse con el pretendiente elegido por la familia [burned alive in the infamous *honor crimes* for not wanting to marry their families’ chosen suitor]” (*Nosotras* 19, emphasis mine). When she calls for sanctions against those who commit such crimes, she doesn’t name any specific country or region, but she laments the fact that

la mujer siempre es moneda de cambio; si hay que hacer *un acuerdo momentáneo con los talibanes*, la comunidad internacional no vuelve a tocar el tema de la situación de las mujeres en la zona [the woman is always currency; if they have to make *a momentary accord with the Taliban*, the international community doesn’t touch the topic of women’s situation in the region.] (*Nosotras* 19, emphasis mine)

Between the reference to Pakistani Malala Yousafazi earlier in the paragraph and this reference to the Afghani Taliban, it seems that Montero’s intended recipients for economic sanctions would be countries in the Middle East. Despite its worldwide nature, violence against women is often externalized by Western countries which project it upon the Middle

East and spend their efforts attempting to save “those” women from “those” men (Puar (2017) 98-99). Often this replaces efforts to reduce domestic violence against women. For example, the United States Senate has failed to renew the Violence Against Women Act after it expired for the second time in February of 2019 (Rueb). One of the differences in sociopolitical setting is that the United States is framed as a majority Christian nation with a majority white population. Therefore, the USA does not receive the same kind of scrutiny within Western Feminist discourse as the Middle East does. All of this is to say that it is insufficient to point to oppression of women in the Middle East without clearly examining national and transnational issues and recognizing the agency of Middle Eastern women, who have their own organizations and their own priorities. Those priorities may or may not line up with what Western feminists find most abhorrent, but they should carry far more weight than the priorities of outside observers. Focusing on two axes of marginalization, those of gender and class, works better in *Bella y oscura* than in the introduction to *Nosotras*. In *Bella y oscura*, as described in the previous chapter, Montero is speaking to her own lived experience with generational sexism. In *Nosotras*, focusing on violence against women without considering the influence of racism and Islamophobia allows the argument to fall into an all-too-common set of misconceptions and stereotypes. In *Bella y oscura*, Baba’s narrative viewpoint as a young girl lends itself to a study of two axes of marginalization. There is only one person of color in the novel: as a Little Person whose body is “muy moreno y muy pequeño [very dark and very small],” Airelai’s experience is shaped by her non-normative body as well as her gender (*Bella y oscura* 168). Baba’s perspective allows the reader to see how gender and class affect the experience of those in the Barrio, though as a child Baba does not understand everything she observes.

As with Islamophobia, antisemitism is still widespread, and antisemitic canards make frequent appearance as dog-whistles in many settings. This happens to the point that many progressive people repeat the dog-whistles without understanding their significance and their potential for harm. In her 2017 column “Recordando el peligro,” which I cited in an earlier chapter, Montero calls out the harmful nature of saying that surely Trump would change his tune once in office. She says people said the same of Hitler, and as an aside, adds “(al principio incluso hubo millonarios judíos que le dieron dinero para detener el auge del marxismo) [at the beginning there were even Jewish millionaires who gave him money to detain the rise of Marxism]” (*El País* 4 Feb 2017). I could not find any evidence that this was indeed the case, though there were a small number of groups of German Jews who opted to try and appease Hitler’s government, unsuccessfully. The idea that there are Jewish millionaires who affect or even control global events is a long-held antisemitic talking point, dating back to the Middle Ages. Many such statements were collected in the first published volume of conspiracy theories, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1903. The trope of rich Jewish bankers or independently wealthy Jews who control the world is still prevalent. This is a concept which the dog-whistle “globalist” refers to (Zimmer). The Nazis themselves made use of this concept in their claims that Jews, capitalists, and communists were all united against Germany (Corrigan 4). In the third Bruna Husky novel, *Los tiempos del odio*, Bruna finally discovers the existence of a group which does in fact control the world. While the man who the novel gives as the originator of the order that controls the world is a historical figure who was not Jewish, he was a banker: Anton Fugger, based on the historical person of the same name (*Tiempos* 242). The idea of a banker who founded a secret order to control the world by hoarding power and resources

is an antisemitic trope. I say all this because I believe in the importance of awareness. At the same time, in Montero's case, she is also deliberately writing against capitalism and against the real problem that multinational monopolies pose. Her main villain is a man who has technologically extended his own life in order to accumulate more power and increase his own profit far beyond his needs. Ultimately, while I trust in Montero's good intentions, the impact of a story about a secret cabal of bankers who rule the world taps into a longstanding antisemitic conspiracy theory. This is almost certainly inadvertent, but it runs the risk of perpetuating antisemitic stereotypes.

Like Islamophobia and antisemitism, discrimination against mentally ill people is still quite prevalent. Within the Bruna Husky novels, Montero focuses on several characters with mental illnesses. Bruna herself deals with depression and traumatic stress. Yiannis also experiences depression and struggles to feel that his life matters. Bruna stops Yiannis from going through with his planned euthanasia at the end of the traumatic events they both experienced in *Lágrimas en la lluvia* (*Lágrimas* 472). The presence of visibly mentally ill people is important as it is often difficult to find fictional characters that experience mental illness. However, the portrayals of Yiannis' depression and of Ángela Gaio's neurodivergence fall short. As the text describes Yiannis's treatment for depression, the narration and Bruna's interactions with her friend cast doubt on his ability to think clearly. The text describes him as unstable and critiques both his illness and his use of medical treatments. Yiannis treats his depression with an automated pump:

Al *inestable* Yiannis, propenso a súbitos ataques de melancolía, le habían implantado una bomba de endorfinas junto a la amígdala cerebral, el último grito en la terapia contra la depresión, y cuando su equilibrio psíquico se desplomaba, la

bomba entraba en funcionamiento. [To the *unstable* Yiannis, inclined to sudden attacks of melancholy, they had implanted an endorphin pump next to his cerebral amygdala, the last word in depression treatments, and when his psychic equilibrium plunged, the pump started working.] (*Tiempos* 42)

The automation of the pump results in extreme mood fluctuations: “inundaba la amígdala con una sopa de beatitud química. El tratamiento conseguía sacarle del pozo de negrura, pero la bomba estaba mal regulada y a menudo Yiannis entraba en una fase de optimismo expansivo y pegajoso que Bruna aborrecía. [it bathed the amygdala with a soup of chemical beatitude. The treatment succeeded in getting him out of the well of darkness, but the pump was poorly regulated and often Yiannis entered into a phase of expansive and clingy optimism which Bruna loathed]” (*Peso* 32). Yiannis’s portrayal, particularly his mood swings, seems to stem from a stereotypical representation of bipolar disorder rather than a good representation of depression. His medication is miscalibrated and the pump poorly regulated. This could be caused by an inaccurate diagnosis, or to the unavailability of a more appropriate treatment. Whether a better treatment does not exist or whether it is out of reach for Yiannis’s budget and health insurance is a question that the text does not address. In her essay on David Owen’s *The Hubris Syndrome: Bush, Blair and the Intoxication of Power* (2007), collected in *El amor de mi vida*, Montero responds to Owen’s analysis of hubris and its manifestation in those leaders of the US and the UK. Conflating this with mental illness, Montero adds, “¡Arriba el ánimo, *enfermos bipolares*, que podéis ser presidentes de los Estados Unidos! [Cheer up, *bipolar patients/invalids*, you can be the president of the United States!]” (*El amor de mi vida* 53, emphasis mine). Mental illness is often cited as a potential cause of harmful actions, including violent crimes. Because of the

stigma surrounding mental illness, the post-Guerra Civil regime deployed mental illness as one justification for both the imprisonment of political prisoners and the poor conditions they faced within prison. Michael Richards notes in his article “Morality and Biology in the Spanish Civil War: Psychiatrists, Revolution, and Women Prisoners in Málaga” that

Other ‘anomalies’ of the family, such as ‘pauperism’, emigration, illegitimacy, economic crises and mental illness, were minutely annotated... Using these data, the roots of the lamentable conditions from which the fifty Málaga women prisoners were said to be suffering would be ‘established’ as hereditary and ‘genetic’. (Richards 415)

Stereotypes about mentally ill people are also often weaponized against people who commit violent crimes, which reifies harmful, ableist stereotypes. Yiannis’s portrayal as a mentally ill person whose medication has unintended side effects is not precisely inaccurate, but it feels incomplete. In the world as it is now, many people must try multiple medications before finding one that works for their particular brain chemistry. In a century from now, when the Bruna Husky series is set, if such pumps become available, I would expect them to need customization involving at least several months of trial and error for each new patient. If Yiannis has that kind of psychiatric care, Bruna’s perspective does not show it, and her treatment of her friend is influenced by her bias against his mental illness and the medication he uses. When Yiannis helps Bruna investigate a clue further, he calls her with an update. Skeptical of his actual ability to help, Bruna asks, “No estarás demasiado alterado con la cosa esa que llevas en la amígdala, ¿verdad? [You’re not too disturbed/altered with that thing in your amygdala, right?]” (*Peso* 291-292). This kind of question can be extremely hurtful, especially from a loved one. Before Bruna will take him

seriously, Yiannis must protest that he is thinking clearly: “Anoche desconecté la bomba. Me di cuenta de que no conseguía pensar bien con toda esa droga en mi cabeza. [Last night I disconnected the pump. I realized I wasn’t thinking well with all that drug in my head]” (*Peso* 292). Yiannis’s claim that the drug was impeding his ability to think clearly indicates to me that the prescription is not functioning well and that Yiannis would benefit from a different dosage or a different prescription. Often, medications are what enable mentally ill people to experience a better fit than they otherwise would in the abled world, but there is stigma against using them. In Yiannis’s case, his medication changes the way Bruna sees him. When he reconnects the pump, Bruna reads his actions as less than natural, as too much. He appears happy and she thinks his expression is “Demasiado dichosa, de hecho. Había vuelto a conectar la bomba de endorfinas y tenía todo el aspecto de estar en un subidón. La rep le miró con recelo. [Too happy, in fact. He had reconnected the endorphin pump and had every aspect of being on a high. The rep looked at him with mistrust]” (*Peso* 365). Her gaze is suspicious, and the text seems to justify her suspicion that Yiannis is “too happy.” Such misfittings can occur in close relationships like this as well as in larger social settings. The way that Bruna and the narrator describe Yiannis and his medication recalls the social stigma and stereotypes which surround mental illness and its treatment.

Bruna’s interactions with Ángela Gayo show a different kind of misfitting and a different set of stereotypes. She meets Ángela during her search for Lizard in *Los tiempos del odio*. Ángela is neurodivergent, a term which refers to autistic people, those with ADHD, and to people whose minds function differently than the norm. Ángela’s neurodivergence is a stereotypical one. She is portrayed as a savant. Savant syndrome is present in about ten percent of autistics (Treffert), but stereotypically, autistic people are

all assumed to be savants (Brown). Autism is generally portrayed in this way in fiction. While many neurodivergent people have special interests and hone their skills in one or more areas, the outdated stereotype of the so-called “idiot⁴³ savant” is overrepresented in fictional portrayals such as the film *Rain Man* (1988), which popularized the stereotype. Ángela is depicted as a savant, whose abilities allow her to solve difficult mathematical problems. Within the text, she is capable of visualizing her own mind:

La veía como una inmensa construcción geométrica, un poliedro con miles de caras de fulgurantes colores que giraba a toda velocidad dentro de la oscuridad de su cráneo. Y en cada ángulo había un número, un signo, una fórmula, por eso se le daban tan bien las matemáticas, porque lo único que tenía que hacer era contemplar su mente y las soluciones se encendían por sí solas. [She saw it like an immense geometric construction, a polyhedron with thousands of faces of flashing colors that whirled at full speed within the darkness of her skull. And on each angle there was a number, a sign, a formula, that’s why she was so good at mathematics, because the only thing she had to do was contemplate her mind and the solutions lit up by themselves.] (*Tiempos* 14)

This type of neurodivergence as portrayed in fiction more often than not falls into the “super crip” trope, in which a disability turns out to be a secret superpower. Kathryn Allan writes that “By classifying disability as a condition that creates superhumans or ‘super crips,’ S[cience] F[iction] writers contribute to a culture that sets up people with disabilities with unrealistic standards, and then condemns them when they cannot or do not want to

43 The term idiot was a diagnosis for a person with a low IQ and is now used as an insult. It and other terms which deprecate people of low intelligence are ableist.

meet them” (Allan). Neurodivergent people in real life may have extraordinary abilities, but not *superhuman* abilities. Expecting superhuman abilities from neurodivergent and biodivergent people is a way of de-humanizing those people. Montero writes Ángela’s character as someone who struggles with self-harm, with relationships and interpersonal boundaries, and with her sense of self-worth, and also as an extremely intelligent woman whose skills as a consultant are highly sought after:

Ángela necesitaba que la quisieran a ella, a ella toda, a ella de verdad, no a los mañosos retoques que pudiera hacerle en el rostro los cirujanos plásticos. Necesitaba probarse que era digna de ser amada. [Ángela needed that people should love her, all of her, the true her, not the tricky touch-ups that the plastic surgeons could make to her face.] (*Tiempos* 12)

Her attempts to prove to herself that she is worthy of love put her in Bruna’s path. When Bruna is annoyed and depressed, she thinks of the other woman as “la chiflada de Ángela [the crazy Ángela]” (*Tiempos* 131). Ángela’s misfitting resides in her difficulty with relationships and the manner in which she self-harms. Her struggle to find someone who loves her for who she is and her tendency to fixate and obsess about someone who doesn’t love her is a human struggle, taken to an extreme. It also resides in the expectations of the society in which she lives and the people with whom she interacts. Bruna learns to feel affection for Ángela, but it takes time until she sees Ángela as a whole person:

A medida que hablaba, Gayo iba ganando seguridad y elevando el tono de voz. La tecno la miró, *atónita*, y recordó que la doctora del CRGM había comentado que Ángela era una profesional muy cotizada. Husky sintió un pellizco de culpabilidad: no había tratado nada bien a esa chiflada. [While she talked, Gayo gained

confidence and raised her tone of voice. The techno looked at her, *astonished*, and remembered that the doctor from CRGM had mentioned that Ángela was a sought-after professional. Husky felt a pinch of guilt: she had not treated this crazy well at all.]” (*Tiempos* 157)

She does realize that her treatment of Ángela is unkind, but her interactions with Ángela do not improve quickly. Her guilt is not a good substitute for improved behavior. When Ángela offers to pay for a spacecraft that will aid in Bruna’s investigation, she insists “De verdad que tengo mucho dinero. Siempre me han pagado muy bien. Soy buena en mi trabajo. [I really do have a lot of money. They have always paid me very well. I am good at my job]” (*Tiempos* 160). Her economic privilege helps mitigate some of the ableist treatment that she experiences. She can, for example, afford the care a private clinic provides. After Ángela makes the offer, Bruna “se sentía tan llena de gratitud con la increíble generosidad de Ángela que ya no le molestaba tanto su mirada fija y su arrobado silencio. [felt so full of gratitude for Ángela’s incredible generosity that she wasn’t so bothered by her fixed gaze and her entranced silence]” (*Tiempos* 160). Ángela’s fixed gaze and her tendency for silence, and the way that Bruna perceives them, create a kind of misfit in their relationship. Ángela’s strangeness bumps up against Bruna’s perspective and expectations of normality. One of Ángela’s most powerful statements to Bruna speaks to her own identity and external perceptions:

Sé que piensas que soy una loca. Locos, nos dicen. Nos encierran en habitaciones blancas, nos medican, nos temen, nos desprecian, nos ignoran. Como si llamarnos locos fuera una categoría taxonómica. Como si nos dijeran: coleópteros, crustáceos. Bichos raros definidos por nuestra locura. Y no es así. No es así. Somos muchas

más cosas. Somos seres que sufren. Somos humanos. Tú deberías saber de eso, Bruna. [I know you think I'm crazy. Crazies, they call us. They lock us up in white rooms, they medicate us, they fear us, they despise us, they ignore us. As if calling us crazy were a taxonomic category. As if they called us coleoptera, crustacean. Weird creatures defined by our craziness. And it is not like that. It is not like that. We are many more things. We are beings who suffer. We are human. You should know about that, Bruna.] (*Tiempos* 250)

While her poignant speech allows Ángela to speak about the oppression that mentally ill people face, it also includes medication as one of the acts of oppression, on par with institutionalization. Medication may not be the correct treatment for every condition. However, when practiced with consent of the patient, it can save lives and improve the quality of life, and denying people access to medicinal treatment along with other therapeutic methods would be abusive. Ángela's speech affects Bruna, but shortly afterwards, she dies saving Bruna's life. Her death cuts any possible relationship short (*Tiempos* 377). Her self-sacrifice allows Bruna to survive, rescue Paul Lizard, and live. Ángela also helps Yiannis develop the technology that later allows Bruna's memories to transfer to a new body and continue living (*Tiempos* 257). Effectively, Ángela saves Bruna's life not once but twice. In a world of inequitably distributed resources and the toll that takes on people's lives, Ángela and Yiannis's invention has the potential to extend people's lives. However, Ángela herself dies immediately and does not benefit from the invention she greatly contributed to. Her death scene was the most painful for me to read in all of Montero's SF novels. Seeing a neurodivergent woman's life cut short is a pain that I find it difficult to put into words.

While Ángela's death was the most personally affective to me, other aspects of Montero's writing would impact different readers more painfully. For example, in her column "Odio" from 28 Sept 1991, in which she decries the evil of racism, Montero writes that

Desdeñamos a los *moros* y a los negros, pero sobre todo padecemos esa mala fiebre del entendimiento que es la violencia contra los gitanos [we disdain the *moros* {Muslims and/or Maghrebi} but above all we suffer that evil fever of understanding which is violence against the Roma people.] (*La vida desnuda* 156, italics original)

Montero's assertion that the anti-Roma discrimination is the *worst* racism in Spain might be a difficult one to sustain. Racism has different material effects on different bodies and in different contexts. In her column "Malentendidos" from 22 Dec 1991, Montero writes of a previous satirical column, whose title and date she does not mention, but which led to what she terms a misunderstanding:

Dije que a los negros, si se ponían mañosos, había que encadenarlos y azotarlos como en los buenos tiempos, y otras barbaridades semejantes ... que, por supuesto, *nadie* podía tomarse al pie de la letra. ... Poco después de publicar el artículo, me llegó la carta de un hombre que decía ser negro, inmigrante y guineano. Había leído de manera literal y completamente en serio mi artículo *atroz* y, pese a ello, su tono no era indignado, sino apesadumbrado. ... *Entendemos las cosas desde lo que somos*: desde nuestras necesidades, nuestros miedos, nuestras obsesiones. *Estremece imaginar* desde qué realidad leyó aquel hombre mi *desenfrenado artículo* sobre los negros para llegar a interpretarlo al pie de la letra. Cómo sería su vida, de qué *infiernos* venía para creer que esa *sarta de infames disparates* iba en

serio. [I said that the blacks, if they got difficult, should be chained and whipped as in the good old days, and other similar atrocities... that of course, *no one* could take seriously ... Shortly after the article's publication, I received a letter from a man who stated that he was a black Guinean immigrant. He had read my *atrocious* article seriously and completely literally, and, despite this, his tone was not indignant but sorrowful. ... *We understand things according to what we are:* from our needs, our fears, our obsessions. *It makes one shudder to imagine* from what reality that man read my *wild article* about black people to arrive at such a literal interpretation. How must his life be, from what *hells* did he come to believe that *string of vile absurdities* was serious.] (*La vida desnuda* 135-136, emphasis mine)

Montero's writing here states that no one could have thought she was serious in her writing. Those who know her can trust her good intentions because they understand her progressive values. I trust Montero's intentions to be good, and I have no doubt that the "Malentendidos" column is a good faith effort to own the way that her original column impacted the man who wrote to her. However, Montero's words in the above quote from this column as well as the title "Malentendidos" imply that the *reader* has experienced a failure of understanding. I read the failure of communication as what J. L. Austin terms an "infelicity," specifically a "misfire" in which the hearer reader does not understand the meaning of the speech act because of a misunderstanding of tone or context (Austin 18). This type of failure to communicate can be more common in written communication, because without the spoken and visual cues that a person might grasp in face-to-face verbal communication, the tone of written language can be difficult to read. What one person may say satirically, another may say in total seriousness, and the main difference would be the

context and the tone. If one does not have that context and “met” Montero for the first time via the satirical column, it could be difficult to recognize the satire as satire. One of the dangers of satire, in my opinion, is that people will believe it is serious. Jonathan Swift ran that risk when he published his essay “A Modest Proposal” in 1729, advocating satirically for cannibalism as a solution to the famine in Ireland. His suggestion was meant to shock his audience into taking the famine seriously and finding a real solution. I believe Montero likely had a similar goal with her satire. However, a difficulty with the phrases that Montero employed satirically is that while for her they comprised an atrocious, outrageous “sarta de infames disparates [string of vile absurdities],” and they are certainly terrible things for anyone to say seriously, but they are not phrases that would be unheard of in Black readers’ experience. Within the United States since 1 January 2015, police have shot and murdered 1,252 Black people (“A Decade of Watching Black People Die”). That number does not include George Floyd, who was murdered by a police officer who choked him to death, or any of the people who police murdered by means other than a bullet from a gun. Nor does it include Ahmaud Arbery, whose murder was not committed by police but by whose murderers were not arrested until the video of his death went viral (Fausset). The cumulative effect of the violence against Black people within the United States alone takes a severe toll on the health and well-being of Black inhabitants of my own country, and systemic racist violence worldwide would have a similar effect on people such as the reader who wrote to Montero after the column which she intended to be satirical. In her response to his letter, Montero expresses sympathy for him: she writes that the letter writer’s situation must be truly hellish for him to have taken her column literally, beyond imagination. While it is true that he inhabits a different reality than white people, it is not

an unimaginable reality nor even an unusual one. He lives as a Black man in the world. Black people have been writing about this type of verbal abuse that Montero writes as satire as part of their everyday experience for quite some time. While this type of discrimination may well seem extreme and beyond the norm for white readers, who have not been at the receiving end of this kind of bigotry, it would be different for Black readers. The forms and impact of racism are often invisible to those who do not experience it unless we learn how to pay attention to it. This is like the way that classism is invisible to financially privileged people, as Montero describes in *Bella y oscura*. Often, the ways in which racism impacts marginalized bodies becomes individualized and places the blame for the harm on those who live with marginalized bodies, rather on harmful and discriminatory systems. Referring to healthcare inequalities which combine racism and classism, Loyd writes, “As Foucault suggests, individualization, or the reification of biosocial relations into singular bodies, is perhaps the greatest power of health discourses” (Loyd 16). Treating the harm that impacts a marginalized body as a symptom of that body only rather than as a manifestation of a larger systemic problem changes the way people seek solutions. Unless we learn to see racist violence for what it is—real, systemic, and continual, not unimaginable or a hellish thing of the past—we cannot overcome it. The same can be said of systemic ableism and discrimination against LGBTQIA folks.

When I began my study of Montero’s Speculative Fiction, I did not expect to be writing the conclusion during a crisis that would not be out of place in one of her novels. I first became interested in Montero’s SF work in 2013, and at that time the dystopian settings I was familiar with were inside works of fiction. Now, as I write this conclusion, I am aware of a far different sociopolitical climate than when I began it. Currently, as a

friend well-versed in public health summed up, “we are all facing, in one way or another: COVID-19. Civil unrest. Wildfire season. Hurricane season. Climate change. Looming global economic insecurity. All of which will inter-operate in various ways (JohnsTon). While the current landscape begins to resemble the grimmest of Montero’s fictional settings, the strategies her characters use to survive and connect during crises may be vital to our present day as well. As Montero’s characters interact with each other in each novel, they build personal relationships, often in alternative ways to what society expects of them. I read the non-normative modes of establishing social relationships as the main cause for hope within Montero’s dystopian narratives. These relationships and alternative modes of being offer, if not a complete remedy, at least a set of survival strategies for the problems Montero describes in her texts. Her journalism calls attention to societal problems throughout her columns, and I see this as a key part of the collective actions we must take if we are to prevent the settings she creates in her fictional futures from taking complete form in real life. Despite its shortcomings, Montero’s SF work has pushed me to think beyond my own perspectives in the years that I have been engaged in analyzing her writing. In fact, I believe her SF work has played a role in shaping the person I am today. I also believe that a study of these novels is a necessary part of an academic understanding of the SF genre in Spain today. There is a significant amount of work left to do in SF studies and this dissertation is my effort to begin my contribution to that field.

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