

DIY Lover: A Look at Latin American Fiction that (De)Constructs Gender

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Bookend Lecture, February 14, 2024

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Look at the cover of this book and you'll see a solitary man peering into the pages of a book, seemingly unsure of the path ahead. *Creators and Created Beings in Twentieth-Century Latin American Fiction* began as a dissertation at the University of Virginia and eventually evolved into its current form, but since today is Valentine's Day, I want to briefly talk about my book's abandonment issues.

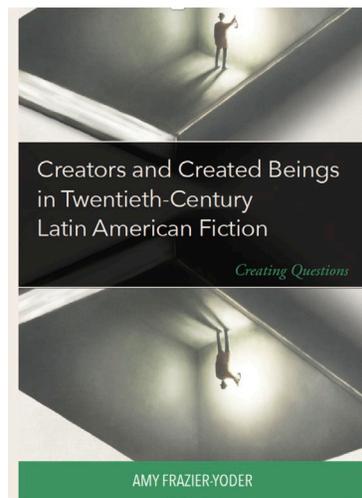


Image: Book Cover.

Life and work conspired against it. I shelved it, but kept returning to it after having read more, talked to more colleagues. At one point, I contemplated breaking it down into articles—what I thought of as potentially higher value parts—even though I had the prospectus written.

I had some kind kicks in the pants not to abandon the bigger project. One mentor said, “Don’t be afraid to be great.” Like most, I was actually afraid of being terrible. Still, the message resonated with me. I am grateful for all the pushes and kick in the pants that got me here. A special thanks to Big Boots, the publishing group that collaborated with me in refining various aspects of this book. There has been

abundant support along this journey, and I genuinely appreciate it. These are important especially because writing a book can otherwise be a very lonely endeavor.

Today, I will share a bit about the broader book project, but will focus on the final chapter of the book, which looks at gender and (de)construction of norms and practices. I'll do so in recognition of Valentine's Day, an occasion that is highly scripted by gender, overly so. As I focus on gender, I want to do something I did not get to do in the book. I will explore some trends in how gender is portrayed in works from other chapters. Some added patterns emerged.

AN OVERVIEW OF INTERNAL CHARACTER CREATION

Does anyone recognize this image, this reinterpretation of Michelangelo's work "The Creation of Adam"? Here, God has shuffled across the shag carpet and is ready to impart a most-important electric shock. This image of the hands of God and Adam represents the moment of creation, the genesis of life.

In *Creators and Created Beings in Twentieth-Century Latin American Fiction*, I look at internal fictional entities who bring other characters to life through non-traditional means. What I discovered was the fascinating array of methods they used—far beyond conventional biological means. They crafted through science, embraced their roles as authors, played the parts of gods and divine craftsmen, and even manifested their creativity as lovers.

These roles reflect the four divisions of the book. Even with their diversity, the portrayal of internal creators who shaped characters within the narrative share a common thread. They pose significant inquiries—epistemological questions, exploring and critiquing the ways we understand things. They engage in ontological disruption, shaking the very core of our understanding of existence, raising profound questions in the process. That's the real reason for the lonely man seeking direction on the cover. Fiction of the twentieth century in Latin America suggests an upheaval in our understanding of nature and existence. These works question assumptions about the nature of being, existence, or reality and also questioned fundamental principles about what we know and how we know it. The subtitle of the book is *Creating Questions*. This is the essence of what I like to think of as a four-part side eye, a literary gaze in Latin America in the twentieth century that posed big questions.

They fretted. The focus of sci fi's side eye was to sound out the worried embrace between humans and science and technology. As they contemplated the possibility that we might be on the brink of creating life through technological advancements, a genuine worry and fascination stemmed from observations and speculations about science. They were asking about possibilities and consequences. What if we venture into or are trespassing on God's territory?

They questioned. They probed the boundaries between fiction and reality, asking whether fiction reflects our notions of reality, whether it has the capability of influencing reality, or if it is a mere flimsy

artifice. They explored examined how fictions are constructed and if fiction plays a role in shaping perceptions.

They undermined. They questioned religion and philosophy, challenging religious systems. Particularly, they scrutinized these systems and suggested that no system, especially religion, but also philosophy, could ascribe meaning to known reality.

Finally, they rejected and magnified established norms. They made unjust or unsatisfying gender-based systems more visible. Our focus today centers on the rejection of unjust or unsatisfying gender societal structures. Consider that. Making something transparent allows us to see its building blocks, and it prompts us to contemplate how we can construct something more meaningful.

My study encompassed around 20 different works of fiction by approximately 13 distinct authors. While not everyone may be familiar with each one, many of you will be familiar with names like Julio Cortázar, Juan Carlos Onetti, Jorge Luis Borges, María Luisa Bombal, and Carlos Fuentes. When choosing these works, I focused primarily on pieces from the twentieth century through the 1960s, a period often regarded as the peak of the Latin American literary Boom. It marked a time when fiction from Latin America gained global recognition and found its place on bedside tables worldwide.

GENDER IN EARLY-CENTURY SCI FI CREATION-BASED WORKS

Let's look at some patterns of gender seen in sci-fi, a genre that looks both backward and forward to predict, warn, and entertain. In the retrospective gaze, sci-fi contemplates the creation of life, drawing inspiration from both existing foundational science and debunked or pseudo-science.

As these sci fi works looked back, some referenced the homunculus, a miniature, fully formed individual believed to be present in the sperm cell. They reference the false hope that an automaton, such as Vaucanson's pooping duck, could mimic life. They reference the idea that lower forms of life presage higher form, an idea that gained popularity in Latin America at the start of the 20th century, sparking enthusiasm around Darwin's ideas. There was an optimistic shift that humans could be creators as they moved from vitalism, the belief that God was in everything, to materialism. Through understanding the smallest parts, there was a growing belief that humankind could comprehend the whole. Then came cinema, dividing life into tiny bits and further suggesting that life could be understood as fragments, little parts.

As early-century sci fi works fictionally portray humans being able to actually create life, there is often a portrayal of a DIY (do-it-yourself) lover, the creation of an idealized woman by a scientist. Women could be anything in this technologically-created medium, but unfortunately, their creation is very problematic.

In consuming these stories, readers engaged in what is called recreational horror just as you probably do when you watch scary movies. They tap into a fear, but may also warn us about something. These stories tended to show hideous consequences of technologically-mediated lovers both for the creating men and the created women.

In *XYZ*, a shocking work by Peruvian author Clemente Palma from 1935, replicas of Hollywood stars are made from a slurry of egg white 3D film and radium. A whole gaggle of Hollywood starlets is created and confined to an island with their creator. When one doesn't love the creator reciprocally, he remakes her with the egg base of another star who did. They are molded into adoration. They are identical replicas of objectified and adored women. In tech recreations, they are molded into adoring partners and into compliance. Technology is a place where gender norms could be broken, but in the sci fi works I studied for this chapter, I found they are further calcified and made worse.

There is a sense of justice. In most of the sci fi creation stories, the creators die as a result of their creations. The creator in Palma's novella dies of radiation poisoning. The phallic arrow turned on him because he loved his creations "too much". Moral of the story: do not make egg-white, 3-D film, and radium carbon copy concubines on an island and sleep with all of them.

What's the true moral? What is to be said about living out and magnifying gender inequities in otherwise-out-of-reach fantasies of domination through technology here? I suspect those types of questions are equally important as we move forward with artificial intelligence and virtual reality. We are moving into the techno-sexual era. Sexuality is increasingly mediated through technology and to some degree many are already engaging in the creation of ideal lovers. These questions here are becoming more important.

GENDER IN SELECTED WORKS OF CREATION METAFICTION

Chapter Two, *Frame Crossings, Author Spotting, and Power Struggles: Metafictional Readings of Character Creation by Arlt, Onetti, and Cortazar* focuses on metafiction. Metafiction, also called self-conscious fiction, tends to have moments in which the reader sees the worlds and characters for what they are, constructed artifice. Robert Spires writes in *Beyond the Metafictional Mode* that "the language of metafiction tends to be more opaque in that the reader does not look through it so much as at it" (7).¹ Another definition, this one from Robert Alter, posits that metafiction "systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice" (xi *Partial Magic*).² When we look at metafiction texts of Latin America during the twentieth century, what we uncover is that they pose inquiries: Should fiction hold a sacred position? Does it possess transcendent powers?

Characters in the works question their in-text authors. They do not like the scriptedness that confines them. They do not like what they're forced to do.

While gender was not a primary focus of this chapter's study, it becomes clear in these works' exploration of power and control that the in-text authors fashion characters who then operate with gender-based patterns, particularly gender-based violence. In all the works of metafiction that I studied in this chapter, women are murdered or pushed to commit suicide.

In Julio Cortázar's story, "Instrucciones para John Howell," a man in the audience is called in to be part of the play; they beckon him. They place him on stage, and he is compelled to play a specific role, the part of John Howell. Gradually, he transforms into this scripted character, obliged to enact the character's actions. He strongly rejects the role after a woman on stage with him pleads, "Don't let them kill me." He resists the script that is to end in her death, but ultimately succumbs, and the story implies that when he becomes the character John Howell, he shares culpability for her eventual murder. Even as he leaves the stage and returns to his identity as a spectator, he experiences considerable guilt about it. The story ultimately suggests that fiction is potent; it can absorb nonfiction. He goes on being John Howell and responsible for not stopping the script or the femicide.

Here is another one with underlying gender aspects. The fictional city of Santa María in Onetti's *La vida breve* is a realm where characters evade consequences for a femicide. They evade punishment for their crimes. The protagonist is an author character named Brausen. He plans to murder a woman but discovers that she's already been killed by someone else. Brausen flees to the fictional town of Santa María. As an author, he has crafted Santa María, a place where he enjoys impunity. Fiction serves as a sanctuary for those who have transgressed. The novel asserts that ultimately, Santa María holds as much or more significance than reality.

Continuing with the pattern, in *El fabricante de fantasmas* (1936) by Roberto Arlt, the protagonist precipitates the death of his wife, but goes unpunished. His fictional creations rant against him and he engages in conversations with them. They express disdain for him and detest what he has subjected them to. Eventually, the fictional creations precipitate a reality in which their author faces consequences for the crime, pushing him to take a parallel fatal plunge. A femicide that would not have been punished in the frame representing reality is punished in an eye-for-an-eye way.

What we see in these three works of metafiction is that fiction consistently triumphs; it holds more sway than reality. Fiction for the win. However, in these narratives, women consistently end up on the losing side. When they are murdered, fiction provides imprisonment, impunity, or justice.

INVISIBILITY AND EXCLUSION OF WOMEN

As I explore in the chapter *The World Made Flesh: Ontological Disruption in Character Creation in Works by Borges*, Jorge Luis Borges' works are mind-benders. He intricately weaves together diverse

philosophical and religious traditions. Borges' works of character creation suggest problems in traditional understandings of reality and existence. His works are ontologically disruptive. For example, many of his stories suggest that reality might be the error-laden product of a flawed creator. This is enunciated to different degrees of success by a society, a demiurge, a decipherer of spiritual texts, a poet, authors, and characters. For instance, in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," a secret society makes a whole world based on philosophical idealism. That world then overrides the current one, suggesting the fragility of what we know to be true. In another work, a rabbi laments making the clunky golem, suggesting God might lament our imperfections and having created us.

When looked at through the lens of gender, something becomes clear. These metaphysical creation tales mention gender and women the least. When they suggest, for instance, that God is not close, but rather that reality might be the creation of a god, made by another god, and so on into nearly infinite regress, they do not lead us to a Mother Nature or Pachamama. Even in questioning God's existence, it is a male god that is questioned. In truth, most of Borges' characters are men making other men or making whole worlds or empires, which is certainly worthy of note. Existential angst is portrayed as a universal thing, but the angst is largely held in the male mind. Spa day ladies? We know existential angst and philosophical questions are not gendered. So why are they here?

DIY LOVERS AND GENDER

In the spirit of Valentine's Day, *el Día de los Enamorados*, or the Day of the Lovers, I would like to look deeper into the questioning of gender found at the core of the internal creation of lovers, here referred to as DIY Lovers. This discussion is particularly relevant to Chapter Four, titled *Making Lovers: Power, Design, Gender, and Identity Construction in Works by Bombal, Arreola, and Fuentes*.

The creation of lovers often perpetuates patriarchal stereotypes. However, amidst perpetuation, there is also the opportunity for deconstruction. Some of the works I analyze reinforce these stereotypes, while others challenge them through transparency. Today, we will look at two works: Carlos Fuentes' *Aura* (1961) and Juan Jose Arreola's *Anuncio* (1952). You can decide with me if these are perpetuation or rejection stories. Heads up: not everything is what it first appears.

The concept of DIY lovers embodies a potent act of self-love. It is about crafting a lover from within, fulfilling desires through self-serving and self-seeking actions. In this process, an internal, textual lover is fashioned, molded into an "ideal" – though I emphasize the quotation marks here, as these ideals stem from the creator's perspective. There is a visibility of construction that sheds light on the origins of gender construction, allowing us to further understand what foundations gender ideas are built upon and how they shape our present realities. Through this exploration, we aim to uncover the boundaries of ascribed identity and determine whether these acts are oppositional or amplifying in nature.

CARLOS FUNTES: *AURA* (1961)

This story of Carlos Fuentes' *Aura* unfolds like a puzzle, and I hate to share my theory before you have the chance to read it yourself. Apologies in advance for any spoilers. In *Aura*, an adoring lover is recreated by an aging woman, Consuelo. This woman seeks to convert a man, Felipe Montero, into her long-dead husband and to simultaneously bring Aura, a younger avatar of herself, into existence.

Gender-based identity is crucial in understanding this work. Consuelo is a powerful sorceress, a witch, a powerholder. She is incredibly powerful, a real badass lady who can do anything. But you might wonder why with all her abilities, why would she bring this guy back? Why create a younger version of herself for him to fall in love with? What is her motive when she wields such power? That is what we will be discussing.

It is worth noting that this story is not told in the typical narrative style. The novella is told in the second person "tú" form. Felipe Montero, the man destined to become the general, Consuelo's husband, reads a help-wanted ad that matches him precisely: "Seeking a young historian. Organized, meticulous."³ The narrator suggests that the only thing missing is the mention of his name: "But if you read that, you would suspect, you would take it as a joke."⁴ When read as the voice of Montero reacting, the line expresses the uncanniness of encountering an ad that describes him so precisely. When this simultaneous narration is read as the controlling voice of Consuelo, it indicates her caution in directing and controlling Montero so as not to call his attention to the predetermined path that she has set for him. The narrator, I argue, is Consuelo.

Montero goes to her creepy, dark house where he meets Consuelo and her "niece," Aura. His job is to finish the memoirs of Consuelo's deceased husband. She explains to him: "I will inform you of everything. You will learn to write in my husband's style. Just sorting and reading the papers will be enough to fascinate you."⁵ Though he doesn't yet know it, she has external control and influence over him. Montero is being manipulated by a to-be creator. It works. As the novella progresses, Montero's identity fades; he eventually comes to realize that he is the general.

He learns gradually from the memoirs and from observations in the house that young Consuelo practiced some disturbing witchcraft. There are references to the sacrifice of cats, rabbits, and goats. She was obsessed with maintaining her youth. Despite some serious red flags, he falls for Aura, even asking her to run away with him. The novel concludes as he, now converted into the General Llorente, beds Aura. However, in the throes of passion, she turns into the yellow-toothed Consuelo.

Let us rewind and talk about what prompted Consuelo to re-create her dead husband, Llorente, and her avatar, Aura. Consuelo is described as hunchbacked, wilted, unable to walk with strength, white-haired, and yellow-toothed. Her physical decline is emphasized by what surrounds her. When asked to

open the chest of memoirs in her room, Montero finds a nest of rodents hidden in the dark recesses; age is linked to decrepitude, filth, and darkness.

Consuelo wants something long lost and much desired: her youth, beauty, and seductiveness. She incarnates Aura, a young version of herself. Aura, unlike her, commands desire through compliance with norms of femininity.

Like a living puppet, Aura depends on Consuelo, a relationship that Montero first observes as he watches the two eat. She moves with “mechanical fatalism, as if she were waiting for an impulse external to her to pick up the spoon, the knife, to slice the kidneys”.⁶ Consuelo uses sorcery to recapture her youth, but body-shaping exercise, diet plans, and careful application of make-ups and anti-aging creams are examples of self-surveillance regimes that often take root in longings to recreate or maintain the appearance of youth and normative beauty

It is intriguing how we engage in these practices, rooted in the desire to either recreate or preserve the illusion of youth. In her essay “Suffering to be Beautiful,” Sandra Lee Bartky writes about beauty routines and the glorification of youth. “Women submit to this discipline in large measure largely because we have been persuaded that our faces and bodies are defective” (2002, 20).⁷ Consuelo’s creation of Aura may seem far removed from makeups and creams, but this witch is a member of the cult of beauty, disdainful of the aged body. Remember when Montero realizes he is sleeping with her, not the young Aura? Consuelo, horrified at her own aged body, promises him that she will create Aura again for him. She puts her power behind gender-based body constraints. Through the avatar, she can be eternally adored because her body exhibits what Bartky describes as “the proper marks of normative femininity” (15).

She knows that no cream or spell will work. In the voice of her avatar, Aura, she asks, “Will you love me always? Even as I grow old? Even if I lose my beauty? Even if my hair turns white?”⁸ She extracts this promise from him, pleading that he, as her judge, love her even when her beauty is gone. She desires to be loved beyond her physical appearance. Yet, her emphasis on beauty perpetuates a power imbalance. Montero, while controlled by her, is also granted power by her.

Consuelo possesses the ability to do anything, yet she willingly relinquishes her power and reconstructs herself in conformity to highly gendered characteristics. There are some intriguing studies of why individuals conform to norms that do not benefit them. I encourage you to reflect on this in your own lives. What if you are conforming to something that ultimately harms you? Desired conformity may lead to a sense of fulfillment through achieving normative goals. However, it can also result in discontent and a huge sense of frustration when one feels restricted or denigrated by societal expectations.

JUAN JOSE ARREOLA: “ANUNCIO”

Juan José Arreola's short story "Anuncio" is a bit scandalous, to say the least. This piece was actually published in 1952, nearly a decade before *Aura*, but is far more futuristic. In it, a commercial voice sings the glories of Plastisex© venuses, gynoid creations meant to physically resemble and replace women in all things sexual. Plastisex© are products designed to be fetishized and objectified in women's place, serving as projections of male fantasies, substitutes for real women, and displacing of women from sex and desire.

Now, a bit more about the title: "Anuncio" means "advertisement" or "warning". It not only encourages consumers to buy the product but also serves as commentary on the dangerous direction society may be heading. This copy of this advertisement fits into the broader context of 1950s product advertising oriented toward consumer choice. Slogans on real products like Lucky Tiger hair tonic suggested that women were to be selected. In one ad published in *Esquire* magazine, images of various women's heads and busts are depicted as mounted like trophy game alongside the ad copy, "Lucky tiger gets the gals" and "which one would do you want". Buyers presumably selected the poster image of the girl of their choice, but the ad suggests that women are "male-ordered" products. Selection continues to be an ad motif in the 2020s. In a modern ad from Red Tape, a guy is shown operating a vending machine filled with women. He is selecting a woman, a specific type. It is reminiscent of the concept of Plastisex©. The objectification and fragmentation of women through selection has taken a new turn. Has anyone here heard about recently released Your Cherry, a make-your-own AI companion service? You choose the specs of your online romantic AI partner. Once again, we are witnessing how our sexuality is increasingly mediated by technology. The issues raised in this 1950s story about the implications of choice and conformity remain highly relevant today.

Now, let us examine what the ad in "Anuncio" says. The voice of the ad in "Anuncio" vehemently denies that the creation of the gynoids is about objectification. The story's ad copy proclaims: "Far from representing a threat for society, the Plastisex© venus is a powerful ally in the fight for the restoration of human values. Rather than diminishing her, it enhances and dignifies woman, taking away her role as an instrument of pleasure, as *sexophora*, to use a classic term. Instead of depressing, expensive, or unhealthy merchandise, our companions will become beings capable of developing their creative possibilities to a high degree of perfection."⁹ With the popularization of Plastisex©, consumers are promised the blossoming of female genius. Despite claims of mutual benefit, we are compelled to question the true intentions behind it all. What lies beneath the surface of these advancements? I particularly enjoy discussing this story with my students, who engage with it in a class in Spanish called Gender Fiction. In our classes, students create illustrations depicting the specifications and options available in Plastisex© companions. We also inspect the works alongside theory by Judith Butler, as well

as Virginie Despentes' *King Kong Theory*, which all offer fresh insights into gender norms and their implications.

The narrator depicts these creations as customizable to the utmost degree, tailored precisely to the desires and budget of the purchasing owner. The details under the consumer's control span a wide range, encompassing hair color, eye color, odor, skin texture and tone, makeup, age, accent, and even the most intimate aspects such as viscosity and scent. The narrator asks, "Are you fond of the pleasures of smell? Then tune in to the range of scents. From the faint armpit aroma made of sandalwood and musk, to the strongest emanations of the sun-soaked and sporty woman: pure butyric acid, or the most quintessential products of modern perfumery. Intoxicate yourself as you please."¹⁰ Desire, in this context, becomes intensely localized, focusing on specific traits; for example, red hair versus the woman with red hair. This fragmentation portrays the reduction of women to mere collections of physical attributes, stripping them of their inherent value as individuals. She is then accessible through a control panel, likened to the simplicity of operating television buttons, which highlights the notion of complete control and domination. She is devoid of any autonomy or agency. It reflects a fantasy of dominance and submission.

The gynoid is entirely customizable with the client providing photographs, documents, measurements, clothing preferences, and descriptions to tailor the companion to their desires. The narrative examines the practice of creating faithful replicas of former spouses and lovers: "It is also common for clients who were previously married to request faithful copies of their wives (usually with some adjustments) in order to use them without betraying their wives during times of serious or temporary illnesses, and during prolonged and involuntary absences, including abandonment and death."¹¹ What's unfolding here? A woman decides to leave her husband, and how does he respond? Well, it's a new twist. He need not be bothered. He can simply go and replace her. This depiction illustrates how the gynoid women are fragmented and controlled in ways that real women cannot be. As the control over these women escalates, the narrative takes a darker turn. The advertisement implies that each sex doll comes with a device symbolizing virginity, reminiscent of archaic purity standards. This device serves as a twisted guarantee of ownership, reinforcing the objectification and control of women.

Here we observe a prevalent idea within many societies, particularly prominent in Latin American cultures, that women's sexual activity must be closely monitored and controlled. In traditional cultural contexts characterized by power imbalances, women were often viewed as perishable commodities. This notion depicts women as goods whose value, call it consumer value, was intricately tied to their perceived purity. The Plastisex© gynoids are subjected to stringent cleaning rituals after every use, highlighting the extreme level of control and dehumanization inherent in these practices. While such extreme control may initially appear to be exaggerated satire, it unfortunately reflects real societal attitudes and practices.

As you've likely gathered, "Anuncio" functions as a stunning satire of the dehumanizing, objectifying force of consumeristic male desire. It drips with satire, right? Not all is what it seems. Arreola's own unconventional take on gender provides insights. I want to emphasize that while authorial intent is not the sole factor in interpreting a story, it is worth noting what Arreola was conveying about gender. He presented an unconventional perspective on gender binaries, proposing that human beings were originally unified, complete, and bisexual. This belief is not entirely novel; it mirrors ancient views held by Greeks and Egyptians. Arreola's narrative suggests that men possess a spiritual essence that becomes degraded through sexual interaction with women. Arreola expressed the belief that in the split of humans into men and women, women have shouldered a heavy biological burden, while men have been associated with a more spiritual dimension, which he perceived as a superior realm.

There is some redemption for the story in reader reception theory. The story's richness lies in the multiplicity of readings or interpretations that it permits *us*. The narrative voice smoothly, unctuously, encourages pleasure-seeking via gynoids for the good of humankind. We understand the voice's need for corporate revenues and naturally question it. The commercialized voice plus the copyright-protected Plastisex© name invites a critique of a capitalist system of supply and demand.

THINGS *SEEM* BETTER NOW...

The gynoids are heavily exaggerated objects of fragmented desire. Their heads can be filled with honey, port, or liquor to give intoxicating or sweet kisses. They are protected from the potential damage of passionate embraces by a magnesium frame. We see absurd extremes in this work that we might imagine we are immune from. And yet, we see modern Plastisex© in dehumanizing advertising and modern technologies in surgery and digital filter manipulation that shape bodies on demand. In this world - not in fiction - commercially-voiced value is placed on set body and behavioral characteristics. This contributes to the construction of gender norms. These contribute to pressures to fashion both body and being based on high-value characteristics.

I must emphasize that there is a perception that things have changed and that things are better now. Sexism may be hidden in 2024, says Philippa Roberts, "Brands appear to be presenting a more positive and progressive message for women, but all that has happened is a trick of the language. Age-defying has turned into 'ageless,' and dieting has coded itself as 'wellness.'"¹² Sexism may be obscured by euphemisms. In 2024, brands continue to present themselves as more inclusive and aware, but these shifts in language may merely disguise underlying issues.

In analyzing these narratives, I also draw from Michel Foucault's writings in *The Subject and Power* to shed light on the complexities of these power dynamics. He suggests that different interpretations and understandings of the same events and power struggles can arise depending on whether one approaches them from the perspective of power or from the history of struggle. He writes:

The interpretations which result will not consist of the same elements of meaning or the same links or the same types of intelligibility, although they refer to the same historical fabric, and each of the two analyses must have reference to the other. In fact, it is precisely the disparities between the two readings which make visible those fundamental phenomena of ‘domination’ which are present in a large number of human societies.¹³

The company frames Plastisex© as a concession, even gifts, to the powerless. It is a powerholder narration. An unvoiced response is present in a reading against corporate speak. Presented with an unreliable source—a source whose commercial pitch calls for added skepticism, the reader may logically read the actions of the creators from inside the history of struggle. Furthermore, the power of the reader is paramount.

The reader may insert or intuit other responses, giving voice to identities and desires that do not match those portrayed. It is this extra-textual voice, and not the creation of the Plastisex© women, that provides the most authentic liberation in “Anuncio.”

NOTES

1. Robert Spires, *Beyond the Metafictional Mode* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984).
2. Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley and Los Angeles University of California Press, 1975).
3. Author translation from the original. “Se solicita historiador joven. Ordenado, escrupuloso” Carlos Fuentes, *Aura* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1983), 24.
4. “Pero si leyeras eso, sospecharías, lo tomarías a broma.” Fuentes, 24.
5. “Yo le informaré de todo. Usted aprenderá a redactar en el estilo de mi esposo. Le bastará ordenar y leer los papeles para sentirse fascinado . . .” Fuentes, 18.
6. “[F]atalidad mecánica, como si esperara un impulse ajeno a ella para tomar la cuchara, el cuchillo, partir los riñones” Fuentes, 36.
7. Sandra Lee Bartky, *“Sympathy and Solidarity” and Other Essays* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).
8. “—¿Me querrás siempre? . . . ¿Aunque envejezca? ¿Aunque pierda mi belleza? ¿Aunque tenga el pelo blanco?” Fuentes, 49.
9. “Lejos de representar una amenaza para la sociedad, la venus Plastisex© resulta una aliada poderosa en la lucha pro restauración de los valores humanos. En vez de disminuirla, engrandece y dignifica a la mujer, arrebatándole su papel de instrumento placentero, de sexófora, para emplear un término clásico. En lugar de mercancía deprimente, costosa o insalubre, nuestras prójimas se convertirán en seres capaces de desarrollar sus posibilidades creadoras hasta un alto grado de perfección.” Arreola, 127–28.
10. “¿Es usted aficionado a los placeres del olfato? Sintonice entonces la escala de los olores. Desde el tenue aroma axilar hecho a base de sándalo y almizcle, hasta las más recias emanaciones de la mujer asoleada y deportiva: ácido butírico puro, o los más quintaesenciados productos de la perfumería moderna. Embriáguese a su gusto” Arreola, 125.
11. “Es también frecuente el caso de clientes antiguamente casados que nos solicitan copias fieles de sus esposas (generalmente con algunos retoques), a fin de servirse de ellas sin traicionarlas en

ocasiones de enfermedades graves o pasajeras, y durante ausencias prolongadas e involuntarias, que incluyen el abandono y la muerte” Arreola, 124.

12. Philippa Roberts, *NYT*, “Yes, Marketing Is Still Sexist”.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/26/us/marketing-industry-sexism-brandsplaining.html>
13. Michel Foucault, *The Subject and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).