Fluidity, Opacity, and Anticolonial Resistance in Mayra Santos-Febres's *Sirena Selena*

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Mayra Santos-Febres's *Sirena Selena* explores the limits of gender identity and expression under the stringent expectations of anticolonial dominance through her portrayal of Dominican and Puerto Rican transvestism. Her protagonist, Sirena, glides through the text in expressions of both male and female embodiment, resisting categorization of either and at times demanding categorization of both. Her translocation and class mobility also suggests mutability: she travels from the diverse geopolitical and social landscapes of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, as well as participates in upwardly mobile movements that take her from the streets to the stage as a budding *bolero* star. Her movement, this simultaneous affirmation and evasion, suggests that Sirena enacts Édouard Glissant's concept of opacity: resistance to be known, and thus, othered. Additionally, as Caribbean scholar Alexandra Perkins proposes, her fluidity personifies a queered representation of transnationality. Thus, this paper will analyze Santos-Febres's exploration of anticolonial resistance via Sirena's use of opacity through her fluidity. Santos-Febres expresses Sirena's fluid opacity through multiple lenses, but for the purposes of this article I will focus on three modes: textual, imagined, and spatial, first, that is, the way the text itself acts as a mode of opacity to the reader through its representation of language and narrative cues that delineate Sirena's fluidity; second, the imagined reactions and perceptions of Sirena through other characters' interactions with her, and finally the overarching theme of translocation and movement via Sirena and Martha's travels across geopolitical lines. Sirena, then, represents a multiplicity of being: she embodies both opacity and fluidity through her experiences as a multi-gendered body that enacts anticolonial resistance.

Categorizing Sirena is no easy feat, as she is a character that eludes both other characters' and readers' perceptions of identity. Across many disciplines, scholars have sought to assess Sirena's positionality in reference to the text as well as Caribbean literature as a whole. I want to note that the following is limited to scholarship that has been published in English; I realize the limitations of a lack of access to the breadth of scholarship and criticism in Spanish and other languages that surrounds this text, but for the purposes of this article I will be dealing with references in English only. Through the lens of queer

theory and gender studies, scholars have approached the text in reference to Santos-Febres's articulation of trans and gender-variant characters. Scholars such as Rosamond S. King and Vek Lewis question the validity of Santos-Febres's depiction of trans characters as symbols: for Lewis, the *transvesti* character of Latin American literature as nation-symbol; for King, the trans character as myth. King refers to Sirena's connection with the concept of trans deliverance as Sirena's singing "delivers people to a deeper sense of self, but one that is often full of painful memories and harsh truths" (591). Whereas King situates Santos-Febres's linking of mythology to Sirena as limiting, Solimar Otero engages with Sirena's mythological connections as referential to the agency found in drag folk culture as "the creativity involved in reconstructing the self in flux, of rehearsing a personhood that is constantly being refashioned" (211). This reconstructing of the self is reflected in Debra Castillo's assessment that Sirena's performance of *boleros* informs her performance of gender and thus her sense of self (18). Sirena, and the text as a whole, also informs perceptions of space in the context of the Caribbean identity. Irune del Rio Gabiola notes Sirena's commodification as the marginal subject in Puerto Rico's economic networks and networkers established by late-stage capitalism ("Never Ending Journey" 86), while Radost Ragelova explores how the idea of the nation is transformed by the spaces occupied by transvestites and as such undermine the authority of the legal system. In his introduction to a dossier centering on the text within Puerto Rican literary contexts, Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez highlights "Santos's employment of transvestism and its transmutability and applicability to different circumstances that invite a variety of alternative critical readings and diverse interpretations" (7). In this sense, Sirena occupies and embodies multiple definitions in relation to and in opposition of the Caribbean sociopolitical climate.

What I hope to have shown here is the vast diversity of perceptions of Sirena: her character fits in many molds, crosses multiple disciplines, and disrupts a breadth of conceptions of expressions of self. With this versatility, albeit a rich landscape for critical debate and analysis, Sirena's categorization proves difficult to pin down—she is fluid. Her fluidity, then, is the facet of her character that I will be working with for the remainder of this discussion.

Her appearance, past, emotions, and trajectory is depicted as elusive and ultimately fluid. As the term "fluid" or "fluidity" relates to queer, gender, and postcolonial studies, *Sirena Selena* can be read as an intersection of all three. For gender and queer theory, fluidity extends to alterity: an alternative state of being that is not only resistant to hegemonic identity, but also transitive. Postcolonial theory, too, utilizes fluidity in reference to movement, from geopolitical boundaries to the hybridity of ethnic and racial identity. In the more

specific context of gender variant identities and sexualities in the Caribbean, Faith Smith contends that "indeterminancy can be used to affirm the ways in which the Caribbean is identified with a range of erotic desires" (14). While desire and the erotic are of close interest to this text and Santos-Febres's work generally, the indeterminacy that Smith suggests is a key facet of Sirena's identity, as her ability to shift and transform links her to the agency she seeks.

For my purposes, I will work with Alexandra Perkins' definition: "Fluid bodies are dispersed, difficult to contain, and transgressive. They originate in a particular space, and upon release, move across natural as well as imposed boundaries" ("Introduction" 17). While Perkins utilizes this term as it applies to queered Caribbean bodies across multiple works and mediums in the context of transnationality, Sirena's character lends itself most closely to the second attribution. She is "difficult to contain," as she moves from Puerto Rico to the Dominican Republic; from her grandmother's care to Martha's; from living on the street to enrapturing audiences with her enchanting *boleros*. She embodies both the effeminate beauty of a young boy and the intoxicating allure of a female diva. Clearly, Sirena resists any type of concrete categorization, and while she enjoys the benefits of this fluid mobility (of self and nationality), her ability to transform renders her difficult to know—she is perceived as an experience by her admirers, an entrepreneurial pursuit to others, but never truly a flesh-and-blood person.

Santos-Febres attributes to Sirena a categorization of ephemerality of mythical proportions: "from the gods you came, sweet Selena, succulent siren of the glistening beaches" (1). Aesthetically, Sirena is impossible to grasp; she resides in the framework of imagined spaces —a creation of the gods, a siren of seduction and enchantment. For example, Dawn F. Stinchcomb isolates Sirena's mythological attribution to the Black Aphrodite of Yoruba culture, claiming "the bodies of the sexually ambiguous characters themselves are conduits between the spiritual and material worlds" (4-6). Sirena is perceived by other characters in a similar manner, as her beauty and art enrapture and evade earthly constructions. While this ephemerality attributed to trans and gender-variant characters can be criticized as narratively limiting, as King argues (583), Stinchcomb values Sirena's attributions as a connection to Indigenous culture. Further, Stinchcomb highlights the importance of Yoruba constructs, that "there is an understanding of the difference between gender and sexuality, as well as one between this sexuality and sexual orientation in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean that directly opposes western European concepts of sexual identity" (9). While critics of the text such as King and Lewis bring essential nuance to literary representations of Latin American and Caribbean trans characters and gender-variant characters, Stinchcomb's assessment adheres more closely to Santos-Febres's

view of *transvesti* characters as anticolonial agents, which I will engage with in a later section of this discussion. The opposition of western constructs of sexuality that Stinchcomb highlights and, as I will show, accessibility and identification serve as turning points for this discussion. The crucial intervention here is to apply Édouard Glissant's theory of opacity—the reclamation and protection of the self in response to imposed subjectivity through intentional resistance—to envision Sirena not as passive in her subjectivity, but as an active agent who participates in her own identity-making process.

It is necessary to deconstruct Glissant's concept of opacity within the context of Caribbean postcolonial narratives and *Sirena Selena*. Opacity refers to the resistance to be known by imposing structures, most notably enacted by colonized subjects in response to colonial pressures. Opacity can be deployed through speech, for example by resisting acquisition of a dominant language. Its opposite, then, is transparency which Glissant outlines through the framework he attributes to Western thought: "In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgements. I have to reduce" (190). So, the basis for Western understanding, and therefore acquisition, is comparison by a premeditated scale—that which Westernized tradition has already laid out. Opacity, however, abides by no such scale. Glissant highlights the power of difference: ascribing to an entirely different scale of "knowing" and thus, understanding, renders the Western ideal as irrelevant and the colonized as relatively immune to imperial pressures. While colonial opacity has been historically likened to obstinacy at best and ignorance at worst, Glissant makes a crucial departure from misconceptions of this particular form of resistance: "The opaque is not the obscure…it is that which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence" (190). The opaque subject reserves features of the self in their fullest forms, rejecting the reducing process of being known, or examined, by the other. This confluence that Glissant refers to lends itself to our interpretation of Sirena's fluidity: the merging of multiple selves and identities is how she achieves the self-preserving features of opacity, and thus protects her identity from exploitation by oppressive forces.

With these definitions of opacity and fluidity in mind, I now turn to the ways in which Santos-Febres utilizes these concepts through her character of Sirena and the text as a whole. I will be working with Stephen Lytle's English translation of the text, an important facet of the analysis. Textually and linguistically, *Sirena Selena* resists overt accessibility. There is a long history of postcolonial literature utilizing language and translation to access levels of opacity as modes of resistance, especially in Caribbean literature, and *Sirena Selena* is no exception. The English translation maintains a large amount of the

original Spanish language, situating the text itself as an opaque work. Conversely, in her comparative analysis of both versions of the text, Juana María Rodríguez notes that in addition to Spanish words featuring in the English translation, the same is true in the reverse. In the Spanish-language version an entire chapter is in English, through the view of a Canadian tourist as he describes the Hotel Colón and the local sex work scene, "as soon as they figure out that they make more money spending a night with you than working at the hotel for a whole month, the roles change. They chase you like flies do honey. Most need the money a lot. And I'm happy to oblige. It must be tough to be gay in this country" (Santos-Febres 152). Rodríguez provides valuable insight on this linguistic and thematic shift, as:

> an understanding of written English already signals a position of privilege vis-á-vis the characters in the text; it thus implicates readers in the transnational circuits of exchange and power that the novel depicts. In the English translation, however, this shift is made invisible, remaining unmarked in the text, in a way eliding its potential significance for English-language readers who may have more in common with the gay Canadian than with Selena or the other Spanish-speaking characters. (Rodríguez 209)

Rodríguez makes a crucial distinction beyond linguistic opacity, as translative and linguistic choices carry a duality of emphasis to both Spanish and English readers; Santos-Febres artfully shields understanding and relatability at the sentence level that informs connections to the economic and social power dynamics of the characters. Turning back to the English translation, the characters utilize Spanish colloquialisms and phrases throughout the text, demanding some level of either Spanish fluency or translative work of the readers. These phrases range from short and relatively common terms, with Martha's affectionate names for Sirena such as *"nena,"* or "*mamita"* (29), to phrases that require more in-depth engagement such as Solange's internal narrations: "to fall into the clutches of *de aquella mujer de fantasía"* (136). The use of the original Spanish within an English translation communicates to the reader that unless they have knowledge of the original language, and therefore have access to this community of speakers, the text will reserve some level of mystique or establish a challenge in order to be fully appreciated. As such, the text itself reflects a value of opacity and protects itself from being completely or wantonly consumed by cursory audiences. Readers must work to apprehend the text—not unlike the characters that seek to possess and apprehend Sirena. Interestingly, the text offers translations for certain Spanish phrases, like "*las dragas,"* where others like "*loca"* are left untranslated (3). *Las dragas* refers to drag queens—the term is referential, used to denote transvestites. It is a functional noun, used infrequently, and Lytle provides the English translation the first

time it appears in the text. By contrast, "*loca*" or "*locas*," a term which also refers to transvestites, appears consistently but takes on a more contextual, peer-group function. The definition of *loca* more often refers to the scene or community of drag queens of which Santos-Febres's characters are a part. It is a community-making noun, a selective term that aligns and unites this specific group of Spanish-speaking, Caribbean characters partaking in the drag scene. Del Río Gabiola contends that the transgender and transsexual figures "complicate national discourses through a not very visible but blurry subversion of the ideological traditional family unit and through a queer way of family life that yearns for heteronormativity" ("Queer Way" 82). And while Martha and Sirena utilize heteronormative paradigms as they enact a mother-son dynamic to ensure safe travel to the Dominican Republic, I argue Santos-Febres is displaying an *exploitation* of heteronormative structures for the characters' upward mobility, not a yearning for these structures. The use of language, then, continues this community-making practice that the characters employ. For example, *Las draga* is functional, a simple noun; "*loca*" signifies community and demands readers participate in the unfolding of this group's stories before understanding its meaning. This give and take of understanding and knowing, which ebbs and flows with the narrative and the amount of information that the text and characters reveal, reflects the theme of fluidity that informs Sirena's ability to shift and move. Just as Sirena exposes parts of herself on her own terms, the text itself functions as an agent of fluidity and opacity at different junctures and in part through regulating the reader's level of participation.

More specifically, I would argue that whenever the text works to underscore Sirena's fluidity it actually in turn augments her opacity. Thus far, I have referred to Sirena with female pronouns, namely because this is the identity that she and others largely attribute to herself—although there are instances where she is referred to as "he." Sirena is biologically male, yet she embodies both male and female attributes and identities. While I will discuss her identity and appearance more fully in another section, for now I want to focus on the language of the text and its application of fluidity and opacity in reference to her pronouns. Both English and Spanish are gendered languages that assign people (in the case of English and Spanish) and nouns (in the case of Spanish) gendered attributes. Rejecting binary attribution, Santos-Febres oscillates between assigning Sirena male and female pronouns, as Juana María Rodríguez notes in both the Spanish original and English translations, "textual references to Selena in the form of pronouns and gendered designations are contextually based and move back and forth depending on the situation being described" (206). Rodríguez continues this practice in her article, opting to refer to Sirena as either male or female depending on the focus of analysis, much like the primary text. For example, Martha

Divine utilizes the male designation when Sirena is not embodying her female identity, referring to her as "*mijito"* as they land in the Dominican Republic, performing roles of mother and son on vacation (13). Further, in flashbacks of her time living with her *abuela,* Sirena is referred by male attributions either by herself or others. Chronology is important here, as prior to Sirena's exposure to the drag scene, she was attributed as predominantly male. Whereas after Martha "helped to transform him into who he really was" (5), she flows between male and female attributions as evident by the text and the context it describes. Rodríguez further notes the effect that this transitory gender attribution has had on some readers, citing evidence that some confuse this fluidity and lose sight of who Sirena actually is in the narrative, conflating her with another character, Leocadio (Rodríguez 213). While this is an egregious oversight, it establishes the notion that Sirena's fluidity, as evident by her narration and others', underscores her lack of accessibility. It is useful to accept the text and character as she is: fluid, effective, and transitive. Rodríguez contends "the movement across genders is likewise seen as a chance to explore the possibilities of performative expression" (206). She floats from gender to gender, from identity to identity. Glissant's self-proclamation is all the more relevant when we apply this to Sirena's perception of herself: "it does not disturb me to accept where places of my identity is obscure to me, and the fact that it amazes me does not mean I relinquish it" (192). As we trace the fluctuations in Sirena's narrative, it is prudent to adhere to the understanding that not everything must be transparent or readily accessible.

Having established the textual demonstration of Sirena's fluidity, I wish to return to assessing the imagined aspects of the text, more specifically, how Sirena and her gender expression—as well as others' perceptions of these—relate to fluidity as a theoretical concept. I return to Alexandra Perkins's discussion of Caribbean transgender identity, as Sirena embodies multiple modes of being that demand careful consideration within the context of the text as a postcolonial narrative. Perkins writes of Sirena, "Consideration of her body requires a reconceptualization of the gender binary, as well as a decoupling of the strict ties between male and masculine and female and feminine" ("Caribbean" 5). Rather than seeing Sirena as at times male and at times female, Perkins situates Sirena's gender identity as fluid, thus restructuring the idea that men are masculine, and thus when Sirena is "doing" male, she is masculine, and while she is "doing" female, she is strictly feminine. It is of course apt to apply Judith Butler's concept of gender as performative in order to move forward with analyzing Sirena's identification (528). Combining these two concepts presents Sirena's gender as both enacted and fluid, a performance through her mobility and transitive identity. She enacts qualities of the feminine male, the masculine female—and more. Following Perkins's logic

renders almost fruitless the attempt to measure or decide where Sirena lies on any scale. However, the imagined perceptions that we, readers, see through the other characters reflect the values and challenges that Sirena subverts through her fluidity.

To consider Sirena's identity in an anticolonial context, assessment of her interactions with Hugo, the most stringently "masculine" and thus colonized character in the text, is crucial. Hugo Graubell is the embodiment of colonial masculine dominance as well as the narrative foil to Sirena. Where Sirena evades, flows, and enraptures, Hugo seeks to know, consume, and possess. He is a tragic character, closeted, and in a sense, trapped by heteronormative conventions of the nuclear family and homophobic pressures of Dominican society. He simultaneously resides in unattainable power and is incredibly fragile in his need for Sirena and his inability to assume his real identity. While *locas* as described by Santos-Febres certainly encounter their own perils in the form of violence, drug abuse, and AIDS, she writes of a certain level of power they maintain in their identity expression that is unavailable to others. In her essay "The Caribbean and Transvestism," Santos-Febres describes the transvestite in the Caribbean: "Man dresses up as woman in order to feminize—that is, negate—that is, render laughable, his dubious masculinity, his problematical association with patriarchal power…colonialism has prevented a full display and development of patriarchy in the Caribbean" (163). Colonization inherently reconstructs the process of patriarchal power of the colonized; the colonizer becomes that power which was heretofore reserved for the men of the indigenous nation(s). This problematizes the role of men under colonization, restructuring gender roles. Santos-Febres goes on to describe the effects of this subversion of power, as women enjoy somewhat more freedom (albeit are at risk for retribution via violence) while men are reserved to more oppression both inwardly and outwardly. In this light, Hugo experiences double subjugation under postcolonial structures of patriarchal values in addition to being a closeted gay man. He thus seeks to assume this power through the acquisition of Sirena. Her queer, fluid body transforms before Hugo's eyes, as he is both enamored and resistant to her: "he could have sworn for an instant he saw a hint of shame on her face … and then immediately afterward, he saw how Selena's face was transformed, how it changed back into that of a gold-digging *muchachito* trying to be beautiful and elusive in the eyes of his host" (103). In this moment, a power struggle is at play: Sirena, who enacts the role of a performer, an entrepreneur, and an agent of feminine allure; and Hugo, who reads his own desire in response to this act, before then becoming resentful of it. Part of Sirena's allure is in her fluidity; she offers both moments of regret and shame for her role, as well as moments in which she is entirely goal-oriented. As Hugo watches Sirena lounging by his pool, "showing off

her unusual boy-girl ambiguity … she tired to act indifferent, but at the same time she was watching her host out of the corner of her eye" (102). This is just one example of the many interactions between Sirena and Hugo circling one another, trading positions as the dominant pursuer. While Hugo certainly engages in attempted possession of her, Sirena also participates in eluding and possessing *his* attention. What is also notable about this section is Sirena's appearance: void of her typical regalia of wigs, makeup, and elaborate dresses, Hugo is the audience to her more ambiguous gender expression. While her more female appearance is certainly attractive to him, her fluid expression is equally so. Her multiplicity of body and presentation mirrors to Hugo the latitude for freedom that she possesses—a latitude under colonized patriarchy he is indelibly limited by.

As a character resistant to categorization, it is helpful to acknowledge Sirena's figure in relation to others, in this case, other female characters. Just as Sirena's fluidity threatens Hugo's performative masculinity, she is perceived as a threat to his wife, Solange's role as the mother and wife in her nuclear family unit. Solange finds value in her heteronormative role as the wife to the powerful Hugo and can serve as an example of the ways in which Santos-Febres deconstructs the nuclear family through queer representation. Perkins describes this deconstruction of the heteronormative family structure as a "disintegration … due to the overly rigid social and economic structures that determine familial and bodily intelligibility" ("Caribbean" 5). As the heteronormative familial structure is what shapes gender roles and performativity, the deconstruction of this structure paves the way for new modes of being. While the text outlines multiple modes of family, from Leocadio's found communities, to Sirena's relationships with mother figures like Valentina, her *abuela*, and Martha which demonstrates that ability to enact a broader spectrum of self that Perkins describes, the storyline between Solange and Sirena provides a more painful deconstruction. Solange views Sirena as a threat, a complication to her acquisition of power via her role as Hugo's wife. She states, "*Ese monstruo*, that cursed monster, she cannot get close to Hugo even for an instant … She needs Hugo to maintain her position" (135). Her access to power via Hugo is as tenuous as Sirena's. Her fear of losing her power morphs into resentment for Hugo's desire for Sirena, which she then turns towards Sirena herself. But rather than be affected by this palpable hate, Sirena acknowledges Solange's pain and channels it into her performance: "Even singing, I am not who I want to be, but I am closer to a level of perfection, to a sad lady, very sad, but beautiful. Solange, see how I suffer for your guests" (133). She sings of transformation, of expansion beyond what she is now to what she can be. Despite Solange and Sirena's similarities, Solange never truly sees

Sirena for what she is. She, too, is enraptured by Sirena's song and Sirena thus evades Solange's identification. Similarly, Sirena's relation to Martha's more structured gender as a female-identifying character augments her fluidity. While Sirena flows from gender to gender, at times signifying one or the other, and often both, Martha is at home in her femaleness, her desire to be fully formed. At the outset of the text, Martha discusses her desire to reach the final step in her journey to be fully female: a gender-affirmation surgery. She states: "To be able to take off her clothes and see herself, finally, from the waist below the same as from above the waist, with tits and candy. Together. To finally be able to rest in a single body" (11). For Martha, her true, complete self resides in her ability to see and experience herself as one. Without her surgery, she is an amalgamation of bodies, rather than a "single body." Unlike Sirena, Martha wishes to be seen, and to see herself as unified. She desires some level of constancy to become her true self. Sirena, on the other hand, is at home in her fluidity, as it affords her multiplicity and expansion.

Transnational identity is yet another avenue for anticolonial resistance that Sirena enacts through her fluid opacity. The geopolitical borders that Sirena and Martha cross are powerful rhetorical tools that Santos-Febres employs to craft her anticolonial narrative. Imbedded throughout the text is the underlying complexities of identity in the context of both Puerto Rican and Dominican anticolonial practices. Sirena and Martha are both natives of Puerto Rico, which awards them certain privileges and prejudices that come with their home's parallels with the United States. The drag scene, for example, is much less regulated and more "out" than in the Dominican Republic; however, child labor laws in Puerto Rico bar Sirena from legally performing to her highest potential and Martha's financial gain (5). The impetus for their trip across borders is the lax labor laws of the Dominican Republic, despite other challenges this space evokes. The text is framed with this translocation; Sirena and Martha begin their narratives in the air—quite literally in an in-between state. Perkins claims it is this movement that "facilitates enactments of queer identity. The geographic and ideological space of the Dominican Republic is a place in which Selena's transgender identity creates opportunities for social and economic mobility" ("Introduction" 4). What Martha and Sirena are doing is utilizing the opportunities that fluidity of both ideology and self afford them. While each space has its own limitations and threats of exploitation, they evade and use to their advantage the inconsistent regulations and accepted spaces for their own gain. Del Río Gabiola establishes Martha and Sirena's translocality as additionally subversive to heteronormativity, as "instead of being settled in domesticity, their lives go by transient places such as the hotel, the taxis, the beach, the mansion, and the streets, which reinforce a flexible spatial mobility" ("A Queer Way"

82). While Martha desires permanence in the physical presentation of her body, as Sirena exists in the fluid state, for Del Río Gabiola their trajectory from Puerto Rico to the Dominican Republic and the in-between spaces that they inhabit in each, represent further translocality as queered spaces.

I have been referring to Sirena's acts of fluid opacity as "anticolonial" in that her existence—and her ability to transcend and transform both physical and geopolitical lines is itself an act of rebellion, of self-preservation. But she does not just survive—she thrives. Santos-Febres continues this transitive theme at the end of the text, as Sirena's final destination is left unknown. After spending the night with Hugo, during which Sirena engages in penetrative sex, she disappears (190). This interaction with Hugo has served as a lucrative point of contention for scholars, as Sirena's subversion of prior dominant/submissive sexual paradigms problematizes perceptions of masculinity as well as notions of desire. María Celina Bortolotto considers narcissism the feminine characters' tool to counteract the *machismo* standards of the Caribbean, utilizing their feminine performance to manipulate material means to achieve greater autonomy (1-2). In the context of desire, Bortolotto contends that Sirena fears the possibility of falling in love, as it would open her up to the possibility for "shame and humiliation" (2), but also a loss of agency that economic independence would provide. I argue that Sirena's sexual desire is relatively opaque, as her sexual encounters are limited to the transactional through her sex work and services to Hugo as bolero singer-turned-temporary courtesan. The exaggerated imbalance of financial, social, and experiential power between Hugo and Sirena problematizes conversations of Sirena's possible desire for Hugo as questions of Sirena's agency are clouded by her proximity to his overarching reach. While Hugo offers economic security, Sirena knows that accepting this would shackle her to his side, vulnerable to her attachment to him: "No, that can't happen. Sirena couldn't allow herself to depend on this host. She shouldn't trust the hand that throws scraps to stray dogs" (190). I have worked to establish Sirena's ultimate access to power: her fluidity. Without it, Sirena is exposed. Whether she truly desires Hugo, the financial security he offers, or both, she resorts to escape. The hotel manager tells Hugo: "I saw her take a taxi this morning and heard her tell the driver to take her to the capital. She was carrying a large bag and a small case. She left the keys to the room. She said you would take care of the bill" (207). The text discloses little information as to where Sirena ends up, but we do know where she is *not:* with Hugo. She resists his possession; she even resists Martha's exploitation. Sirena's story is literally left unsaid: she exists outside the text and her supposed success or failure is left up to the imagination. While this "unfinished" path may leave more questions than answers, what is important is what we are left with: she

is independent, and presumably, free. Not only this, she exists once more, in a transitive state. As with the initial depiction of travel, and movement, there is freedom and a place for her multiplicity in transition. Like her journey from Puerto Rico to the Dominican Republic, Sirena is awarded possibility through transition. This possibility communicates the notion of success and resistance to the stagnate expectations of singularity. Through her multiplicity, she expands and restructures definition. Her ending is in itself an extension of her fluid opacity. This is more than merely existing in a postcolonial society, her success is an act of political subversion, of not only rejecting but counteracting depictions of colonized bodies.

It may seem counterintuitive in an essay that focuses on analyzing a character to claim that this character's fluidity achieves Glissant's theory of opacity. I have sought to prove that Sirena is unknown, through attempting to know her. But through this analysis, I have established that the reader faces many obstacles as presented by Santos-Febres in knowing the text and Sirena on a level with Western ideas of identification. Returning once more to Glissant, who claims that Western ideals of understanding reside on a set scale of values—values that are predetermined and upheld by stringent ideology. Through the nuance and interpretive work that the reader must employ, there is no easy way to "know" Sirena or the other presentations of the peripheral characters of *Sirena Selena*. Mayra Santos-Febres disrupts the Western scale. Notions of gender, sexuality, power, and space are consistently inverted and restructured through Santos-Febres on all fronts: from the textual resistance and nuances to the oscillation of characters and space, *Sirena Selena* rejects and reconstructs Western ideals of power. Sirena is a kaleidoscope of a character, offering new visions of self and body that the reader must either accept, or let be. Even characters that reside firmly within the binary of gender and power, like Solange with her limited access and Hugo with his, are more than they seem under the echoes of colonial oppression. Santos-Febres paints a picture of fluidity as a means for more than survival—it is a revelatory method of success in the face of a domineering culture that attempts to eke out all dregs of individuality. Through her discussion of resistance through transvestism, gender fluidity, and the preservation of self, Mayra Santos-Febres opens the narrative on how to utilize fluidity to subvert norms while maintaining an individual voice, through the preservation of self by way of persistent opacity.

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