

Communicating Control: Performing and Voicing Authorial Power through the Female Body in *Dreaming in Cuban*

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Lourdes Puente welcomes the purity, the hollowness of her stomach. It's been a month since she's stopped eating, and already she's lost thirty-four pounds. She envisions the muscled walls of her stomach shrinking, contracting, slickly clean from the absence of food and the gallons of springwater she drinks. She feels transparent, as if the hard lines of her hulking form were disintegrating.

—Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban*

More than shells of flesh or composites of bones and blood, human bodies are crucial vehicles of thought, desire, and interaction. Focusing upon the distinct worlds of a matrilineal Cuban family, Cristina García's novel *Dreaming in Cuban* explicitly uses the female body to reflect the powerlessness of Cuban and Cuban American females to act as autonomous and independent agents of change within their own lives and communities. Lourdes Puente, one of García's main characters, strives to transform her linguistic insignificance into corporeal exhibitions of personal power throughout the text. Lourdes's obsession with body shape and concrete personal actions, illustrated in the epigraph above, can be seen as an attempt to transform her inability to claim rhetorical power in her Cuban homeland into the power to exert control over her world—even if that world is only the microcosm of her own body. Judith Butler's succinct and accurate conclusion that bodies "matter" is key to comprehending the power of female bodies as they appear in the work of Cristina García—as agents of subversion, conveyors of unrest, and mechanisms by which to challenge the hierarchical, patriarchal constructions of Cuban and American societies. A combination of Butler's canonical, post-structuralist, feminist work and Roman Jakobson's structuralist analysis of language and communication provides a uniquely interaction-centered method for explicating and exploring the ways in which Lourdes Puente's body is acted upon by both herself and others. According to Jakobson's framework, this perspective effectively concretizes the female body as a site reflective of the addressee position, of female cultural and linguistic powerlessness in the rhetorical and physical presence of powerful, male linguistic addressers. Viewing the body as a rhetorical and sociocultural performance directed toward the greater audiences of Cuban and American societies within García's text enables an understanding that Lourdes's rape and forced scarification, eating disorder, and insatiable sexual desires signify not only the injustice of patriarchy but also the conscious attempts of a woman to subvert the prescribed social addressee position of females and claim authorship in a textual world where her body does not "matter." To situate García's text within a discussion of power relations and to establish Lourdes's actions as explicitly interrogating cultural notions of who can and cannot claim the authorial position of addresser within the world of a text, we must locate *Dreaming in Cuban* within the greater context of the

rhetorical exploration of the binarial nature of power. In this essay, I blend Jakobson's communication model as it is appropriated and warped by the binary of social power with Keir Elam's groundbreaking semiotic conceptualization of a performance text and Judith Butler's ideas about bodies as vehicles of subversion. By this means, we can concretize Lourdes's body as a rhetorical exploration of the extent to which Latina women claim authorial power over the narrative of their lives.

We begin with an examination of Jakobson's communication model, paying specific attention to the addresser/addressee relationship as translated from a linguistic to a social application; such an approach yields a new perception of communication in society. In this new model, the addresser/addressee interaction functions as a power binary. Constructing the contrast between addresser/addressee on a literary level, Jakobson asserts that "*one must distinguish sharply between two positions, that of the encoder and the decoder, in other words, between the role of the addresser and that of the addressee.*" This seems to be a banality, but indeed, banalities are the most often disregarded" (*Verbal Art* 32; Jakobson's emphasis). To overlook this foundational model of communication risks disregarding the dichotomies, conflicts, and power struggles that exist within verbal interactions as well as social and cultural events. Supporting this application of Jakobson's ideas from literary to social and rhetorical contexts is the image of the binary as Jacques Derrida conceptualizes it in his text "Différance." The first theorist to comprehensively adapt the structuralist concept of the binary to deconstructionist thought, Derrida aptly describes how pairs of linguistic terms or concepts, when polarized, can become binaries in the sense that one position, the center, holds power over a second, marginalized position, or the periphery. Developing this concept, Derrida asserts:

We could then take up all the coupled oppositions on which philosophy is constructed, and from which our language lives, not in order to see opposition vanish but to see the emergence of a necessity such that one of the terms appears as the différance of the other, the other as "differed" within the systematic ordering of the same. (290)

The interaction between the sender of cultural and social messages (addresser) and the passive listener and receiver of these messages (addressee) falls into Derrida's explanation of the binary, although under Jakobson's theory of communication the two were not originally intended to be viewed as an oppositional pair. "Differed" as an "other" because of her gender in a society where the state of being male holds a socially, culturally, and religiously privileged position, Lourdes can be seen as both a representation and an interrogation of the male (addresser)/female (addressee) social binary. In the epigraph to this article, Lourdes revels in her anorexia, in her ability to shrink and control her body by willpower and personal strength alone. Drinking "gallons of springwater," she purges years of rhetorical male power and, by association, physical domination, from her body with the result that her stomach feels "slickly clean" from the absence of food and force-fed patriarchal discourse (García 167). Expanding the relationship that Jakobson outlines between addresser (author) and addressee (reader), and imposing it on a sociocultural level upon the binarial statuses and power relationships between Cuban/Cuban American males and females, we can see that Latino men consistently lay claim to the cultural and social addresser position afforded them by Hispanic cultural institutions such as machismo and Catholicism (Olsen 552, 554–55). The men whom Lourdes encounters in Cuba, reinforced by the power of this culturally specific form of

patriarchy, hold social and cultural power and influence over her *merely by virtue of their maleness*.

However, Jakobson's model of communication reveals that, in the creation of successful speech acts, neither the addresser nor the addressee is more crucial or powerful than the other. Therefore, "both attitudes, production and perception, have equal claims to be described by the linguist. It would be a mistake to reduce this two-sided language reality to merely one side. Both methods of description participate and have equal rights" (*Verbal Art* 32). Ignoring the "banal" relationship between addresser and addressee would thus risk overlooking the conflict of power that ensues when addresser and addressee are *not* held in equal regard. Interrogating the fact that Latino males consistently inhabit the cultural addresser position in relation to Latina females, the story of Lourdes Puente's life and body illuminates the struggles of Cuban women to claim social power and equality with men: because addresser and addressee hold equal linguistic value, and men and women are both humans.

Now that I have framed the female body as reflective of the political and cultural power discrepancy between Cuban and Cuban American males and females, I must now interrogate how the body can act not only as a site of exploitation and a symbol of widespread female oppression but also as a vehicle of subversion and a conveyor of personal strength. Crucial in establishing this idea are the writings of Keir Elam and Judith Butler, both of whom view bodies as sites through and upon which to impart and enact messages. Within García's text, Lourdes's body becomes a physical location where she can outwardly manifest a distinct discursive and physical pattern of resistance to male power. In 1980, Herminia Delgado, a friend to one of Lourdes's kinswomen, remarks that after the Cuban Revolution, "[o]ne thing hasn't changed: the men are still in charge" (185). While this statement is true, and Lourdes, like Herminia, finds herself the cultural, linguistic, and physical inferior of Cuban males, García's text explicitly explores the ways that women can work against this binarial power system. Using Elam to explicate the ability of a body to function as a performance vehicle—displaying personal rhetorical messages in response to cultural stressors—and Butler to explore the performative nature of gender itself, we can see that the female body is a fertile location to explore the social performance of gender and power.

Whether personal rhetorical messages upon this concept are script based or rooted in one's personal interactions with cultural notions of gender, both Elam and Butler focus on bodies as vehicles that perform and subvert scripts, both in the traditional written sense as applicable to the stage and in a more abstract sense in relation to normative patterns of gender portrayal. Glossing the concept of a performance text as "presented as an already produced and bounded object which the spectator observes, rather than constructs, from his permanent lookout point," Elam focuses our perception of a performance to mean a demonstration in which, in Jakobson's terms, the addressee takes the role of reader rather than author (Elam 57). A performance text thus acts as a mirror—it reflects what is cast upon it, but the onlooker cannot manipulate or reconstruct what is seen. Elam easily applies this model to the stage, for the relationship between actor and audience creates a forced distance between addresser and addressee by means of the physical barrier of the stage. However, "acting" cannot be confined to the stage, and a view of human action and interaction is inherently tainted by one's preoccupation with self-presentation and perception of normality within the dominant sociocultural construct. When viewing bodies as performance texts, we must envision them as blank tablets upon which the actor or individual inscribes specific messages—via lin-

guistic and physical choices—to convey a specific argument. The body as a performance text effectively becomes visual rhetoric, or language and argument embodied.

Judith Butler's comparable conceptualization of gender performativity in her text *Bodies That Matter* shows us that, when applied to a social context, "acting" or performing a way of being takes on a rhetorical rather than a theatrical connotation:

Performativity is . . . not a singular "act," for it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated. . . . Within speech act theory, a performative is the discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names. (12–13)

Butler's specific notion of gender performativity is extensively useful in evaluating how and to what extent Lourdes reconstructs her gendered identity in the United States. In her article "Sovereign Performatives in the Contemporary Scene of Utterance," Butler aptly quotes philosopher Rae Langton's assertion that "the ability to perform speech acts can be a measure of political power" and of "authority," and "one mark of powerlessness is an inability to perform speech acts that one might otherwise like to perform" (364). Linking Butler's ideas in *Bodies* and "Sovereign Performatives" allows us to situate Lourdes and her body within a cultural system where rhetoric and the ability to perform speech acts directly correlate with one's position within Jakobson's communication model; those individuals, such as Lourdes, who cannot utter authoritative words in relation to their political, cultural, or gendered power(lessness) occupy the addressee position, and these individuals are invariably gendered as female. Referring to the ability of rhetoric to function as or embody action, Butler calls epithets and hate speech "speech-as-conduct" ("Sovereign Performatives" 354). I assert, following Langton's logic as Butler incorporates it into her argument, that because Lourdes cannot effectively employ speech to voice her claims of female cultural powerlessness, she uses the conduit of her body to physically show that while she cannot culturally lay claim to the rhetoric of power, she can indeed perform such power bodily.

Butler's concept of performativity and her conceptualization of rhetoric are most useful as a broad interpretative lens when employed in combination with Elam's idea of the performance text. On one hand, Butler views the actions of one's body (with respect to the contrived connection between gender and biological sex) as reflective of and reinforced by normative patterns of behavior; on the other, Elam views the performance text as a "vehicle for the actor rather than vice versa" (78). Blending Butler's and Elam's differing approaches toward how bodies impart messages and act as vehicles that convey both personal messages and sociocultural influence allows for a deep analysis of the addresser/addressee relationship as it relates to the connection between mind as a script and body as a performance of internal mental processes. Combining the two perspectives yields a vision of human culture in which individual bodies can be construed as individual performance texts used by humans to convey intentional, rhetorical messages to the audience/reader or to society as a whole. This means that we must see the body both as a vehicle for the messages of the actor and as a site of occupation for an individual. In addition, because Butler calls for the recognition of society's role in regulating and reinforcing normative actions, we can view the body as a text that reflects both the "author" or individual's needs and the power of society to regulate the "actor" into normative patterns of behavior. Despite this pattern of cultural pressure upon one's

sense of self, it is important to remember that the body's very role as a performance text, a vehicle of gender performativity, renders a female socially powerful, for it explicitly displays the ability of a woman to make conscious rhetorical choices. Even viewed through a small scope, this pattern supports the actions of Lourdes Puente, and the Latina females whom she represents, as performative displays of a greater linguistic and personal message of power in the face of a male-centric society that places pressure on the female body by deeming certain gendered actions normative. By this means, we can link Butler's and Elam's perceptions of the body as performance text to Jakobson's model of communication, effectively expanding the linguistic addresser (male)/addressee (female) relationship to become that of society as addresser and individual as addressee.

If we combine Jakobson's, Elam's, and Butler's conceptualizations of human action and interaction and apply them to the body of Lourdes Puente, we can establish a stable foundation according to which García's text translates the struggles and stressors of Latina females, particularly Cuban American women, into physical and bodily terms. Lourdes's rape, and the culturally specific events surrounding it, is the point in the novel at which the female body transforms into a crucial semiotic and metaphorical tool for interrogating the patriarchal structure of society. Immediately before her violation, several soldiers of the Cuban Revolution enter her family's property and hand Lourdes "an official sheet of paper declaring the Puentes' estate the property of the revolutionary government." The document socially and legally strips Lourdes and her husband of their individuality, home, and security. When she "[tears] the deed in half and angrily [dismisses] the soldiers," Lourdes's physical message to the soldiers as addresser is clear—she intends to fight for her home (70). The contact, or "physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and addressee," between her and the soldiers that conveys this message is her obvious rage and her defiant action of tearing up the printed message that physically embodies the right of the government to assert power over the individual (Jakobson, *Language* 66). Because the soldiers clearly receive this message, noting that "the woman of the house is a fighter," they attempt to reassert their authorial power and presumed cultural and social role as addresser by violating her in a way specifically designed to break independent women of their spirit and strength—rape (García 71). Effectively linking the positionality of the state/individual addresser/addressee binary with the male/female addresser/addressee relationship, the soldiers attempt to reset the power dynamic between center/periphery, male/female, and addresser/addressee by sexually violating Lourdes and scarring her belly as a physical reminder of the warped nature of the addresser/addressee relationship when applied to male/female interactions. In Jakobson's communication model, neither the addresser nor the addressee can claim superiority or significance over the other; we can thus contextualize this violent episode as one in which the presumed system of interaction has broken down. Adherents of a cultural, social, and political hierarchy of power in which women, gendered as weak, docile, easily manipulated, and domestic, defer to the will and authority of men, the soldiers enact the only model of communication and social interaction they know—that of men controlling women and reinforcing their role as socially and politically submissive.

The verbal and physical power struggle of addresser and addressee is inextricably linked to human bodies. Adamant in her desire to claim control and power in the physically and emotionally oppressive situation of her rape, Lourdes asserts authorial control over the rhetorical presentation of her body during the act. She does not close her eyes when the soldier assaults her—"[H]er

eyes . . . looked directly into his” and she “spat in his face” (García 71). Because both Lourdes and the revolutionary soldier claim authorial power in this situation, the rapist attempts to reinforce his dominance and “true” cultural position in the social addresser position by literally marking her body as inferior, violated, broken, and conquered. After the rape, he “lifted the knife and began to scratch at Lourdes’s belly with great concentration. A primeval scratching. Crimson hieroglyphics” (72). Physically written upon by her assailant, Lourdes’s body thus becomes a literal tablet upon which the writings of female oppression, violation, and powerlessness can be seen. Unable to discern the writings of her rapist upon her own belly, Lourdes is positioned such that her body is transformed into a textual representation of powerlessness. Her body visibly displays to the “audience” of her society and community the disenfranchised location she occupies in relation to the male soldiers of the revolution.

Keir Elam’s conceptualization of the “performance text” thus becomes critical in comprehending Lourdes’s relationship to and manipulation of her body throughout the remainder of the novel. She uses her body as a canvas upon which to show others the linguistic utterances of personal power that she could not express in Cuba. However, to fully understand the foundations of this philosophy, more attention must be paid to the altercation preceding her rape. At the culmination of her sexual violation, Lourdes faces more than the burden of living in a body that acts as a constant affirmation of female marginalization. She must also live with the new knowledge that “notions of femaleness and femininity are rooted in national imperatives such as ‘the control of the population’ [that situate] women’s bodies as a site of political struggle at the state level and [suggest] . . . that those same bodies play an equally crucial role in mediating the political struggles of an international kind” (Derrickson 479).

It is significant that no males, family members, or neighbors are present to mediate when the revolutionary soldiers come to confiscate the Puentes’ property and Lourdes is subsequently raped and scarred. Her aloneness is conveyed succinctly: her husband, Rufino, “was in Havana ordering a cow-milking machine when the soldiers returned” (García 70). Thus, alone at the home and farm that she and her husband clearly cherish, perhaps expecting nothing more than the mundane round of daily chores, Lourdes experiences instead a brutal rape. This interaction between Lourdes and the state, as represented by the soldiers upon her property, is entwined with the complex role of women as domestic helpmates and social addressees in relation to Cuban men, regardless of their positionality within the revolution.

Her rape and failed attempt to assert her rights to property and liberty mirror not only the strife that many Cuban citizens encountered in the Cuban Revolution but also the largely unnoticed struggle of women to assert these selfsame rights in relation to men. Lourdes’s forceful utterance, “Get out of my house!” does not correlate with Butler’s conceptualization of speech-as-conduct because she does not possess the cultural and political power to convey a speech act into actuality (García 71). Lourdes realizes that her words hold no sociopolitical clout; the reality is that women’s bodies, through rape, are vulnerable sites upon which to display the brute force of male rhetorical and physical dominance. She comes to understand that words alone cannot affect a female’s future. Lourdes Puente’s rape and forced scarification are events embedded within layers of communication in which the addresser/addressee communication model is warped by the human desire for dominance and authorial power over personal, national, and social exchanges.

We can thus view the female body—its condition and the actions done to it—as the physical form of gendered cultural power plays. This allows us to interpret Lourdes’s rape as representative

both of male authorial command over the female experience and of how the powers of “national identity and transnational belonging mark themselves on the flesh of women in decidedly unsubtle—and often violent—ways” (Derrickson 479). Given Lourdes’s existence in Cuba within the marginalized poles of the binaries of addressee/addresser, female/male, and individual/state, we can fully comprehend why Lourdes utilizes her body when she lives in the United States as a performance text to enact her psychological distance from the patriarchal, oppressive institutions of her homeland.

Clearly, Lourdes’s physical experiences are the key to understanding her aversion to Cuba, her loathing of Communism, and her warped relationship to her own body. Because “she was violated in the space where violation was not supposed to exist,” the homeland and mother-nation, the experiences of Lourdes’s body forever link her mind to the oppression, pain, and persecution of her past life on the island (Mujcinovic 175). Thus, she escapes to the ideological anti-Cuba: the United States, a place where her body does not link her to physical acts of pain and concrete experiences of disempowerment. Lourdes’s own daughter, Pilar, candidly observes that “Mom says ‘Communist’ the way that some people says ‘cancer,’ low and fierce” (García 26). Lourdes divides the world into cancerous Communists and undiseased anti-Communists; her worldviews “are strictly black-and-white. It’s how she survives” (García 26). Lumping together Communism, Cuba, and her rape, Lourdes conflates Communism with her homeland, heritage, and an immeasurable degree of helplessness. Thus, she seeks not to escape and forget the patriarchal institution that Cuba represents, but rather to reject and contradict the fact that this force, in occupying the authorial position over the lives of its individual citizens, can and did infiltrate her home, the one place of authorship and safety that, arguably, a female can claim. Fleeing Cuba equates to escaping from the social reality of patriarchy and seeking to develop a “replacement” home and bubble of security in which she can deny the past and forget her violation. Lourdes’s choice to move her body to the United States can be seen as a deliberate “black-and-white” choice to distance herself from Cuba and the reality that “women’s bodies (and, by extension, women’s lives), . . . are never fully owned and controlled by women themselves. On the contrary, those bodies are tied up in issues of nationalism and post-nationalism, embedded in the framing and articulation of the state, in the negotiation of global cultural and political formations” (Derrickson 479). In order to “own” her body in this new, replacement homeland, Lourdes engages in discursive and physical acts that change not only the location but also the appearance and actions of her body. Using herself as a corporeal linguistic code, Lourdes embodies a message of female power even though her raped and scarred body acts as a living record of male dominance. As living documentation of male oppression, Lourdes’s body supports Teresa Derrickson’s conceptualization of women’s bodies as entwined in (masculine) conflicts of nation and state. This means that Lourdes cannot escape from Cuba any more than she can leave behind her body and the indecipherable mark of patriarchy upon her violated belly. Despite this, Lourdes makes conscious rhetorical and physical choices to reclaim her body and show her independence from the Cuban patriarchal, political conflicts, rendering herself socially powerful. As an independent being, she possesses the inalienable power of choice.

The ability to manipulate her body—by determining its size, what she puts in it, and what she uses it for—becomes for Lourdes a means of creating visual rhetoric, her message to society that she hides a well of personal power beneath her flesh. Because her body literally entraps her within the marginalized positions of addressee/female/individual, Lourdes’s primary goal during her new life in the United States is to change that body to refute the connotations of weakness and sub-

missiveness that the scars on her belly carry. Through her fluctuations in weight, Lourdes performs her authorial intent in physical terms, so that the audience of society will not uncover the pain, marginalization, and trauma of her past life. Fatima Mujcinovic poignantly and aptly assesses García's construction of Lourdes's character:

Cristina García develops the character of Lourdes Puente by carefully depicting the protagonist's post-traumatic stress disorder. Lourdes is introduced as suffering from compulsive eating and insatiable sexual needs, and these character traits are developed as symptoms of the sexual abuse that Lourdes experienced during Cuba's revolutionary days. Her anti-Communist sentiments represent her psychological reaction to this violation: superimposing her pain and anguish on the Cuban sociopolitical reality, she alienates herself from her homeland in order to elude the troubling past. (175)

While Mujcinovic succinctly describes every symptom of Lourdes's pain and correctly establishes a link between her sense of alienation, tendency for escapism, and unrelenting sexual and food-based cravings, she does not outline the central axis of Lourdes's confusion—the conflicted self. Lourdes is self-aware enough to realize that, through sex, she “was reaching through [her husband] Rufino for something he could not give her, she wasn't sure what” (García 21). This “reaching” through food, starvation, or sex for an ephemeral “something” to soothe her pain is the catalyst for her search to display rhetorical and physical power through her body. Indirectly realizing through experimentation that the corporeal self can act as a performance text or rhetorical site, Lourdes deliberately manipulates her body, conveying messages even if she has no conscious idea why.

Obsessed with a need to establish a new sense of power and meaningfulness in the United States, but reminded continually by her own body of the physical violation of her past, Lourdes is unable to function without literally transforming her body in the process. Butler calls attention to this transformation, asserting that we cannot overlook “the materiality of the signifier itself,” for if Lourdes's body is her chief avenue for rejecting her perceived positionality and expressing her desired one in the addresser/addressee binary, then the physical and material makeup of her body in that endeavor cannot be ignored (*Bodies That Matter* 30). Thus, Lourdes's body “matters,” both in the sense that it cannot be ignored as a powerful and prominent physical indicator of her turmoil and in relation to her struggle to achieve the ultimate goal of “[rewriting] history to suit her ideas of the world” (an objective that Lourdes's daughter believes she has not only attained but taken too far) (García 176). However, despite the health hazards of binge eating and compulsive dieting, these ways of acting must be understood as attempts by Lourdes to use her body as a vehicle to prove that, just as she can claim authorial and physical power over her female body, women can occupy the addresser role in society just as easily as men. Lourdes's use of her body advocates for the equality of men and women both in a social sense and within Jakobson's communication model. Employing her body as performance text, she interrogates the broken interactive and associative system of society in which linguistic and cultural addressers and addressees are not equally valued, and men and women cannot claim social and political equality.

Lourdes's eating habits and the elevated emotional strain that accompanies her ballooning weight indicate that she views her female body as the only mechanism of control by which she can assert her ability to fulfill the addressee position. Unlike the dictates of rape, a situation in which she is powerless at the hands of a male, Lourdes can completely control what she eats, thereby occupying the authorial position regarding the size, shape, and narrative of her female body.

Lourdes's effort to control how others perceive her ability to hold author/addresser position becomes clear in the context of her father's worsening health: "the more she took her father to the hospital for cobalt treatments, the more she reached for the pecan sticky buns" (García 20). The ability to control the volume of food entering her body creates for Lourdes an isolated environment in which she is the chief source of power; by controlling what she eats she gains access to a specific type of power: self-representation. As her father becomes increasingly ill and fear dominates her consciousness, she eats until the fat "[amasses] rapidly on her hips and buttocks [and] . . . Lourdes had gained 118 pounds" (García 20). Thus, in order to reach a position of power, even if that power is exerted only upon the self, "she overeats, then diets compulsively" (Payant 168). Asked by her daughter how she miraculously lost so much weight, Lourdes nonchalantly explains, "I just made up my mind to do it. Willpower. Willpower goes a long way towards getting what you want, Pilar" (García 172). By dieting, Lourdes thus exerts willpower in such a way as to link the physical with the mental, purging fear, loneliness, loss, violation, and sadness from her body as she flushes fat from her hips. Getting what she "wants," Lourdes uses her physical body to convey a message of female willpower and strength, a message that is nearly impossible to otherwise transmit in the rhetorical and linguistic terms available in her society.

Further complicating Lourdes's weight gain and craving for sweets is the fact that the sticky buns and sugary sweets causing the fat to balloon around her inner self are composed of a chief product of Cuba—sugar. Although the Cuban embargo prevents Lourdes from actually consuming Cuban sugar in the United States, the layers of "sweet" fat with which she insulates her inner self symbolically fuel her desire to use her body as a tool to escape from her past in Cuba and insulate herself from pain, loss, and fear. In her bakery, "Lourdes sits down with a watery cup of coffee and her sticky buns to figure things out," a pattern that leads to an increase in flesh; it "[hangs] from her arms like hammocks" (García 20). In Lourdes's world, fat and food thus become mechanisms by which to physically show others ("spectators," the audience, the community) her claim to the addresser position and ability to manipulate and hide her fear and the story of her past. Even though we are told that "Lourdes did not plan to stop eating," we can clearly see that her "intense need to dephysicalize her own body and the space of Cuba point to the physical abuse she suffered. For the same reason, she gains extra weight," though this need is so raw and deep-seated that it is subconscious (García 169; Mujcinovic 177). The physical manifestations of Lourdes's body thus tell the tale of her internal pain and conflict, a pattern that can be isolated as a method for uncovering the untold pains of Latina females suffering from similar traumatic experiences of rape, brutality, and powerlessness.

Thus, while Lourdes appears to be the model "adjusted" immigrant in economic terms, her chronic weight fluctuation reflects her constant struggle to transform her body from a site marking her as a marginalized, Cuban exile cemented in the social addressee position to a site of strength and empowerment by means of alternating between self-control and willful overindulgence. Although she masks her pain by using her body as a performance text, we can see that "despite her apparent adjustment to immigration, Lourdes has not acknowledged the trauma of her rape and departure" (Payant 168). Her oscillation between compulsive eating and equally compulsive dieting is a direct result of her yearning, on one hand, to feel isolated and protected from the past by means of her body and, on the other hand, to seem wholly unaffected by it through purging in order to feel "a profound emptiness, to be clean and hollow as a flute" (García 169). Unsolvable and unavoidable, Lourdes's poor weight control is not only a physical ailment linked to psychological

trauma; it is also an external and necessary means by which to assert a measure of power over herself and the narrative of her life. Weight control becomes a form of visual rhetoric in Lourdes's life, and asserting power over her body shape creates an outlet through which to translate conduct (powerful actions) into speech (unspoken sentiments of independence). Lourdes Puente's experiences, as indicated by the story of her body, explore García's literary "interest in the political [, which is] is rooted in the personal cost of events in Cuba after 1959, especially to women and their families" (Payant 165). For Lourdes, the revolution results in a lifelong battle to show others that she lives through her inner strength and her ability, despite social conditioning that asserts otherwise, as she reinvents her historical narrative so that it masks, remolds, and removes the pain and trauma of her life in Cuba.

In interrogating the conflicts between individual males and females and states and individuals, we must look not at where conventions of communication and interaction proceed neatly along binarial lines, but instead at where these models of societal and personal relations break down. The bodily narrative of Lourdes Puente is a case study highlighting the role of the body as a signifier that reflects the fluctuating and complex relationship between females and the warped, power-tainted addresser/addressee communication model powerful in both Cuba and Western society as a whole. García's text interrogates the fact that a preoccupation with power permeates all social actions and interactions. As we explore further the relationship between the Latina female and the world she inhabits, it becomes necessary to unpack the role that society plays in reinforcing and circumscribing the normative behaviors and the social position that she "must" occupy. By viewing the female body as a performance text, we can, contrary to Jakobson's model of communication, uncover that the positions of addresser and addressee hold specific connotations of power and marginalization in Latino culture and society. Lourdes Puente proves that we can speak without engaging in verbal communication—her actions within García's text outline an inherently female, unexplored cultural code. Nonverbal rhetoric, by changing the way in which society must approach communication, thus becomes pivotal in the transmission of power and the reevaluation of what language itself constitutes.

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