When Silence is Violence: Exploring Literary Representations of Abuse within a Lesbian Relationship in Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House*

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Abstract

In the Dream House tells the story of the author's relationship with a woman who subjects her to years of emotional, psychological and, ultimately, physical violence. In her attempts to grapple with the reality and aftermath of this relationship, Machado explores the varied and complex ways in which discursive and epistemological silencing set the stage for the violence she experienced at the tongue and hands of her female lover. This is a story about how the marginalization of queer bodies and experiences, as well as the shaming of already marginalized narratives, continue to constitute a profound veil of silence that cloaks the reality of violence within lesbian relationships. This article uses feminist and queer theory to analyze how the dynamics of silence shape the representation of the main character's experience of domestic violence. I will demonstrate how this is a particular iteration of silence that is infused with shame and, in order to untangle the intricate intersections of the main character's identity, I will argue that the long-term feminist insistence on telling women's stories, in all their lush diversity, is an unfinished project and one that remains as urgently necessary today as it was during the second wave of feminism. Because of the relative paucity of accounts of lesbian violence, and the problematic misogyny and heteronormativity that often informed the few accounts that did exist, Machado found herself at a loss when she tried to make sense of her experiences. There seemed to be no feminist and queer narrative anchor that she could use to articulate her own story. *In the Dream House* thus presents the reader with her attempt to 'speak into the silence' and this article offers both a scholarly engagement with this effort and a continuation of the larger

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In *In the Dream House*, Carmen Maria Machado offers a memoir of such breathtaking power and literary richness that it is challenging to determine with which aspects to initiate one's engagement. Yet, as a feminist and queer theorist, this is a text that demanded my scholarly attention in a way that few others have. From the author's selection of epigraphs, to the first chapter in which she seems to challenge the value of those very epigraphs, this is a text that refuses to let the reader off the hook of intellectual engagement. *In the Dream House* tells the story of the author's relationship with a woman who subjects her to years of emotional, psychological and, ultimately, physical violence. In her attempts to grapple with the reality and aftermath of this relationship, Machado explores the varied and complex ways in which discursive and epistemological silencing set the stage for the violence she experienced at the tongue and hands of her female lover. This is a story about how the marginalization of queer bodies and experiences, as well as the shaming of already marginalized narratives, continue to constitute a profound veil of silence that cloaks the reality of violence within lesbian relationships. This article uses feminist and queer theory to analyze how the dynamics of silence shape the representation of the main character's experience of domestic violence. I will demonstrate how this is a particular iteration of silence that is infused with shame and, in order to untangle the intricate intersections of the main character's identity, I will argue that the long-term feminist insistence on telling women's stories, in all their lush diversity, is an unfinished project and one that remains as urgently necessary today as it was during the second wave of feminism. Because of the relative paucity of accounts of lesbian violence, and the problematic misogyny and heteronormativity that often informed the few accounts that did exist, Machado found herself at a loss when she tried to make sense of her experiences. There seemed to be no feminist and queer narrative anchor that she could use to articulate her own story. *In the Dream House* thus presents the

reader with her attempt to 'speak into the silence' and this article offers both a scholarly engagement with this effort and a continuation of the larger feminist work of speaking into gendered and queer spaces of silence and shame.

Marilyn Frye (1990: 311) is concerned with the implications of not speaking about lesbian sexuality and she articulates the political, epistemological and existential danger of these silences as follows:

> I have, in effect, no linguistic community, no language, and therefore in one important sense, no knowledge …. The meaning one's life and experience might generate cannot come fully into operation if they are not woven into language: they are fleeting, or they hover, vague, not fully coalesced, not connected, and hence, not *useful* for explaining or grounding interpretations, desires, complaints, theories [italics in original].

Over the course of this article, I will demonstrate how Frye's concerns resonate with the experiences Machado struggles to articulate. In the second epigraph that precedes the first chapter, Machado reproduces the following, well-known quotation from Zora Neale Hurston: 'If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it'. Right from the start, she thus signals a number of things to the reader. She tells us that she will be engaging with the trope of silence. She makes it clear that she will be dealing with the more negative potential of silence and she frames this challenging of silence explicitly as a political act of resistance and survival. In the very brief first chapter, she then seemingly casts doubt on the value of this epigraph, as well as that of the others, by asking 'If what the author has to say is so important, why relegate it to the paratext? What are they trying to hide?' (Machado 2019:3). This is an effective rhetorical maneuver that encourages the reader to consider the complexity of the issues with which she is going to be dealing in the rest of the text. The paratext is a literary liminal space and it is one that is infused with meaning and opportunity. Mary Rice (2011:49) explains that, '[i]n a liminal space, it is safe to say things and do things that cannot be said outside of that space' because of a shared understanding that 'the liminal ritual is not reality'. In her exploration of the specific paratexual element of the preface, Martha Bowden (1996:17) demonstrates how a woman writer, in particular, could use this space as one in which she could, with relative

safety, 'mold[ ] her self-presentation to present an acceptable persona' while simultaneously 'reveal[ing] the pressures of her situation'. One of the strategies Bowden identifies for accomplishing this is the use of contradictions. In addition to introducing possibly difficult topics and presenting one's authorial persona, the paratext is where the author establishes her authority and determines how the reader will receive the text that will follow. In a memoir that deals with the fractured identity of a woman who has survived an especially marginalized form of domestic violence, setting the text up in a way that makes the reader receptive to listening to the voice and the story to come is crucially important. Feminist scholars have long shown that women in general and particularly women telling their stories of domestic violence tend to have their narratives either completely elided or disbelieved (see, for instance, Hegarty 2011). For Machado to utilize the paratext to minimize the chances of this fate befalling her own story is thus a strategically significant decision. In their engagement with the work of Philippe Lejeune, Gérard Genette and Marie Maclean (1991: 261) note the description of the paratext as 'the fringe of the printed text which, in reality, controls the whole reading'. In their authoritative work on the paratext, Genette and Maclean (1991:261 - 262) build on this notion of the paratext as 'fringe' to advance the following argument for the power of the paratext:

> This fringe, in effect, always bearer of an authorial commentary either more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes, between the text and what lies outside it, a zone not just of transition, but of *transaction*; the privileged site of a pragmatics and of a strategy, of an action on the public in the service, well or badly understood and accomplished, of a better reception of the text and a more pertinent reading – more pertinent, naturally, in the eyes of the author and his [or her] allies [emphasis in original].

Machado, as a woman and as a domestic violence survivor, knows that she needs to take special care to ensure a 'pertinent reading' or any substantive reading at all of her story and I read her paratextual choices as part of her sustained effort to make that happen. Although she employs a number of other paratextual elements, for the purposes of this article and the analysis I will be building, my focus is on how she uses it to introduce the reader to the

crucial complexities of silence in the context of queer domestic violence.

In their insightful collection, the tellingly titled *Silence, Feminism, Power: Reflections at the Edges of Sound*, Aimee Carillo Rowe and Sheena Malhotra (2013: 1) make a compelling argument about 'the paradoxical relationship between sound and silence that is obscured when we assume an equation between voice and agency, and its inverse equation – silence and oppression'. For them, a more meaningful understanding can be gained by 'wading into the fullness of silence' (Rowe & Malhotra 2013:1). This latter phrase constitutes an apt description of the nuanced engagement with the dynamics of silence that Machado's text offers. She encourages the reader to reflect on the difference between imposed and strategically selected silence when she notes that '[s]ometimes your tongue is removed, sometimes you still it of your own accord' (37). She utilizes parallel sentence structure to ensure that there is no doubt about what is at stake in the mechanics of silence when she follows this sentence with: 'Sometimes you live, sometimes you die'. She then shares this riddle and her understanding that there are no simple answers: 'Whatever names me, breaks me. The solution, of course, is 'silence'. But the truth is, anyone who knows your name can break you in two'. The process of speaking out about domestic violence is equally complex and, while silence might well mean survival at times, the breaking of that silence seems to be a crucial part of the larger healing process. The author's abuser clearly knows that, at least to some extent, the power she wields over the author is dependent on silence. Early in their relationship and after one of the first, terrifying instances of emotional abuse, she tells the author: 'You're not allowed to write about this … Don't you ever write about this' (44). The need for silence extends to the victim's support structure and it serves to render them unable to intervene. The author recalls how one of her friends 'overhears her making you cry' but that she just wanted 'him to pretend that he didn't hear anything' (50).

In her research on the strategic use of silence in the context of abusive lesbian relationships, Grace Giorgio (2002) draws complex links between larger issues of discursive and epistemological silencing and the silences of individual women. She explains that 'abused lesbians mediate a complicated nexus of power relations – protective services, the legal system, and their own loyalty to the relationship as well as their lesbian communities' and she argues that, '[w]ithin these contexts, lesbians' silence about the violence is a reasonable though stifling response' (Giorgio 2002: 1235 -

1236). The author explicitly engages with this link as she negotiates her own narrative. A reference to a homophobic comment by one her aunts suggests that she is grappling with her partner's violence within a context where her very existence as a queer woman is at risk of erasure when her aunt deems it acceptable to tell her 'I don't believe in gay people' (71). The lack of support she receives when she is confronted with this epistemological violence is summed up by the succinct statement that her 'mother said nothing at all' (71). Giorgio's (2002:1238) findings confirm lesbian victims' 'ambivalence and reluctance to speak about the violence in the context of the cultural stigmatization of lesbians'. In her work on violence in lesbian relationships, Mikel Walters (2011:250) similarly finds that '[s]urvivors repeatedly reported feeling silenced, isolated, and helpless due to the lack of acknowledgment of and support for lesbian survivors of intimate partner violence in their communities'. These feelings of being silenced and not finding support have very real consequences for women who experience violence in their relationships. According to Jude Irwin (2006: 29), '[r]esearch has indicated that women who experience domestic violence and have high levels of social support and extensive networks seem to fare better than those with lower levels of support and fewer networks'. This, Irwin argues, poses particular challenges for lesbian survivors who seek to tell their stories in heteronormative contexts where the 'assumptions of universal heterosexuality' (Irwin 2006:29) impose additional layers of silencing and further complicate the possibility of being believed.

A common tactic of domestic abusers is to isolate their victims to such an extent that the abuser appears to be the victim's only ally. These dynamics are exacerbated in abusive lesbian relationships because queer women already regard themselves as allies against a hostile heteronormative society. Machado offers examples of these abusive tactics as well as the additional complications that are faced by lesbians in their attempts to respond to the abusers' isolation. In addition, she refers to scholarship on this particular reality of domestic abuse as she notes that this is a 'common feature of domestic abuse' that works to convince the victim that '[h]er only ally is her abuser, which is to say she has no ally at all' (72). At the start of their relationship, the author's own investment in this idea of a partnership between her and her lover is profound as it allows her to consider herself as 'a piece of someone's destiny' (67). When the cracks start showing, she is unable to offer a strong, cohesive response to protect herself at least in part

because so much of her emotional energy is expended on protecting the idea of them as a queer couple in a world where their relationship is always already under attack. She reminds the reader that she 'came of age in a culture where gay marriage went from comic impossibility to foregone conclusion to law of the land' and she notes that, despite these formal moves towards recognition and equality, she remains 'unaccountably haunted by the specter of the lunatic lesbian' (126). Here the construction of the lesbian as a woman who is out of emotional control and who is 'dogged by mental illness or a personality disorder or rage issues' (126) serves to stand in for all the homophobic assumptions, erasures and silencing that haunt her and these are the specters that compel her to protect her abuser and their relationship when the first instances of abuse crop up. It is only in retrospect that she is able to name exactly what was going on here and she shares these reflections as follows: 'Years later, if I could say anything to her, I'd say "For fuck's sake, stop making us look bad"' (126). She reiterates this point by insisting that 'the last thing queer women need is bad fucking PR' (132). She understands just how high the stakes are here when she says that finding 'desire, love, everyday joy without men's accompanying bullshit is a pretty decent working definition of paradise' (109). For her as a queer woman, it is thus about much more than losing a relationship when she admits the violence. Breaking her silence amounts to paradise lost in this context.

Quite explicit links can be drawn between the discursive silences and erasures of lesbian women's experiences of domestic abuse, the compulsion to cling to a utopian relationship ideal that challenges heteronormative assumptions and physical violence. The author ruminates on these interactions as follows:

> The literature of queer domestic abuse is lousy with references to this punctured dream [the definition of 'paradise' offered in the preceding paragraph], which proves to be *as much of a violation as a black eye, a sprained wrist* [emphasis added] …. Acknowledging the insufficiency of this idealism is nearly as painful as acknowledging that we're the same as straight folk in this regard: we're in the muck like everyone else (109).

While we may all be in the same 'muck', the silencing of specifically lesbian women's experiences of domestic abuse does add an additional layer of

complication when lesbians try to break the silence and leave abusive relationships. This, in itself, makes the experiences of lesbian women qualitatively different from the experiences of straight women in abusive relationships and we can only address these differences adequately when we recognize that they are fundamentally political. As feminist scholars and activists have long argued, the political and the personal are inseparably intertwined and Machado's text offers a nuanced engagement with these entanglements. Giorgio (2002: 1235) articulates the implications of this when she suggests that,

> abused lesbians negotiate a shared and concrete dissonance between their lived experience and dominant domestic violence discourse. Because our models of relationship violence are drawn from heterosexual women's experiences, they do not capture nor reflect the specific needs of lesbian victims.

The fact that lesbian women's experiences have not been part of shaping 'dominant domestic violence discourse' matters and this political reality compromises the ability of individuals to extricate themselves from violent relationships. Machado demonstrates an acute awareness of this and she dedicates her second (and first fully fleshed out) chapter to reflections on the related concepts of the 'violence of the archive' and 'archival silence' (4). She knows that elisions are neither arbitrary nor innocent as she explains that '[w]hat is placed in or left out of the archive is a political act, dictated by the archivist and the political context in which she lives' (4). She draws on the work of a queer theorist when she teases out how these dynamics impact the telling of dissonant stories:

> The late queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz pointed out that 'queerness has an especially vexed relationship to evidence …. When the historian of queer experience attempts to document a queer past, there is often a gatekeeper, representing a straight past'. What gets left behind? Gaps where people never see themselves or find information about themselves. Holes that make it impossible to give oneself a context. Crevices people fall into. Impenetrable silence (4-5).

Once again, Machado returns to the issue of silence. This is no ordinary si-

lence as she describes it as an 'impenetrable' one. The epistemological silence that is constituted by a lack of context, is something that the author also repeatedly notes and she links this to her vulnerability. She reveals that she trusted her lover because she simply had 'no context for anything else' (45). Machado uses assonance to draw the reader's attention to these links between silence and isolation, and the inability to leave an abusive relationship. The silence is impenetrable and her relationship becomes an 'island, surrounded by impassable waters' (72). The lack of reference points in meta narratives that elide queer experiences of domestic abuse means that she remains unable to articulate what is happening to her as violence and, more importantly, that she is unable to conceive of escaping the relationship. She signals the extent of her powerlessness in a story about a dog whom her mother rescued. The narrator has to take care of the dog, Greta, and she is struck by her profound sadness. One day, she opens the door for Greta and tells her to run and be free. Greta, however, refuses to take the opportunity to escape and just looks at her with 'the saddest, most mournful expression' (119). Machado ends the chapter with the following reflection, which seems like an apt description of her own situation: 'She could have run. The door was open. But it was as if she didn't even know what she was looking at' (119). Towards the end of the memoir, Machado articulates the desperation of a woman who is trapped in an abusive relationship as she describes how she fantasizes about dying because she would do '[a]nything to make is stop' (177). Yet, by this stage, she has 'forgotten that leaving is an option' (177).

For Machado, the road to recovery and healing involves a multi-layered breaking of the impenetrable silence that made her escape feel as inconceivable and impossible as navigating 'impassable waters' (72). Although she had no idea that she could be hurt like this by another woman, her research reveals that the 'first book about lesbian abuse was published the year [she] was born' (232). Her most urgent question is 'Why did no one tell me?' (232). As much as her memoir breaks the silence, she dreams of a queer community where these stories are told: 'I imagine that, one day, I will invite young queers over for tea and cheese platters and advice, and I will be able to tell them: you can be hurt by people who look just like you' (232). She is well aware of the challenges inherent in this project as she admits that '[p]utting language to something for which you have no language is no easy feat' (134).

The liminality that Machado explores in her playful yet strategic use

of paratexual elements, resurfaces as a concept and a queer reality when she grapples with the difficulty of speaking into this specific silence. She describes the 'curse of the queer woman' as one of 'eternal liminality' (135). She explores this liminality as she reflects on an actual court case involving abused women where the straight victims who fit in with socially accepted norms of femininity had their sentence commuted but the one lesbian victim had a longer, tougher battle for justice. The woman, Debra, struggled and the attorneys leveraged a number of heteronormative assumptions, including one that holds that victims need 'to fit the traditional domestic abuse narrative that people understood: the abused needed to be a 'feminine' figure – meek, straight, white – and the abuser needed to be a masculine one' (137). The case reinforces Machado's argument that the 'queer woman's gender identity is tenuous and can be stripped away from her at any moment, should it suit some straight party of another' (138). She again links this uncertain epistemological ground on which queer women stand to the 'archival silence' through which 'certain people's narratives and their nuances are swallowed by history' (138). In the same chapter where she revisits liminality, she returns to the implications and exacerbated vulnerability that result from a lack of context. She uses italics to make it clear just how dangerous this is for queer women who find themselves in abusive relationships by phrasing her point as follows: 'There is also the simple yet terrible fact that the legal system does not provide protection against most kinds of abuse – verbal, emotional, psychological – and even worse, it *does not provide context*' (138) [emphasis in original]. Any meaningful breaking of the silence much include recognizing the nuances of queer people's experiences as this is the only way to offer real context. In order to escape, she had to get to a place where she realized that she and her partner did not need to be the poster children for lesbians and that they did not need to perform being 'good' queers to avoid invalidating their entire identities. She reflects on the possibility that lesbian relationships are 'more intense and more beautiful but also more painful and volatile, because women are all of these things too' (45). The admission of pain and volatility is something that she does with great caution as she knows that she is doing so in a context that is structured according to 'a system of coding [in which] villainy and queerness become a kind of shorthand for each other' (47). The way to challenge this, however, is not to offer some artificial context where there is never any link between villainy and queerness. Such a maneuver does nothing to help women who

find themselves at the receiving end of queer villainy. Instead, Machado offers the following solution, which amounts to a call for acknowledging nuance:

> We [queer people] deserve to have out wrongdoing represented as much as our heroism, because when we refuse wrongdoing as a possibility for a group of people, we refuse their humanity. That is to say, queers – real-life ones – do not deserve representation, protection, and rights because they are morally pure or upright as a people. They deserve those things because they are human beings, and that is enough (47).

Allowing space for nuance and complexity in queer narratives is thus a crucial part of Machado's larger project of filling archival gaps and challenging epistemological and discursive silencing.

Throughout the memoir, the narrator's body looms large as a locus of violence and shame and, ultimately, a reclamation of that body is a defining characteristic of her healing. Elspeth Probyn (2005: 162) argues that the 'body of the writer becomes the battleground where ideas and experiences collide, sometimes to produce new visions of life' and this is an apt description of the corporeal dynamics we see in Machado's text. As a fat, queer woman of colour, her refusal of corporeal shame and silence is in itself a political act. In one of the early chapters, Machado articulates how her fat embodiment exacerbated her vulnerability to an abusive relationship as follows: 'Part of the problem was, as a fat weird girl, [she] felt lucky' (24) that her pretty blond lover chose her. Once the abuse starts, her body serves as an early warning system that alerts her to the danger long before she is able to articulate it. She wonders whether she should 'be concerned' when she finds that she feels 'sick to [her] stomach almost constantly' with 'a burning in [her] gut', a 'tremor in [her] limbs' and a 'weird, closed-down sensation in [her] esophagus' (103). Her body is speaking loudly and breaking the stifling silence before she can do so. In one of the most terrifying encounters with her lover, the narrator locks herself in the bathroom. For the rest of her time in that house, her 'body would charge with alarm every time [she] stepped into that bathroom' (141). Probably more than any other room in a house, the bathroom is a site where corporeality is laid bare. It is thus significant that this is the room that comes to symbolize both her fear and a

semblance of safety. Her body also bears witness to the abuse, even as it fails to carry any outwardly obvious signs of it. When she struggles with telling her story in a way that will be believed, she finds herself wishing that her lover had hit her so that she would 'have bruised in grotesque and obvious ways' (224). After her escape, she reflects that her body is, in many ways, substantively different from the one that cowered in a bathroom in terror: 'So many cells in my body have died and regenerated … My blood and taste buds and skin have long since re-created themselves. My fat still remembers, but just barely – within a few years, it will have turned itself over completely. My bones too' (225). The memories, however, retain their residence in her 'nervous system', in the 'lenses of [her] eyes' and in her cerebral cortex. She notes that these parts of her 'can still climb onto the witness stand' and that her 'memory has something to say about the way trauma has altered [her] body's DNA, like an ancient virus' (225).

The body bears the evidence of the abuse but, like the rest of the narrative, what constitutes proof is complicated and queer. Once again, the idea of the specter is invoked as a residue of the violence that haunts the body of the victim. There is nothing obvious about the corporeal effect of this violence but it is, nonetheless, very much there in all its tenuousness. Machado again draws on the work of Muñoz as she tries to make sense of this: 'The key to queering evidence, and by that I mean the ways in which we prove queerness and read queerness, is by suturing it to the concept of ephemera. Think of ephemera as a trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor' (225). As Machado describes these ephemeral traces, two issues are foregrounded: the impact of the abuse on her body and the difficulty of telling her story in a way that will be believed:

> The recorded sound waves of her speech on one axis and a precise measurement of the flood of adrenaline and cortisol in my body on the other …. A photograph of her grip on my arm in Florida, with measurements of the shadows to indicate depth of indentation; an equation to represent the likely pressure. A wire looped through my hair, ready to record her hiss. The rancid smell of anger. The metal tang of fear in the back on my throat.
> None of these things exist. You have no reason to believe me (225).

This need to find a receptive audience who believes her story is a familiar

one that will resonate with all victims of gender violence. For a queer woman who is sharing her experience of violence at the hands of a female lover, the difficulties in this regard are all the greater. The evidence is present only by its absence. There may not be bruises but her body knows and remembers. She can still hear, feel, smell and taste the violence. In telling her story, she does not get to draw on what Muñoz refers to as 'mainstream visibility' (226). In fact, her deviation from the heteronormative master narrative means that she has to challenge layers of elision and silencing. Her identity as a woman and her sexuality as a queer woman are already rendered marginal and now she needs to articulate an experience that depends on speaking all these pre-existing silences in order to be understood. She understands that these pockets of silence are what enable the abuse in the first place when she adds a footnote in the voice of the abuser: 'I am doing this because I can get away with it; I can get away with it because you exist on some cultural margin, some societal periphery' (233). This last statement appears in a chapter directly after the one in which she imagines inviting young queers over and telling them that same-sex domestic abuse is both possible and common. This placement further reinforces the argument that the author regards the silencing and the fact that these stories are pushed to the 'cultural margins' as factors that facilitate the abuse. For her, silence is violent because it actively facilitates the abuse that she suffers.

In the second last chapter before the epilogue, the reader sees just how far the narrator has come from feeling lucky that someone would want her fat body to reclaiming that body in all its infinitely wise wonder. In this short chapter that covers less than half a page, she uses repetition, alliteration and assonance for emphasis as she argues that your 'body is brilliant, even when you are not. It doesn't just heal – it learns. It remembers' (238). After leaving the abusive relationship, she sometimes finds that she gets a visceral reaction when she meets someone new and she identifies this as a 'sixth sense' that she experiences as a 'physical revulsion' (238). She comes to understand this corporeal alarm system as follows: 'Inconvenient, irritating, but important: my brilliant body's brilliant warning' (238). She has done a great deal of work to reclaim this profound connection to her body but she leaves the reader in no doubt that her queer body played a pivotal role in the abusive relationship. She reflects that,

> [t]his, maybe, was the worst part: the whole world was out to kill

> you both. Your bodies have always been abject. You were dropped from the boat of the world, climbed onto a piece of driftwood together, and after a perfunctory period of pleasure and safety, she tried to drown you (142).

After she has worked through the implications and reality of her situation, with no master narrative to draw on, her healing process is thus all the more complex. She finds that she is left with many more feelings than just being 'mad, or heartbroken' as she also needs to 'grieve from the betrayal' (142).

The author has been betrayed by the woman who was supposed to be her closest ally but also by the larger idea of a queer community of equality, safety and solidarity and she grieves the loss of this 'utopia'. She ends her memoir in another type of utopia but it is significant that, this time, the space is explicitly devoted to breaking the silences and telling her story. She describes a residential writing retreat where she 'wrote a large part of this book in rural eastern Oregon' (240). Her description of 'a cabin at the edge of a lake' with young deer appearing just feet away from the window she looks out of as she writes has distinct connotations of utopia. Throughout the memoir, one can thus trace the narrator's trajectory from paradise lost to paradise found and it is in the speaking of her experience, through the act of writing her memoir, that she regains a type of 'clarity' that is 'surreally crisp' (242). She associates this clarity with a radically renewed relationship with her body and she wishes that she 'had always lived in this body' (242). Machado's reclamation of her story and her body is no small feat for, as Munt (2007: 216) reflects, 'perhaps for those of us who have learnt silence through shame, the hardest thing of all is to find a voice'.

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