

Rosario Ferre's "La muñeca menor": Fantastic Gendered Space

The 'FANTASTIC' derives from the Latin, *panstasticus*, which is from the Greek φανταζω, meaning to make visible or manifest.
Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*

By Angela Martín

Emulating the mythical Pandora opening her box, the acclaimed Puerto Rican writer Rosario Ferré publishes her first collection of short stories entitled Papeles de Pandora (1976) opening the feminist debate in Latin America on gender stratified private space. In this collection, Ferré creates discursive spatial representations in which the feminine main characters rebel against the hegemonic social roles and identities allotted them. This paper investigates the story "La muñeca menor" exploring how, within a well-defined narrative structure, Ferré crystallizes gender relations in the private space through her use of the fantastic mode, the Double, and figurative language to reveal how woman's cultural identity is a learned behavioral pattern established by the dominant power. The author lexically constructs this private space manipulating the use of the masculine and the feminine gender quality of Spanish nouns, thus exposing the intention of converting women into automatons or decorative dolls.

Emulating the mythical Pandora opening her box, the acclaimed Puerto Rican writer Rosario Ferré published her first book in 1976, a collection of short stories entitled Papeles de Pandora.¹ Ferré's text begins with a concise epigraph, a summary of the Greek myth about Pandora the first woman on earth, created by Zeus. The king of the gods gave Pandora a box containing all the blessings and evils bestowed upon mankind. Pandora opened that box letting the good and bad of life escape, spreading its contents throughout the world. However, Pandora trapped hope as she hurriedly closed the lid. There are two ways of regarding this fact: the first is that hope cannot exist in the world because it is not accessible, and the second implication is that Pandora knows that she, as a figure that represents all women, can always access the hope she trapped. Ferré uses the figure of Pandora in the title of her book joining it with the various meanings of the word *papeles* to suggest multi-layered interpretations of the short stories within.

*Papeles*² signifies paper but another of its definitions is the dramatic roles given to actors to represent, and yet another meaning are the functions or roles that people perform in life. Ferré toys with the ambiguity of this word implying that *papeles de Pandora* are the

social roles assigned to women by patriarchal hegemony. In light of this meaning, the short stories of Papeles de Pandora, represent women's status in the Puerto Rican society. Ferré's cutting-edge work is one of the first in Spanish-speaking countries that enters into a feminist debate about the perpetuation of gender social stratification. Ferré's play on words becomes one of the characteristics fundamental to her writing.

This characteristic can be observed with yet another signification of the word *papeles* which is manuscript, and I propose that the title of this collection be literally translated as Pandora's Manuscripts. This interpretation insinuates that Pandora herself has written the collection of tales, and in this manner, the author suggests an overall theme of woman as a creator or writer that parallels each short story's theme or meaning. This feminist stance cements the distinct interpretations together implying that there is still hope that women can stimulate the change necessary to control their roles in society.

However, if readers expect to find that hope for change in "La muñeca menor," the story does not offer much. Only a thoughtful reexamination of the tale's construction and a consideration of the implied reader's interaction, complete that expectation of fulfillment that hope denotes. The concept of the implied reader corresponds to the German thinker Wolfgang Iser. In his book The Act of Reading : A Theory of Aesthetic Response (1978), Iser identifies the implied reader as "a transcendental model which makes it possible for the structured effects of literary texts to be described. It denotes the role of the reader, which is definable in terms of textual structure and structured acts."(38).

Iser's implied reader is the ideal reader a writer conceptualizes when creating a narration, structuring the text so s/he can interpret its meaning. Iser explains this process writing that: "the structure of the text sets off a sequence of mental images, which lead to the text translating itself into the reader's consciousness" (38). The implied reader is a critic's tool to materialize the invisible, how Ferré structures her text to make what is not in print known and, it is a manner of describing a narrative's "cause and effect." As we will see in the analysis of the short story "La muñeca menor," the reader takes on even more importance because the tale is of the fantastic literary mode³ which relies heavily on the interaction of the text and its receptor.

The word fantastic, can be traced back to its Greek meaning of making visible or manifest as expressed in Rosemary Jackson's quote that opens this paper. In her book Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, Jackson reverts to the etymological analysis of the word in order to support her consideration of fantastic literature as a subversive mode of overturning "'normal' perceptions and undermine[ing] 'realistic' ways of seeing," questioning what is not seen nor said, manifesting the invisible (48-49). I agree with Jackson's identification of the fantastic as a subversive mode of revealing the unseen or unsaid, discovering the many different perspectives of reality.

In one of the most extensive investigations of this literary classification, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre (1973), the social scientist and literary critic Tzvetan Todorov identifies one of the thematic categories of the fantastic as the "self." The fantastic Double is the manifestation of multiple selves that make up the subject. This literary device erases boundaries between subject and object revealing silenced desires. Ferré's fantastic Doubles converge in her stories, to represent the different perspective of the reality of woman as subject and woman as object.

This paper explores Ferré's skillful utilization of both the fantastic and the Double as a literary device, to uncover the patriarchal domination of the private space adjudicated to women: the home. The author toys with figurative language to introduce the uncanny, and lexically constructs the private space of home by confronting the feminine and the masculine gender quality of Spanish nouns in a struggle to dominate that space. In this manner, Ferré makes evident patriarchy's intention of converting women into automatons or decorative dolls.

The title of this paper reflects the three structural elements intertwined by Ferré in "La muñeca menor," the fantastic literary mode and its Double, gender, and space. These three factors are abstract in nature and theorists continue to attempt to make clear their varied interpretations or meanings and connotations. One fact truly stands out: more than thirty years ago Ferré used the combination of all three components when writing stories that describe social interrelationships still under scrutiny today. But, before analyzing the author's use of these structural elements, a short summary of the story is obligatory for those of whom it is not familiar.

Ferré's "La muñeca menor" narrates the story of a beautiful woman from an impoverished sugarcane aristocratic family, who is bitten by "una chágara viciosa" (MM 1)⁴ while swimming in a river. The prawn lodges in the woman's leg causing an open seeping wound, which becomes a permanent disability. In light of her handicap that ultimately confines her to a chair, the woman decides not to marry dedicating her life to taking care of her sister's nine daughters. The aunt makes dolls for her nieces, at first, rag dolls but as she refines her art, she creates exact replicas of each child once a year. The last doll the aunt makes of each niece is very special for it is filled with honey. On their wedding day, the aunt gives the marrying niece her doll with the mysterious words, "Aquí tienes tu Pascua de Resurrección" (5).⁵

With these mystifying words ringing in the implied reader's ears, the narrator reveals that instead of curing the aunt's open sore, her attending doctor prolongs its poor state in order to receive a steady income to cover the costs of his son's medical studies. When the doctor's young son and the aunt's youngest niece decide to marry, her last doll is even more special because the aunt embeds the diamonds from her teardrop earrings in the doll's eyes. As custom dictates, the doll is seated on top of the piano for display in the couple's new home in town. Gradually, the young woman discovers that her husband is only interested in displaying her on the balcony so that "los que pasaban por la calle supiesen que él se había casado en sociedad" (MM 6).⁶

The young wife confirms that her husband is soulless when she learns that "le sacó los ojos a la muñeca con la punta del bisturí y los empeñó por un lujoso reloj de cebolla con una larga leontina" (MM 7).⁷ However, before the husband can sell the doll's exquisite porcelain hands and face, the doll disappears. The young woman explains to her husband that the ants probably discovered the doll's honey filling and they must have dragged it down into their nest to feast on it. As years pass, the doctor becomes a millionaire because the town people pay his outrageous fees in order to "ver de cerca a un miembro legítimo de la extinta aristocracia cañera" (MM 7).⁸ However, when the husband realizes that his wife does not age, he steals into her bedroom at night. Observing that she is not breathing, the doctor poises his stethoscope over her chest and the wife's eyelids open to show empty cavities from which "las antenas furibundas de las chágaras" come out (MM 8).⁹ The story

ends on this fantastic note, resolving the implied reader's hesitance to consider the tale as real or marvelous.

The story's last paragraph contains the climax that dictates the narrative's classification as fantastic: it dissipates the tension maintained by the implied reader's hesitation about her/his perception of the tale's reality. In his study, Todorov bases his concept of the fantastic on the implied reader's hesitation:

The fantastic, we have seen, lasts only as long as a certain hesitation: a hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from 'reality' as it exists in the common opinion. At the story's end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic.
(41)

The implied reader's interaction with the text creates the fantastic. The author's interweaves an uncanny or strange event into the text that elicits an emotional response from the reader: a hesitation about the real nature of what is happening. The principal cause of the implied reader's doubts is the uncanny that is the key to the fantastic.

Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis, wrote a treatise explaining psychological reactions, perceptions, and repressed emotions that tend to incite fear when one is confronted with "The Uncanny" (1919). The psychoanalyst writes that "the 'uncanny' is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (76). In Ferré's story, the doll represents a very familiar object associated with childhood innocence. The uncanny is the doll, a replica of the adult character, which no longer strikes that familiar chord in the reader. The implied reader's uneasiness is heightened by the story's descriptive language and its progressive parallelism between the girl's and the doll's behavior. It is uncanny that either the doll possesses the girl, or the girl becomes the doll.

Freud first explains the disturbing effects of the uncanny on people, and then addresses the narrative uncanny from the author's point of view. Freud writes that "it is a much more fertile province than the uncanny in real life, for it contains the whole of the

latter and something more besides” (97). Freud points out that the story-teller can represent reality or depart from it in any way s/he fancies by increasing the effect of the uncanny. The writer can set the mood by adding real familiar details complying uncanny functions from the very start or maintain the implied reader in the dark by withholding information until the very end (98). The uncanny is a tool in a writer’s box of tricks, a building-block that heightens the plot’s tension. The uncanny intensifies the reader’s doubts about the text, making them oscillate like a pendulum between what is real or what is supernatural, bringing the short story to a climax, often reached in the last sentence.

In connection to Freud’s words on reaching a climax at the end of a story, Todorov similarly cites Edgar Allan Poe’s theory of plot in fantastic narrative, saying that “For Poe, the tale is characterized by the existence of a single effect, located at the end, and by the obligation all the elements within the tale are under to contribute to this effect” (87). Authors and scholars all point out that in fantastic literature, the entire text is geared to that final resolution at the end of the story. But, the element throughout the tale that contributes to the climax is the uncanny; it plays with the receptor’s emotions as if the author is challenging the implied reader to a game.

The celebrated writer Italo Calvino comments on the fantastic’s ludic characteristic, pointing out that “During the twentieth century, intellectual (no longer emotional) fantasy has become uppermost; play, irony, the winking eye, and also a meditation on the hidden desires and nightmares of contemporary man” (134). Ferré’s fantastic texts ironically express the unspoken desires and nightmares of women. In her essay “De la ira a la ironía, o sobre cómo atemplan el acero candente del discurso,”¹⁰ the author confesses that she started to write the narratives in a very belligerent hostile tone, particularly the six that make use of the literary Double:¹¹ “Papeles [Papeles de Pandora] sin embargo, a pesar de estar escrito en carne viva, contiene ya la promesa del disimulo irónico. El juego del sin querer queriendo, del gesto del prestidigitador que oculta lo que necesita desesperadamente revelar, están presentes en cuentos como ‘La muñeca menor’” (194).¹² Ferré writes about how her creative experience mitigates her aggressive anger incited by centuries of injustice committed against women. Writing transforms Ferré’s sentiments

into softer sarcastic words that subversively take on “the gesture of ironic pretense,” that playful tone described by Calvino.

Both Ferré and Calvino consider the fantastic narrative an intellectual game, a challenge to the implied reader to penetrate the surface of words. The Italian writer views the reader’s attempt to rationalize the events of the narrative, as a response to the author’s invitation to play. The reader enters into a mental competition that lies “in the unraveling of a logic with rules or points of departure or solutions that keep some surprises up their sleeves” (134). Ferré’s fantastic narratives, much like those of Italo Calvino, are intellectual language puzzles.

The title of the story, “La muñeca menor,” sets the stage for comprehending Ferré’s adept play on and with words. In Spanish this title is ambiguous because there are various interpretations of the word *menor*.¹³ As an adjective, *menor* indicates lesser or least in size or importance, but at the same time, another definition of the word connotes age, signifying younger or youngest. Interestingly, *menor* is a word with a double use: it can be used both as a comparative and as a superlative adjective. The author uses the superlative because in this case more than two dolls exist. The implied reader is confronted with the two interpretations of the adjective.

“La muñeca menor” can be understood as the youngest of the dolls or the smallest doll, that of least importance. Although these last two interpretations would more appropriately describe an object, the last doll the aunt makes is perhaps the most important because of its diamond eyes and the full set of the youngest girl’s baby teeth! Thus, *menor* indicates youngest which uncannily infers that the doll has human qualities thereby foreshadowing the metamorphosis of the story’s feminist protagonist. This playful creativity with words carries over into Ferré’s English self-translations.

The title of the story and the book in English is “The Youngest Doll,” a repetition of the uncanny adjective in Spanish. The implied reader in English follows a slightly different path of association which rests on the dichotomy “young/old,” but the result is the same. “Oldest” could properly describe a doll indicating a time lapse in the period in which one retains an object in possession. On the other hand, the opposite of a description of an

object as “oldest”, would have to be “newest” but never “youngest.” Ferré employs “youngest” to fulfill the same objective in English as in Spanish: it gives the doll a human quality implicating the uncanny in the text.

The uncanny is inferred through Ferré’s descriptive language use, which in turn, must be interpreted by the implied reader who arrives at a meaning by association, and not symbolic translation. Not quite metonymical¹⁴ which is more straightforward, Ferré’s implied reader experiences the different meanings inferred through association, as explained in connection to the adjective used in the title of the story. The unfamiliar or uncanny sensations aroused by this associative reasoning, heighten but do not resolve the implied reader’s state of uncertainty.

This state of uncertainty is magnified by Ferré’s use of simile. The contrasts represented by the comparisons that associate uncanny images conjured by Ferré descriptive language, maintain the tension of the reader. For example, Ferré writes that when making a doll, the aunt makes a mold of the niece’s face in the following manner: “Luego le hacía una mascarilla de cera que cubría de yeso por ambos lados como una cara viva dentro de dos caras muertas” (MM 4).¹⁵ The author’s choice of words, playing with the dichotomy dead/alive, uncannily hints that the aunt’s creation is alive, trapped within a dead matrix used to cast the face of the doll. Ferré’s figurative language suggests that just as the wax is poured in between two “dead masks”, woman must conform to the mold or pattern into which she is socially inserted. Woman’s social position in the domestic space masks a stagnant dead-end situation if she accepts it as the norm. In Ferré’s tale, the aunt had been trapped by the doctor and his son, poured into her role to which she seemingly accepts with apparent conformity.

However, the aunt’s conformity does not match her portrayed creative role. All fundamental fictions of the creation of man have always depicted a masculine figure in the role of the creator. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Eve is created by God always depicted as a male figure. In Greek myths, Pandora was put on earth by a male Zeus. Women were not regarded as creators of life but rather as a reproductive instrument. Therefore, it is

strange that the aunt, a conformist who never rebels against the manipulation suffered at the hands of the doctors, be cast in the role of a creator.

But, the implied reader must go back and reread in order to understand the aunt's free spirit that could only be controlled by physically disabling her. In the story's first paragraph the aunt swims in the river. The tale reads: "La cabeza metida en el reverbero negro de las rocas, había creído escuchar, revolcados con el sonido del agua, los estallidos del salitre sobre la playa y pensó que sus cabellos habían llegado por fin a desembocar en el mar" (MM 1)¹⁶. The idea of her hair pouring out into the ocean and mingling with the waves' salty foam is a liberating sensation of being released into the immensity suggesting a freedom of movement.

Ferré's poetic language suggests women's freedom and independence to decide her own future, which is not the behavioral norm patriarchy assigns to women. The aunt's behavior must be controlled before it gets out of hand. The character is halted by the *chágara's* bite, and castigated by the patriarchal masculine character of the doctor. It is this male figure who instead of curing her wound, nurtures the parasitic-controlling *chágara* embedded in the aunt's leg that ultimately cripples her. The aunt must conform to the life permitted to her: she conforms to patriarchy's social strategy but she tactically resists her oppressor's control by creating the dolls.

The dolls represent the aunt's warning to her nieces, the future generations of women destined to become "sólo una decoración sentimental que solía colocarse sentada, en las casas de antes, sobre la cola del piano" (MM5)¹⁷. This aunt's act of creating the dolls is her manner of resisting patriarchal control: the dolls represent the unpronounced message of rebellion. In order for the implied reader to materialize the invisible, s/he must plunge into the undercurrent of meaning in Ferré's figurative language. In the passages of the tale that deal with the dolls' creation, the aunt responds to her domination by patriarchy with a veiled aggressiveness implied in Ferré's choice of words that describe the dolls "*nacimiento*" (birth). Ferré uncannily employs the word "birth" in connection with the creation of a new doll thus insinuating that the object comes alive.

There is an uncanny exaggeration in Ferré's description of doll-making as a joyous family occasion: "El nacimiento de una muñeca era siempre motivo de regocijo sagrado, lo cual explicaba el que jamás se les hubiese ocurrido vender una de ellas, ni siquiera cuando las niñas eran ya grandes y la familia comenzaba a pasar necesidad" (MM2).¹⁸ In Spanish, the adjective *sagrado* (sacred) jumps out of the page when reading the sentence. By using this word Ferré plays with the concept of woman as creator affording the action importance and reverence. Through these words choices and overstatements, Ferré makes the implied reader disturbingly hesitant about what is really occurring in the story.

On the other hand, some of the author's descriptive word choices about the aunt's doll-making are not only disturbing but aggressive. In the narrative, the aunt uses a fruit, similar to the coco, whose meat or "*guano*" is used to stuff the dolls.¹⁹ The reader is told that the aunt is an expert in cutting them open to dry the cotton-like meat later to be used to stuff the dolls. Ferré writes that: "Las cogía con una mano y con un movimiento experto de la cuchilla las iba rebanando una a una en cráneos relucientes de cuero verde" (4).²⁰ Ferré uncannily joins the aunt's expert use of the knife together with the description of the "shiny green skulls" to cast a doubt in the reader's mind about the aunt's sanity and repressed violence.

There are many more examples of these uncanny contrasts: the aunt stuffs the dolls through their mouths with the cotton-like meat of the fruits. The image produces a sensation in the implied reader of gagging, and suggests the silencing of woman. Also, the doctor's son courts the niece when he attends to the aunt's wound, he brings the niece flowers. The young girl takes the flowers carefully with two fingers as if it were "el estómago de un erizo vuelto al revés" (MM 6).²¹ The image conjured by Ferré's words strangely contrasts with that of the beauty of flowers and the disgusting image of the urchin's stomach turn inside-out. These words foreshadow the future relationship between the young doctor and niece. One could go on with these examples but they all create the same fantastic effect: the figurative language uncannily jolts the implied reader maintaining her/his tension of hesitation.

The uncanny device, the Double²² of the youngest doll, also maintains the reader's hesitant state. The critic Milica Zivkovic in her article "The Double as the 'Unseen' of Culture: Toward a Definition of Doppelganger," describes how the Double or "other" self functions in literature:

The double offers an exclusive insight into the process of subject formation, suggesting possibilities of innumerable other selves, of different histories. It also directs attention to this area where we can perceive the ways in which the relation between society and the individual are fixed. The double denounces the categories and structures of the accepted and established social order, attempting to dissolve that order at its very base, where it is established and where the dominant system is re-produced -in the individual. (127)

Zivkovic's words describe exactly what Ferré is representing in her story. Ferré is constructing the space in which the patriarchal norm manipulates woman into believing that she controls the home. By creating the Double/doll of her character, the young niece, Ferré is revealing how power relations are established and accepted. In this way, Ferré proposes a manner in which these relations can be dissolved -through woman's knowledge of how she is manipulated. In the story, the dolls represent the reproduction of the existing social order but, at the same time, they are the key to change. These lifeless figures foretell the nieces' conversion into objects.

The multiple dolls or the "others" made by the aunt to replicate her nieces, heighten the reader's fascination and fear of the lifeless figures. Ferré structures a very complicated story: the aunt is a character within the tale that creates exact images of her nieces while the aunt herself is the author's creation mirroring the writer's own self-reflexive figure. The aunt/creator reflects the author/creator and her quest for knowledge of "self" through the "other." The aunt, Ferré's Double, has her own Double in her youngest niece, who in turn has her own Double in her replica which in turn becomes the "living doll". The tale is a fantastic mirror of Doubles.

The Double of the youngest niece is not only special because she is the last one but the doll's eyes are unique.²³ The eyes of all the dolls are the only parts that are not directly fabricated by the aunt: they are imported from Europe. The narrator points out that the aunt would not dare to use them if they were not submerged for a few days in the river so that "aprendiesen a reconocer el más leve movimiento de las antenas de las chágaras" (MM 4).²⁴ Only then, with the knowledge of the dangerous threat the "chágara" poses, would the aunt set them into the doll's face. This knowledge is fundamental to the "I/eye" of the marrying niece and presupposes her resurrection.

The aunt's words "Aquí tienes tu Pascua de Resurrección" (MM 5), pronounced when she gives the final dolls to her marrying nieces, are central to the implied reader's interpretation. This utterance refers to the rebirth of each niece's self, her "I," and not a doll. It is a resurrection from the death-like stagnant existence dominated by patriarchy. The aunt's gift to each niece is the knowledge of patriarchy's manipulation of woman and this knowledge gives woman the possibility of changing her life. The niece leaves home dressed as a bride with a suitcase in one hand and her doll under her arm. The niece now has the knowledge of what threatens her but it is in her hands to make the "change/resurrection" occur.

The doll of the youngest niece not only has knowledgeable eyes but they are monetarily valuable, money that could assist the niece in her resurrection. The moment in which the husband pries the doll's eyes out to sell them, marks a turning point in the story. The implied reader realizes that the niece can no longer escape the transfiguration into a decorative object, a doll. The young niece has lost her "I." just as her Double has lost her "eyes." Ferré writes that "Desde entonces la muñeca siguió sentada sobre la cola del piano, pero con los ojos bajos" (MM 7).²⁵

Just as her Double continues to sit on the piano with her eyes lowered, Ferré describes the young niece with these words: "La menor seguía sentada en el balcón, inmóvil dentro de sus gasas y encajes, siempre con los ojos bajos" (MM 7).²⁶ The metamorphosis is complete and the implied reader realizes that the young wife has been robbed of the knowledge the aunt gave her and stripped of her subjectivity. However, the

reader will discover that there has been a subtle change in the niece's "I." There is a difference between being denied knowledge and being robbed of it: for a fleeting moment woman is conscious of her plight. The doll has taken over the young niece but in her memory is the seething anger that pours out of the cavity left by the robbed "I" or the Double's eyes. Woman now knows of patriarchy's manipulation of what she considers her space, the home.

The 1970s marked a cultural turn in academic studies and its effects can still be observed in many disciplines. Geographer Gillian Rose writes that "feminist geography first began to emerge into publication in the mid-1970s. That geography needed feminism was evidenced in two ways in this early work: first, geography to date had paid no attention to women, and, second, the discipline had paid no attention to what were perceived as 'women's issues'" (253). Up until this time, the public sphere was the focus of geographical analyses: there is little mention of domestic geography because only the male head of the household was mentioned (Rose 254).

In her book Gendered Spaces (1992), Daphne Spain writes that "throughout history and across cultures, architectural and geographic spatial arrangements have reinforced status differences between women and men" (3). Spain comments on the power of feminist geographers because of their "ability to reveal the spatial dimension of gender distinctions that separate spheres of production from spheres of reproduction and assign greater value to the productive" (7). Spain goes on to say that even though spatial segregation does not cause gender stratification, it does reinforce it. However, changing these spatial arrangements, social processes can change because spatial relations are fundamentally social relations (7).

In "La muñeca menor," the private sphere of the home is a spatial arrangement, a sphere of reproduction to which women are relegated to a disadvantageous social position because it is not considered productive in society. Space is not an empty void but rather is produced as a result representational thinking by connecting movements to verbal imagination thus creating the spatial concepts of those actions. The spatial can be defined as our perception of spatial relations and in the case of the private sphere, the hierarchy of

social relations within the home still remains in many cultures advantageous to the patriarchal figure. Spatial representation in narratives is the portrayal of social relations within a setting.

The author must construct a narrative setting that the implied reader can interpret. Traditionally the key components of setting are considered to be time, together with place as coordinates that assign a point on a time-line. But what truly adds the third dimension to a narrative space are the social interrelationships and identities described within the story. The author adds perspective and depth, important to the implied reader in her/his quest for meaning. Hence, without clearly naming setting coordinates or explicitly pointing out the social relations, Ferré spatially represents her tales for the implied reader who will fill in the gaps.

Ferré guides the implied reader weaving place into the beginning sentence of the tale, as the first coordinate of the setting: “La tía vieja había sacado desde muy temprano el sillón al balcón que daba al cañaveral . . .(MM 1)²⁷. One simple word is sufficient to indicate the place of the story, “cañaveral” (sugarcane plantation) and repeats it once again in the sixth paragraph. In the same paragraph, there is a reference to “los peones de la hacienda” (MM 3), (the workers of the “hacienda” or plantation) that are always ready to assist the aunt in her doll-making. Ferré adds information in bits and pieces for the reader to mentally construct the physical location of the narrative.

Having physically located the narrative, Ferré adds social elements that will not only suggest the society portrayed but the time also. The young doctor obliges his new wife to sit on the balcony of their home so that the whole town be aware that doctor had acquired a higher social status by marriage (MM 6). Ferré again insists on the young niece’s aristocratic social standing by mentioning the immense fortune made by the doctor’s son because his patients flocked to him “para poder ver de cerca a un miembro legítimo de la extinta aristocracia cañera” (MM 7)²⁸. Class is important in the story: the doctor uses his marriage and displays his wife on the balcony for all to see how he has scaled the social ladder. The author creates a space where social class and status is rigidly observed in

almost a caste-like manner. Marriage into a social class is one of the few ways of social class mobility.

However, Ferré's choice of words not only contribute necessary social dimension to the reading experience but, with this same sentence, it also situates the story on the timeline. The word "extinct" together with the reference "sugarcane aristocracy" hints that the story takes place in the early twentieth century. Puerto Rican-owned plantations enter into economic decline at the start of the century because they cannot compete with the newly mechanized plantations bought by U.S. corporations. An obvious offset of this change is the gradual disappearance of the landowner aristocracy of the island. The historian Fernando Picó writes in his *Historia general de Puerto Rico* that:

A partir de 1900 la industria del azúcar emprende una vertiginosa expansión. La afluencia de capital externo, especialmente de inversionistas de Boston y Nueva York, resulta en el establecimiento de nuevas centrales azucareras, Aguirre y Guánica se destacan en esta nueva fase. . . . La competencia se agudiza entre las cinco grandes corporaciones azucareras con capital mayoritario norteamericano y los centralistas criollos, que cada vez eran menos. (236)²⁹

Pico chronicles the North American investment in the Puerto Rican sugarcane industry that creates modern sugar-processing plants. The island-born landowners do not have the capital to mechanically update their sugar refineries in order to compete with the U.S. corporations. Ferré's reference to the young wife as a "legitimate member of the extinct sugarcane aristocracy" reflects the precarious and the declining financial situation of the former plantation-owner aristocracy. The author's descriptions are textual evidence that support the early twentieth century timeframe of the story.

Ferré never states that the story takes place in Puerto Rico. Moreover, she deliberately does not name the characters: the author refers to the "family", the "aunt," the "young doctor," etc. employing a detached, impersonal tone. The reader knows that the story takes place in an area where sugar cane grows and that the young doctor studies up North ("que acababa de regresar de sus estudios de medicina en el norte." (MM 5))³⁰. This

reference is commonly used by Puerto Ricans to refer to the United States. Ferré's text suggests the story's setting to the reader and the relationships depicted between the characters, complete its gendered spatial dimension.

The space in "*La muñeca menor*" is gendered because the setting that Ferré depicts reflects woman having a different status than man. Spain writes that "'Gender' refers to the socially and culturally constructed distinctions that accompany biological differences associated with a person's sex. While biological differences are constant over time and across cultures (i.e., there are only two sexes), the social implications of gender differences vary historically and socially" (3). Spain comments that spatial arrangements can provide access to knowledge for men and yet maintain woman away from that possibility, in this way, perpetuating status differences.

In a 1991 interview with Donna Perry (*Backtalk*, 1993) Ferré speaks about the gender differences in Puerto Rico. When asked if in her marriage Ferré was similar to the dolls she symbolically used as to portray women's role in the private space, the author responded:

Yes, I was. Definitely. But in Puerto Rico most of the women of my generation were in the same position [Ferré was born in 1942].³¹ I was no exception. Women who wanted to change that or go against that stereotype would be considered odd or slightly crazy. The only reason they couldn't say the same about me was because I made it in the world of literature... (85)

The author herself has experienced the spatial dimension she constructs in "*La muñeca menor*" and her words transmit those emotions to the implied reader to grasp the meaning of the tale. However, there is one textual element rarely noted by critics within this spatial representation that supports the reader's interpretation.

As mentioned in the thesis of this paper, Ferré lexically constructs the private space of home by confronting the feminine and masculine gender qualities of Spanish nouns in a struggle to dominate the space of the story. The private space of the home is thought of

being the refuge for the family but women have been led to think that this is their spatial domain. As we have already observed, this concept has served to manipulate woman's access to knowledge maintaining gender stratification. Therefore, Ferré's story takes the blinds off women's eyes to afford them a clear view of patriarchy's controlling manipulation.

Ferré's story offers this knowledge in a subtle manner: the aunt resists patriarchy's control by alerting women of the danger. The dominant masculine words that represent the controlling roles in the story are *el río* (the river), *los médicos* (the doctors), and *el balcón* (the balcony). The first word, *el río*, appears in the first paragraph when the author describes the aunt's swim in the river. These swims represent a search for freedom, a self-knowledge that woman can control her own future, breaking all the silent rules and invisible social norms because women are viewed as weak beings that must be protected from influences that come from the public sphere.

The aunt's desire for freedom does not fit into the social space allotted her and in the narrative she is punished, bitten by a *chágara*. This word is the common name for a crayfish that can be found in rivers. The fact that this word is feminine seems to be contradictory but we will later see that this is not the case but rather, it reinforces the concept of words' gender confrontation. The aunt's true castigation is administered by *el médico* (the doctor) who does not cure her wound. The doctor's son continues the father's controlling behavior by displaying his wife, on the masculine *balcón*. Ferré describes the young wife on the balcony as "inmóvil dentro de su cubo de calor" (MM 7).³² The suffocating atmosphere renders the young wife motionless: she has already transformed into a doll, enclosed within the controlling masculine space of *el balcón*.

Within the story's constructed space, Ferré choice of words appropriates male symbols through the use of feminine words. The author uses *la llaga* (the wound) to refer to the aunt's leg abscess. This word echoes the "Five Holy Wounds of Christ" symbolizing Christ's torture and the ultimate sacrifice of his life to save mankind in the Christian doctrine. By naming the aunt's wound with the word *llaga*, Ferré implies that the aunt's

sacrifice is used to save “womankind” alerting them of the danger of becoming the ornamental objects of patriarchy.

Another example of the Ferré’s appropriation of masculine symbols, the author describes suppuration of the aunt’s abscess as “una vejiga abotagada que manaba una esperma perfumada” (MM 5).³³ Although *esperma* is feminine in Spanish, the word signifies a masculine secretion often denominated the seed of life. Ferré’s descriptive words ascribe the seed of life or sperm to woman because of the word’s feminine gender and the adjective “perfumed” thus redefining woman as the creator of life.

In Ferré’s story the gender of the words depict the feminine knowledge of female oppression. In the fabrication of the dolls, Ferré mentions that “las bolas de los ojos” (the balls of the eyes/spheres of the eyes/eyeballs) are imported from Europe. The author has avoided simply using *los ojos* (the eyes) because the word is of the masculine gender: Ferré corrects the situation by using the word *las bolas*. However, the imported spheres will not be used until they acquire the knowledge that will convert them into the “I” after acquiring the knowledge of the *chágara*.

The feminine word *chágara*, requires an explanation. The *chágara* lodged in the aunt’s leg is also the feminine manipulated by man. The doctor could have removed the prawn lodged in the aunt’s leg but instead he left it to make money. The *chágara* also transforms: once the niece metamorphoses into a doll the *chágara* becomes the girl’s instrument of vengeance. Just as the patriarchal order manipulates the aunt, the prawn is used to punish the woman. But in the case of the *chágara*, its transformation differs: it represents women’s centuries-old repressed anger, the same ire that motivated Ferré to write the story.

Following in the footsteps of Latin American writers such as Julio Cortázar and Felisberto Hernández, Ferré utilizes the fantastic mode and its literary device the Double, to construct her first story “La muñeca menor.” As pointed out in the present paper, Ferré’s knowledge of the fantastic mode and the role the uncanny plays to prolong the reader’s hesitation, are evident in her skillful choice of words. The author carefully spins a web of words that invitingly traps a reader into playing her proposed intellectual game.

Employing Iser's figure of the implied reader, this study responds to Ferré's challenge uncovering the importance of language use in Ferré's work. The writer meticulously weighs each word for its multiple interpretations, provoking startling uncanny associations in the implied reader, and climaxing her/his uncertainty in the very last sentence of the story. Ferré constructs a fantastic gendered space in eight book pages that serve as a virtual portal from which the *chágara* can be observed. Much like the mythical Pandora, Ferré makes the feminine *chágara* visible to her readers. The *chágara* is women's ire caused by a long history of female oppression and patriarchal manipulation.

The *chágara* is the bearer of female anger that is poised to attack. In each and every one of the stories in Papeles de Pandora the author's feminist stance transcends "La muñeca menor" is the story of the author's own *chágara*, which through her creative writing transforms into the ironic winking eye that invites society to change. "La muñeca menor" or Ferré's creation of this fantastic gendered space situates the writer's work at the vanguard of contemporary literature.

¹ Ferré self-translates and publishes a collection of these stories in 1991 under the title of her first short story in this book, ("La muñeca menor") The Youngest Doll. "La muñeca menor" is the very first story written by Ferré and was published in the journal Zona de carga y descarga (1972-1975) founded by Ferré and her cousin, the writer Olga Nolla, during the author's M.A. graduate studies at the University of Puerto Rico - Río Piedras Campus.

² "Papel." Def. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 12. Diccionario de la lengua española de la Real Academia Española. 2001. (Del cat. paper y este del lat. papȳrus).1. m. Hoja delgada hecha con pasta de fibras vegetales obtenidas de trapos, madera, paja, etc., molidas, blanqueadas y desleídas en agua, que se hace secar y endurecer por procedimientos especiales.2. m. Pliego, hoja o pedazo de papel en blanco, manuscrito o impreso. 4. m. Carta, credencial, título, documento o manuscrito de cualquier clase. 5. m. Impreso que no llega a formar libro. 6. m. Parte de la obra dramática que ha de representar cada actor, y la cual se le da para que la estudie.7. m. Personaje de la obra dramática representado por el actor. 8. m. Cargo o función que alguien o algo cumple en alguna situación o en la vida. 12. m. pl. Documentos con que se acreditan las circunstancias personales de alguien.

³ Todorov situates the fantastic as a literary genre that falls between the uncanny and the marvelous genres. I understand the marvelous as a supernatural genre but the opposite pole would be reality. The uncanny to me is not comparable because it is not a genre. Jackson also notes the strangeness of Todorov's classification and writes:

This scheme [Todorov's scheme] is useful for distinguishing certain kinds of the fantastic, but its polarization of the marvellous and the uncanny leads to some confusion. For to see the fantastic as a literary form, it needs to be made distinct in literary terms, and the uncanny, or *l'étrange*, is not one of these – it is not a literary category, whereas the marvelous is. It is perhaps more helpful to define the fantastic as a literary mode rather than a genre, and to place it between the opposite modes of the marvelous and the mimetic. The

ways in which it operates can then be understood by its combination of elements of these two different modes. (32)

I agree with Jackson's exposition. It is much more logical to name the fantastic a literary mode, combination of elements from reality and the uncanniness of elements that may seem supernatural. I prefer to use mode because as Todorov explains the fantastic lasts as long as the reader hesitates to believe the story real. The term mode fits the concept of a state of being or form which is resolved at the end of a narrative. In this study, I will refer to fantastic as a mode and not a genre.

⁴ I use Ferré's translation of *chágara* as river prawn because there is no such word in the Diccionario de la Real Academia. All quotes from the story "La muñeca menor" are taken from the book Papeles de Pandora. New York: Vintage, 2000. 1-8. This edition of Ferré's collection of stories will be designated by the initials (MM) in this study. "La muñeca menor" has been published many times and although there may be some variations in the format of the different books, the reproduction of the story is consistent. Any quotes from the English version of Ferré's story "The Youngest Doll" are taken from the translation signed by the author and Diana Vélez published in The Youngest Doll. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1991. 1-6. This study will indicate quotes taken from this book with the initials (YD).

⁵ "Here is your Easter Sunday of Resurrection" (YD 4).

⁶ "so that the passersby would be sure to see that he had married into society" (YD 5).

⁷ "he pried out the doll's eyes with the TIP of HIS scalpel and pawned them for a fancy gold watch with a long, embossed chain" (YD 5).

⁸ "to see a genuine member of the extinct sugarcane aristocracy up close" (YD 6).

⁹ "the frenzied antennae of all those prawns" (YD 6). By adding the word "those" to the English version Ferré suggests that the prawns are the same as all those wrongdoings carried out against women magnifying the vengeance of the prawns twofold, adding it to the vengeance for being used to castigate the aunt.

¹⁰ Ferré's essay was first published in Spanish in the Puerto Rican literary journal *Caribán* 2 (1985): 31-32. The quotes used in this paper are taken from Ferré's book of essays A la sombra de tu nombre (2000), which includes a version with the title narrowed down to "De la ira a la ironía" when it had originally been called "De la ira a la ironía" o sobre cómo atemperar el acero candente del discurso." This same essay was published in English: "From Ire to Irony." Trans. Rosario Ferré and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. *Callaloo* 17.3 (1994): 900-04.

¹¹ "The double 'I', the writing self that splits into an historical, angry self, as well as into a linguistic one that coldly observes what is being said is present in 'The Youngest Doll,' 'The Seed Necklace,' 'When Women Love Men,' 'Sleeping Beauty,' 'The Other Side of Paradise,' and 'Maquinolandera.' All six stories have to do with the female double: a girl turns into a doll; a housewife becomes her own maid; a society lady turns into a prostitute; a circus dancer into a suicidal ballerina; a debutante is impersonated by her family's homosexual man servant" ("From Ire to Irony," 902).

I must add that Ferré forgot the story "Amalia" in which the little girl Amalia, and her wax doll are doubles. In total there are seven stories that use the literary device of the fantastic double.

¹² "However, even though Papeles [de Pandora] was written as though it were a raw open wound, it contains the promise of the ironic pretense. The game of the unintentional intention, the gesture of the magician that hides what he desperately needs to reveal is present in 'The Youngest Doll' (194). This is my literal translation because in the English version "From Ire to Irony," Ferré does not translate these sentences but rather writes "I began to write in a baroque style, full of complicated wordplay, which threatened to

eclipse what was happening in the stories" (902). This English version varies from the Spanish version and I think that the words in Spanish are important to understand the ludic nature of Ferré's fantastic stories in which their readers play a very special role of penetrating the various interpretative layers of the tales.

¹³ "Menor." Def. 1-4. *Diccionario de la lengua española de la Real Academia Española*. 2001. (Del lat. minor, -ōris). 1. adj. comp. de pequeño. Que es inferior a otra cosa en cantidad, intensidad o calidad. 2. adj. comp. Menos importante con relación a algo del mismo género. Las obras menores de Quevedo. 3. adj. comp. Dicho de una persona: Que tiene menos edad que otra. 4. adj. comp. menor de edad. U. t. c. s.

¹⁴ "Metonymy." Def. 1. *Merriam Webster Unabridged*. A figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated; also, the rhetorical strategy of describing something indirectly by referring to things around it.

¹⁵ "Then she would make a wax mask of the child's face, covering it with plaster on both sides, like a living face sheathed in two dead ones" (YD 3).

¹⁶ "With her head nestled among the black rock's reverberations she could hear the slamming of salty foam on the beach mingled with the sound of the waves, and she suddenly thought that her hair had poured out to sea at last" (YD 1).

¹⁷ "merely a sentimental ornament, of the kind that people used to place on the lid of the grand pianos in the old days" (YD 5).

¹⁸ "The birth of a new doll was always cause for a ritual celebration, which explains why it never occurred to the aunt to sell them for profit, even when the girls had grown up and the family was beginning to fall into need" (YD 2).

¹⁹ "Guano." Def. 2. *Diccionario de la lengua española de la Real Academia Española*. 2001. (De.or. taíno: cf. Miraguao). 1. m. Cuba. Nombre genérico de palmas de tronco alto y redondo, sin ramas, con hojas en forma de abanico. El tronco de algunas especies se utiliza para hacer estacas, postes de cercas, pilotes, etc. Las hojas sirven como cubierta de techos. 2. m. Cuba y R. Dom. Hojas secas o pencas de las palmas 3. m. Cuba y P. Rico. Materia algodonosa de la baya del árbol o palmaguano, utilizada para rellenar almohadas y colchones. 4.m. Cuba dinero (moneda corriente).

²⁰ "She would hold them in one hand and, with an expert twist of her knife, would slice them up and lean them against the railing of the balcony, so that the sun and wind would dry the cottony guano brains out" (YD 3).

²¹ "and would hold the bouquet with the tip of her fingers, as if she were holding a purple sea urchin turned inside out." YD5).

²² There are many doubles in the story: the multiple dolls that are in "storage." are the feminine doubles and must distinguished from the Double the literary device, which is a main character (the youngest doll). There are also masculine doubles –the doctor and his son mirror each other.

²³ The youngest doll's eyes not only recognize the "chágara" but they sparkle because of the aunt's diamonds inserted in them.

²⁴ "they would learn to recognize the slightest stirring of the prawn's antennae" (YD3).

²⁵ "From then on the doll remained seated as always on the lid on the grand piano, but with her gaze modestly lowered" (YD 5).

²⁶ “The youngest went on sitting in her chair out on the balcony, motionless in her muslin and lace, and always with lowered eyelids” (YD 6).

²⁷ “Early in the morning] the maiden aunt had taken her rocking chair out onto the porch facing the canefields” (YD 1).

²⁸ “in order to see a genuine member of the extinct sugarcane aristocracy up close” YD 6).

²⁹ “From the year 1900, the sugar industry begins a dizzying expansion. The abundant flow of foreign capital especially investors from Boston and New York, flocks to the island. This results in the establishment of the new sugar refineries Aguirre and Guánica, important in this phase. . . The competition is fierce between the five big sugar corporations, established with a majority of North American capital, and the number of native-owned refineries dwindled with time” (my translation, Picó 236).

³⁰ “who had just returned from studying medicine up north” (YD 4).

³¹ According to my research, Ferré was born in 1938.

³² “motionless inside her cubicle of heat” (YD 5).

³³ “the huge ulcer which oozed a perfumed sperm” (YD 4).

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