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## Journal of Transnational American Studies

### Title

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### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1m64j7dt>

### Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 2(1)

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### Publication Date

2010-03-30

### DOI

10.5070/T821006990

Peer reviewed

# Disorienting the Furniture: The Transgressive Journalism of Alfonsina Storni and Charlotte Perkins Gilman

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It's no accident: women take after birds and robbers just as robbers take after women and birds. They (illes') go by, fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down.

—Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

In the original French version of "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous plays on the double meaning of the verb "voler"—to fly and to steal—to refer to women's gestures in language. Like a whole genealogy of women writers before and after them, American social reformer Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Argentinean poet Alfonsina Storni "steal" the elitist and patriarchal form of the essay to fly outdoors, to burst open the stifling space of domesticity and turn the house upside down, disorienting the furniture, as it were. This article undermines cultural, national, and geographical frontiers to examine how both women interrogate the presuppositions underlying so-called feminine publications to carry out an intriguing disarticulation of the private/public divide. It is by blurring the boundaries between the expository essay and other genres like the letter or the journal, for instance, that Alfonsina Storni and Charlotte Perkins Gilman unsettle the traditional opposition between the private and the public that has helped solidify the social construction of female and male subjectivities. The essay has historically constituted the forum for the philosophical discussion of public concerns, while the letter and the journal are genres traditionally associated with the private realm of sentiment. Traversing these discursive frontiers

therefore enables Gilman and Storni to stage a critique of female subjectivities astride the private/public divide that turns out to be empowering for their female readership. This article hopes to elucidate the mechanisms by which both writers perform this operation, with a view to unveiling the originality of their feminist projects.

Almost a mythic figure in the world of Latin American letters, Alfonsina Storni has achieved world renown as Argentina's most famous "poetess of love," thus obscuring her substantial contributions to Argentinean periodical literature. Even though Charlotte Perkins Gilman has become one of the most influential figures in the history of American first-wave feminism, it is mainly her feminist utopian fiction that has earned her that privilege, to the detriment of her journalism, which has received less attention. The transnational dialogue conjured up on these pages unearths this neglected corpus to expose Gilman's and Storni's unique reappropriation of the essay form popularized during their time in publications by and for women. A focus on the various discursive and rhetorical maneuvers employed by both writers will enable me not only to foreground the relevance of their individual projects in their own right, but also to highlight the convergence of two agendas coming from different backgrounds. On the one hand, the juxtaposition of the writings by Gilman and Storni can provide a template for understanding similar gestures enacted by women writers from seemingly distant linguistic, cultural, and national traditions. On the other hand, this project can reveal how women who helped to shape the feminist movement in various countries at the beginning of the twentieth century were carving out their discourse in the middle of comparable social, historical, and political tensions.

A comparative reading that establishes the points of contact between the journalistic writings of Alfonsina Storni and Charlotte Perkins Gilman seems at the same time absolutely necessary to generate new assessments of their work that are untainted by the more or less codified reception of their production in both countries. In this sense, setting Gilman's gesture side by side with Storni's might act as a reminder of the immense significance of an undertaking like *The Forerunner*, a fact that still goes largely unnoticed by most Gilman scholarship. Beyond the incredible act of publishing a magazine entirely by herself, Gilman also carried out an equally powerful undertaking on the discursive level, as she unsettled most of the expectations her female readers likely brought along with them from reading other comparable publications. Examining Gilman's revolution on the level of form alongside that of a writer like Alfonsina Storni is therefore also meant to relativize the importance of Gilman's lack of engagement with the sexual liberation movement and her discrepancies with the suffragettes. The cross-cultural dialogue summoned in this project allows for the focus to shift onto an unprecedented journalistic endeavor that attempted a much deeper transformation. A nationalist framework that only places Gilman in the context of fellow first-wave feminists can run the risk of obscuring or diminishing the import and impact of the discursive revolution she carried out in her monthly.

Similarly, the critical reception of Alfonsina Storni's work was for a long time trapped within the readings of her work validated by the different literary vanguards dominating the Argentinean literary scene at the time her work was published. The result of this interpretive operation was a rigidly codified appraisal of her poetry that was perpetuated even on the pages of school textbooks, and a complete "erasure" of her other production—journalism, fiction, drama. The reception of Storni's poetry as a poetry of "romantic love" that reinforces cultural stereotypes of femininity and masculinity is also, and by the same token, responsible for the particular marketing of her work outside of Argentina. In this respect, setting her transgressive journalism in dialogue with that of such a paradigmatic figure as Charlotte Perkins Gilman promises to open up future readings of her work that address other aspects hitherto neglected and to simultaneously relocate her production internationally. On still another level, a comparative analysis of the sort carried out in this project speaks as well to the critical and political potential of a project like transnational feminism that, in the words of Constance S. Richards, "allows us to view the experience of women more broadly than is possible in localized situations, while at the same time . . . allows us to recognize the limitations of a global perspective that tends to homogenize experience."<sup>2</sup> The issues raised by Alfonsina Storni and Charlotte Perkins Gilman in the journal *La Nota* and in the magazine *The Forerunner* respectively, their interpellation of private and public female subjectivities, the new pathways they chart, indeed suggest a common experience among women across the Americas. A transnational analysis of their work that reveals the nuances of this experience can in turn illuminate the reading of other more intriguing gestures, like Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector's covert involvement with the periodical press of her time.

I will first set my comparative study in dialogue with some existing scholarship on the two writers, and then engage in the analysis of their journalism, so as to make clear the pertinence of my critical gesture. In the case of Alfonsina Storni, her regular contributions to the so-called feminine column of the literary journal *La Nota* from 1919 to 1920 have only recently called the attention of scholars of her work. American critic Gwen Kirkpatrick was indeed the first to scrutinize Storni's journalism published between 1919 and 1921. This article converses with Kirkpatrick's treatment of Storni's contributions to the newspaper *La Nación* in her essay "Alfonsina Storni as 'Tao Lao': Journalism's Roving Eye and Poetry's Confessional 'I.'"<sup>3</sup> In particular, although I concentrate exclusively on Alfonsina Storni's "feminine column" in *La Nota*, I share Kirkpatrick's emphasis on the active sense of agency of a female subject engaged in the discursive construction of contexts that enable redefinitions of female subjectivity. Storni's formal innovation in both *La Nota* and *La Nación* goes hand in hand with the advancement of a bold feminist agenda in a discursive space commonly replete with food recipes, beauty treatments, and advice for young brides and housewives-to-be. Even though in her book *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires, 1920 y 1930*, Beatriz Sarlo also examines Storni's new thematic repertoire, the Argentinean critic deals solely with Storni's first four books of poetry. Nevertheless,

she considers the thematic ruptures that make Storni's poetry unique to be rooted in the "vindication of difference" underlying the writer's portrayal of the relationship between men and women, and this is a statement that can aptly complement my interpretation of Storni's journalism.<sup>4</sup> In addition, while my article builds off of "Estrategias de un discurso travesti," an essay by Delfina Muschietti on the interrelationships between the poetic and journalistic discourses in Storni's work, my analysis takes Muschietti's further by incorporating a discussion of the private and public spheres.<sup>5</sup> As such, it is obviously in conversation with the two most recent studies of Storni's work, Alicia Salomone's *Alfonsina Storni: Mujeres, modernidad y literatura* and Tania Diz's *Alfonsina periodista*,<sup>6</sup> both of which form a constant backdrop to my own project, as will be evident throughout this article.

Amid the countless examples of scholarly work on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's fiction and, to a lesser extent, on her longer sociological treatises, Shelley Fisher Fishkin's groundbreaking article on the persuasive force behind Gilman's journalism and short fiction undoubtedly stands out as a refreshing new outlook on the writer. Not only is Fishkin's article responsible for the genesis of this project, but it also sets the foundations for the analysis of Gilman's writing undertaken on these pages. In "Making a Change': Strategies of Subversion in Gilman's Journalism and Short Fiction," Fishkin insightfully remarks on Gilman's awareness of the fact that most women readers at the time were accustomed to publications "that felt that freckle removal was a problem worthy of serious attention."<sup>7</sup> This awareness naturally brands Gilman's most ambitious journalistic endeavor with a unique blend of ethical journalism and an agenda for collective social transformation that warrants further analysis. Both Fishkin, in the article already mentioned, and Denise D. Knight, in "Charlotte Perkins Gilman, William Randolph Hearst, and the Practice of Ethical Journalism,"<sup>8</sup> address the uniqueness of *The Forerunner* and are in this sense the precursors ushering in this project. Indeed, Fishkin's wonderful statement that "Gilman saw herself as a writer consciously trying to subvert the conventions of genre in order to expand the horizons of gender" can be seen as the premise that this article starts out from.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, my analysis moves beyond the subject of Gilman's writing—"the transformation of human consciousness" (237)—to take a closer look at the linguistic and rhetorical devices that set Gilman's journalism apart, with a view to examining these vis-à-vis the subversion present in Alfonsina Storni's journalism. In this sense, this article definitely engages with both Fishkin's and Knight's, yet takes their arguments in a slightly different direction, and introduces motherhood as well as the site for the undomestication of female subjectivity.

Denise D. Knight summarizes the uniqueness of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's publication in excellent terms when she states, "Even though there were already a number of magazines in print that addressed themselves to issues of concern to women, such as Alice Stone Blackwell's suffrage publication, the *Woman's Journal*, or the narrowly conceived and gender-specific monthlies such as the *Ladies' Home Journal* and Hearst's *Good Housekeeping*, *The Forerunner* broke new ground."<sup>10</sup> In the

only existing book-length study of Gilman's monthly, Aleta Cane echoes Knight in her own assessment when she more succinctly points out that "Gilman set herself up to be her own voice; to represent a humanist point of view which was not simply that of the feminist, the suffragist or the socialist, but which encompassed parts of the programs of all three groups."<sup>11</sup> In "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Forerunner*: Text and Context," Cane focuses substantially on the content of Gilman's magazine, on her sentiments on human growth and progress as they are portrayed through essays, sermons, serialized nonfiction, and poetry. While my study is concerned here with the more formal dimension of Gilman's innovation, Cane's review of those publications that inspired and helped shape *The Forerunner* proves useful in more than one sense. Not only does it help situate the monthly "within its cultural and publishing contexts" (89), but it also helps underline its originality and the relevance of a study of its main characteristics.

Throughout her study, Aleta Cane makes a point of outlining the many ways in which Charlotte Perkins Gilman's ideas, and even some of the articles themselves, appearing in *The Forerunner* started developing earlier on through her contributions to various other magazines. The portrayal of utopian worlds and the use of new technologies as aids in the creation of a new social order—a hallmark of Gilman's monthly—for instance, were already prevalent in popular magazines of the period like *Cosmopolitan* and *McClure's*. As a consequence, as Cane summarizes, "even before she [Gilman] began the *Forerunner*, she understood the audience to whom she was reaching out, had learned the style of the other journals which appealed to that audience's taste, and was focused on the issues that she believed were of importance to her targeted reader" (67–68). According to Cane, of those journals that influenced Gilman on her outstanding venture, the *Woman's Journal* was the one mostly responsible for determining the structure and the focus of *The Forerunner*. Yet, even though Gilman inherited the more or less conservative viewpoint of the political reform journal and targeted the same audience, she did not restrict her discussion to the suffrage campaign. Cane also lists the *Progressive Woman*—a pro-labor woman's protest magazine—as another important predecessor to *The Forerunner*; however, the prevailing sentiment is still that Gilman's defiant act of combining aspects of several publications enabled her to create her own brand of journalism, partaking of these other papers yet not imitating any in particular.

The fact that *The Forerunner* was in dialogue with many women's magazines of the period did not mean that Gilman necessarily ascribed to the views disseminated in those other publications. Her advocacy for the professionalization of child-rearing and of housekeeping, for instance, widely differed from the ideas advanced on the pages of the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*. As Fishkin brilliantly expresses in the article above-mentioned, "One of Gilman's most fruitful strategies as a journalist involved revising and reclaiming familiar subjects in daringly new and unfamiliar ways."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Gilman's mastery of so many genres only adds to the uniqueness of the publication and engenders a single editorial voice that is absolutely

original. As Knight indicates, “*The Forerunner* boasted annually one complete novel, one nonfiction book, several short articles, a dozen or more poems, twelve short sermons, commentary on various news items, numerous book reviews, and twelve short stories.”<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, while this article concentrates on Gilman’s subversion of the genre of essay-writing, it does so via an exploration of the ways in which her essays for *The Forerunner* reappropriate strategies from the other genres to provide a singular twist on subjects favored by other women’s magazines of the period.

A similar tactic animates Alfonsina Storni’s columns in the journal *La Nota* during the year 1919, yet Storni’s reappropriation needs to be read in two directions. On the one hand, like Gilman, the Argentinean writer was deeply aware of the focus, style, and tone of other similar “feminine columns” in popular magazines of the period, and of conventions that she would herself invoke and subvert when she took over the section “Feminidades” (“Femininities”) in *La Nota*. On the other hand, Storni stamped her own name on a column that had been in existence under different names since 1915 and had slowly grown in length and changed in outlook since its inception. Even though the sections in *La Nota* varied in regularity, authorship, and size during the years of its publication (1915–1921), the overriding aim of the weekly literary journal was the dissemination of national and international cultural news, alongside an explicit anti-German and pacifist stance in relation to World War I. Naturally, Alfonsina Storni directly or indirectly acknowledged her predecessors in *La Nota*, as well as the circulation of different opinions on the condition and situation of women dominating other sections of the magazine. In terms of the so-called feminine columns in the popular magazines of general interest, it is safe to assume that Alfonsina Storni was parodying the sections in *El Hogar* and *Caras y Caretas* that were inundated with advice on women’s fashion and beauty. Sections like “Crónica de la moda: Algunas ideas” (“Chronicle of Fashion: Some Ideas”), signed with the pseudonym Micheline in *Caras y Caretas*, endorsed the notion of a female subjectivity passively acquiescing in the precepts set by patriarchal society, and this is precisely what Storni was reacting against from the pages of *La Nota*. As will become evident later in this article, the writer does address fashion in her own column, yet uses it as the stage for a critique of the domestication of female subjectivity.

Although “feminine columns” were not a staple section of the literary magazines of the period, an exception was the prestigious journal *Nosotros*, which launched one of its famous surveys with the question “Are women more learned than men in our society?” The column, authored by Fanny Pouchan, “Crónica femenina” (“Feminine Chronicle”), was as a matter of fact a by-product of the survey and offers an interesting counterpoint to Storni’s “Feminidades.” Alina, Nelly, and Fifi, the typical young ladies of the society of the time portrayed in Pouchan’s first piece—“Niñas de hoy” (“Girls of Today”)—are related to the “feminine types” inhabiting Storni’s column in *La Nota*. Like their sisters in “Feminidades,” Alina, Nelly, and Fifi have all learned to disguise their intellectual interests and conceal them under their ostensible domestic dispositions so as not to hurt their chances of landing a convenient

marriage. Also, Pouchan's "Niñas de hoy" can be said to be relatives of "la niña boba" ("the silly girl") signing "Las Cartas de la Niña Boba" ("The Letters of the Silly Girl"), the other major section directed at women, which appeared in *La Nota* until January of 1919. This section, written in an intimate and confessional tone and addressed to the editor—the only one who was supposed to know the silly girl's true identity—might in actuality have been written by Storni herself. In "Feminidades," Storni nevertheless distances herself from Pouchan, whose voice echoes patriarchal discourse, and continues instead along the line of resistance against this discourse initiated by "la niña boba," mainly through the use of irony and parody. In *La Nota*, Storni's originality resides in the multiformity of a section oscillating between the polemical tone of her predecessor in the column, Lola Pita de Martínez, and the parodying one of "Las Cartas de la Niña Boba."

Somewhat paving the way for Alfonsina Storni's transgression, Herminia Brumana and La Dama Duende were a couple of the few dissonant voices heard in the landscape of "submissive" women journalists like Micheline or Pouchan, who complied with patriarchal expectations of what a "feminine" column should be. La Dama Duende ("The Lady Elf"), the pseudonym chosen by Mercedes Moreno, in her contributions to *Caras y Caretas* and *La Nota*, and the teacher Herminia Brumana in her chronicles for *Caras y Caretas*, both instill some tension in their criticisms of typical feminine types inhabiting most of the other columns of the period. This continuity between Alfonsina Storni's gesture and that of other women writers is in itself empowering, since Storni is shaping a new social agency for herself—as a woman and as a journalist. In the case of Latin American female essayists, Mary Louise Pratt sees this continuity manifesting itself through the emergence of what she has decided to label the "gender essay." The critic proposes to include under this term "a series of texts, written over the past 180 years by Latin American women, whose topic is the status and reality of women in modern society." These texts, she argues, represent an effort on the part of "criolla (Euro-American women) writers" to counteract the "monopoly on culture and history" exercised by the "male-based identity essay."<sup>14</sup> The journalism of Alfonsina Storni must indeed be read as part of this countercanonical and "contestatory" tradition, as evidenced by her participation in a debate that, though marginal to the canon and to institutionalized literature and culture, has been pivotal to the enfranchisement of women in society.

As if mirroring this countercanon, the journalism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman is informed by a similar dynamic. As she decides to bring *The Forerunner* to an end, the writer recognizes in "A Summary of Purpose" the need to have articulated her agenda through the medium of a more or less marginal publication. Gilman explains her reluctance to have her writing shaped by the editors of more "established publications" in the following terms: "Our magazines, useful, valuable, amusing, and instructive, all depend on pleasing (a) as large a subscription list as they can reach; and (b) their advertising paymasters. . . . The larger the subscription list, the more "average" it becomes. The average reader does not care for the sort of stuff carried in



The Forerunner. Neither does the big advertiser approve of such far-reaching social iconoclasm.”<sup>15</sup> It is precisely the social iconoclasm of Gilman’s and Storni’s journalism that sets them apart, an iconoclasm apparent in the content as well as in the form. Both writers, like the cultivators of Mary Louise Pratt’s “gender essay,” “contest the disenfranchisement of women implied . . . by all the official institutions of politics and culture.”<sup>16</sup> However, whereas Pratt seems to interpret this struggle as one accomplished mainly on the level of content, I find it pertinent to insist on the fact that the power of Gilman’s and Storni’s critiques resides instead mostly in their subversion of form. By the latter I mean both an innovative use of the genre of essay-writing, as well as a peculiar use of language that surreptitiously disrupts the conventions of so-called feminine publications.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s iconoclasm is evident in an article where she points out the need for the current literature to account for the changes affecting men’s and women’s lives in order to accurately portray “the new womanhood,” a need most contemporaneous publications seemed to be unaware of. In “Coming Changes in Literature,” Gilman proclaims, “This new womanhood brings not only a fresh field for literature, but a fresh market.”<sup>17</sup> Gilman’s publication can certainly be inscribed within this emerging market, a market composed of readers until then subject to the patronizing treatment of androcentric writing. The author puts it thus: “All previous literature has been androcentric; written by men for men, by men to please their women, or by their women to please men. The coming literature commands a new field and deals with new characters. It recognizes women as full citizens of the world, and treats of their relations to the world; both entirely new subjects” (235). It is this new field that prompts a publication like *The Forerunner*, which bears testimony to the “coming changes in literature” by addressing these newly constituted social subjects. Right from the start, the editor announces, “It will treat all three phases of our existence—male, female and human,”<sup>18</sup> summarizing in this manner the premise underlying all seven volumes, namely that women are to be thought of as human beings, outside and beyond any of the sex-specific distinctions that have helped misconstrue female subjectivities. Opinions like this, appearing all throughout Gilman’s production, emphasize the writer’s keen awareness of the codification surrounding most periodical literature written for women at the time. Nevertheless, what constitutes in my opinion an even more radical gesture on Gilman’s part is her unique use of language itself as a revolutionary means to accomplish the long-desired aim she had in mind.

The article, “Coming Changes in Literature,” provides a case in point. Pursuing her argument in favor of the inclusion of “the new womanhood” in the “coming literature,” Gilman points out, “Hitherto, viewed from the man’s position, the world was his world, to be striven with, fought against, overcome or vanquished by, according to the cult of masculine destructiveness. Now we are beginning to look at it as also woman’s world, to be nursed and cared for, fed, protected, educated and improved, according to the cult of feminine productiveness.”<sup>19</sup> Gilman’s vocabulary in

this paragraph is still anchored in existing sociocultural constructions of gender, constructions that are to be subverted later in the same article through a deconstructive gesture worthy of notice. The writer resorts to verbs like “nursed,” “cared for,” “fed,” “protected,” “educated,” “improved,” to describe “woman’s world,” embodying in this way the motif of “love” and “care” traditionally associated with “feminine productiveness.” Against these verbs, she sets others like “striven with,” “fought against,” “overcome,” and “vanquished,” which she links to the “cult of masculine destructiveness.” In addition, it is worth noticing that these are all passive verbs following the infinitive “to be,” and therefore signaling a relationship of transitivity between a subject and an object. The subject is either man or woman, and the object is the world, reinforcing in this manner the different ways in which men and women relate to society and experience the world at large.

Along the same lines, Gilman once again sets men against women a couple of pages later: “Of all dramatic figures the world has never seen one more appealing than this. The woman, the feeble, timid, foolish woman—made so by long restriction; now forced willy nilly into the humanity that belongs to her; and the man, the lover, the father, the tender husband, beating her down with every weapon at his command” (233). Adjectives are preferred over nouns for women, who are qualified by words like “feeble,” “timid,” and “foolish,” whereas man is described as “the lover,” “the father,” “the tender husband.” Women, as opposed to men, cannot be defined unless they take on some kind of attribute, a distinction further emphasized by the use of the passive form “forced” in the case of women, as opposed to the active “beating” for men. It is man that beats woman into timid submission and acceptance of his command, and this is the world Gilman is describing as undergoing a radical change that needs to be recorded by current literature. Right after having referred to the “transition period” bringing about favorable changes in women’s condition, she uses the word “struggle” three times in connection with their predicament. The writer’s rhetoric is reminiscent of the language favored by Latin American essayists of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, who were engaged in public debates over the important role of women in the construction of the emerging nations. According to Mariselle Meléndez, in their efforts to incorporate the voice of women in these debates, writers like Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Cuba, 1816–1873), Juana Manuela Gorriti (Argentina, 1819–1892), Clorinda Matto de Turner (Perú, 1854–1909), and Adela Zamudio (Bolivia, 1854–1928) used a language that denoted combat and struggle, and alluded to acts of heroism, triumph, and courage, a language that had been the exclusive property of male postindependence intellectuals.<sup>20</sup>

Gilman’s peculiar use of this “bellicose” language is worthy of consideration since it definitely evokes the verbs used before to refer to men’s destructive tendencies. Towards the end of her piece, the writer proclaims, “What she [woman] needs as a human creature, she can find in the publications meant for people, unlabelled male or female. What she needs as a woman is clear portrayal of the

tremendous issues of the transition period, stories that treat of the girl's struggle for independence, struggle with parental love, struggle with filial duty, struggle with domestic limitations—these would be eagerly read by innumerable women. Are there no women who can write them?"<sup>21</sup> Now, it is women who fight "for independence," "with parental love," "with filial duty," "with domestic limitations." Hence, Gilman turns the tables on the opposition she set up at the beginning of her article in order to unveil its artificiality and falsity. Similarly, she later lists a series of verbs in the passive to refer to men—"mothered," "sistered," "wived"—whereas she had before preferred this form to refer to women instead. One of the last paragraphs reads, "The freedom and happiness of men, when mothered, sistered and wived by adequate normal women, is itself a subject to occupy many pens for many years" (235). Such a word choice defies the reader's expectations in that what would normally occur is "fathered," "brothered," "husbanded," as women have traditionally acquired status—legal and otherwise—by virtue of being related to men in some capacity or other.

As close analysis has attempted to show, Gilman is deeply aware of the binary oppositions that have helped perpetuate sociocultural constructions of gender resulting in the alleged superiority of men and the consequent relegation of women into a lesser or inferior social status. Conscious that these presuppositions inform most publications targeting women, the social reformer sets out to interrogate and dismantle them throughout the pages of her monthly. The writer expresses her dissatisfaction with contemporary publications for women with these words: "Our newsstands are smothered with publications for women—so called—which are not truly for women at all, but only for dressmakers, cooks, nurses, houseservants, and those who need books on etiquette. . . . These housekeepers' manuals are not the literature for the new woman" (235). In reading these words, one is reminded of Alfonsina Storni's response when she agrees in 1919 to take on the "feminine" section of the journal *La Nota*. Upon hearing the director's offer and feeling somewhat uneasy about the request, the Argentinean poet suddenly recalls the names of other similar columns written mostly by women for other women in the popular periodical literature of the time: "Charlas femeninas" ("Feminine Chats"), "Conversación entre ellas" ("Conversation among Them"), "Femeninas" ("Feminine"), "La señora misterio" ("The Mystery Lady").<sup>22</sup> Publications for women during the first decades of the twentieth century do indeed try to reach, as Gilman suggests, a very specific female readership with sharply differentiated attributes and interests. It is through these discursive spaces that a complex ideological operation is set in motion to "domesticate" women, to confine them ever more strongly in the privacy of the home, and consequently to curb the progress of "the new womanhood."

When she decides to take over "Feminidades" in *La Nota*, Alfonsina Storni invokes the female subjectivities endorsed in most publications for women in early-twentieth-century Argentina only to expose their artificiality. It is to these subjectivities that she speaks through the ironic portrayal of her "tipos femeninos

callejeros” (“feminine street types”), some of the most accomplished portraits of typical young ladies of the society of the time. In her column entitled precisely “Tipos femeninos callejeros,” for instance, the writer resorts to bitter sarcasm to outline a merciless portrait of “la chica-loro” (“the parrot-girl”), a fifteen-year-old whose whole life is driven by the desire to “catch” a good husband. The “parrot-girl” spends her days wandering the streets, by herself or with friends, without any motivation whatsoever except to get the attention of wealthy young men cruising in their expensive cars. Marriage to one of these young men is what will eventually enable the girl to climb up the social ladder, so she obsessively concentrates all of her efforts on her physical appearance. With limited resources, the “parrot-girl” is determined to disguise her social origins by imitating in her attire the fashion models she sees in magazines, advertisements, and movies of the period. Indeed, the label attached to this feminine type metaphorically encapsulates in itself the two attributes defining the young girl and her aspirations. As Alicia Salomone indicates, the color green alludes to the girl’s immaturity, which makes her all the more susceptible to the influence of popular ideals of femininity, and her ceaseless chatter points to the mimetic quality of her discourse and to her lack of individuality.<sup>23</sup>

Summoning the ghosts of other “feminine types” of other “feminine columns,” Alfonsina Storni bases her portrayal of the “parrot-girl” on the patterns cut out by her predecessors and contemporaries. In the case of the so-called feminine column, as has been suggested earlier, there exists an extreme codification surrounding themes, style, vocabulary, structures, and even tone, which helps fulfill the expectations of editors as well as readers. While Storni draws on the set of meanings associated with the genre itself, she superimposes other semantic groupings not commonly related and as a consequence generally unexpected. Addressing the presumed female reader directly, the speaker in the chronicle in question plays with some of these assumptions to build up a crescendo in her detailed description of the attire of “la chica-loro.” The image of a theater curtain is utilized to gradually disclose what is behind, to follow a glancing trajectory that ascends from the feet up to the head of the object under scrutiny:

Si vuestra visión de la chica-loro, empezara por los pies y fuera ascendiendo, como si un telón se levantase, imaginaríais que a cuatro dedos del tobillo habría de iniciarse el ruedo de la pollera correspondiendo el largo de esta a la osadía del taco.

Nada de eso.

[If your sight of the parrot-girl started with the feet and gradually ascended, as if a curtain rose, you would imagine that four finger-widths away from the ankle the skirt’s hem would start, proportionate in length to the boldness of the heel.

None of that.]<sup>24</sup>

The speaker insinuates what the reader is expecting to see only to undermine such expectations a moment later. The skirt, though short, is still there, standing both in its material and in its length as poor testimony to the parrot-girl's copycat tendencies.

When it comes to the catalog of items making up the feminine type under consideration, those singled out by Storni are the predictable ones: the shoes, the skirt, the collar, the hair, the hat, accessories, and make-up. However, with a sleight of hand, Storni shuffles the cards and rearranges the whole picture to highlight the irritating discrepancy between the desired effect and the actual portrait. The hair is not neatly arranged but instead hangs loose as it would on a nine-year-old; the dress is made out of old clothes though in the style of the latest fashions; the shoes are too ladylike and the skirt is too short. The catalog of items remains the same, but it is qualified differently, for instance through adjectives heavily charged with a negative connotative value: "la tela del vestido es pobre, el adorno despojado a viejos vestidos" (the cloth of the dress is poor, the frill torn from old dresses), "su sonrisa, un poco artificiosa" (her smile, a little artificial) (850–51). Storni ends such an implacable description by alluding to the various cultural artifacts that have inspired the parrot-girl, thus underlining the contrived nature of this feminine type who is constructed by and for the market of prospective husbands: "pensáis en el cine, en las novelas cursis, en los catálogos de grandes tiendas" (you think of movies, of cheesy novels, of the catalogs of big stores) (851). Hence, the reader is taken aback by the presence of unexpected elements in what otherwise looks familiar, and this in turn shocks her into a new awareness. Herein lies Storni's transgression.

As is evident by now, there is an ongoing dialogue between Storni's column and comparable spaces in other publications of the period, and this mechanism in turn brings about the irony that constitutes a trademark of her journalism. Through the reappropriation and inversion of the presuppositions characterizing the so-called feminine column, the writer manages to foster disbelief and skepticism in the reader, who is made to interrogate assumptions until now taken for granted. Nevertheless, I agree with Tania Diz when she points out that Storni's use of irony also borrows elements from parody, which prompts Diz to coin the term "ironic parody" to refer to the writer's unique and innovative gesture. According to Diz, Storni combines the imitative nature of parody with the ambiguity and ambivalence characteristic of irony to unveil the cultural constructions of gender at the foundation of such discursive spaces.<sup>25</sup> Alfonsina Storni acknowledges the conventions surrounding the "feminine column" and even resorts to them, yet subtly displaces such conventions and shifts the terms to produce the effect of ironic parody introduced by Diz in her study of the writer.

A similar dynamic informs a small and inconspicuous piece by Charlotte Perkins Gilman appearing in *The Forerunner* for January 1915. The thinker starts her piece with a rhetorical question addressed to a reader that, like Storni's, is assumed to be female: "Do not women notice that in the perennial love story the heroine is still described, for the most part, in terms of physical beauty? Or, noticing, do they like it?" Turning

once again to the recurring subject of popular romantic literature, Gilman sets the stage for a forceful opposition between her ideal of beauty and that permeating most literature at the time. Against “strength and stature,” “speed and agility,” “an erect posture,” “an easy carriage,” “sound sleep and good digestion,” she places “a matter of eyes, hair and dimples—the same old ‘charms’ that have been extolled so many years.”<sup>26</sup> The same phrase could have been used to summarize the “charms” of Storni’s “parrot-girl,” whose role model was the romantic heroine of the serialized novels flooding the newsstands in early-twentieth-century Buenos Aires. The “points” of a woman attacked by Gilman are precisely those Storni has subjected to crude ridicule in her own column and stand, in both cases, in metonymical relation to the women to whom they are attributed as a means of criticizing ridiculous fashion standards.

“Her ‘Charms’” testifies to Gilman’s subversive power, to her peculiar use of fact and fiction to enlist the reader’s support as she draws a comparison between the emphasis placed on the physical attributes of the heroine of the love story and the special attention paid to the muscles of a pugilist in a “prize-fighter story.” As Shelley Fisher Fishkin puts it, “recognizing that imagination combined with analysis could yield the most potent persuasive force of all, Gilman refused to rely on logic alone to make her case.”<sup>27</sup> In her journalism, the reformer buttresses her power of persuasion by resorting to strategies more akin to her shorter fiction, sneaking in here and there her characteristic wit. “To praise a woman’s face and not herself, is like praising her bonnet and not seeing her face,” ends her compelling speech.<sup>28</sup> It is possible to argue that Gilman is using in her shorter pieces for *The Forerunner* more “subversive” discursive strategies than in the rest of her production. In this sense, essayistic writing suits her purpose since the malleability of the genre invites digression, a gesture reminiscent of Cixous’s “voler”—flying and stealing in and of language. The American thinker and reformer uses her monthly to “fly” and flow from one genre to another without respect, sometimes, for the boundaries demarcating each, therefore “adulterating” the notion of genre altogether. The publication of Gilman’s full-length sociological works must have of necessity curbed this “playfulness” of Gilman’s, as she had to comply with the wishes of editors and publishers influenced by rigid notions of genre classification.

Straddling the factual and the imaginative, Alfonsina Storni’s essays also rely on strategies and resources typical of creative prose, which differentiate them from the average “feminine column.” Alicia Salomone considers that this oscillation between the literary and the strictly journalistic is actually what warrants their classification as “chronicles,” a genre that consolidates itself in Latin America towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Storni exploits the malleable nature of the essay form to introduce letters, diaries, and fictional accounts echoing with elements of melodrama, in a gesture typical of Mary Louise Pratt’s “gender essay.” Such a crossover between genres is replicated in her decision to sign some of her pieces with another name, resulting in a double-voiced discourse that blurs the boundaries even

further. In “La Carta al Padre Eterno” (“Letter to the Eternal Father”), for instance, the writer adopts the identity of Lita to address a letter to God confessing the miseries of being a poor young woman forced to go to all lengths to keep up with the demands of social life.<sup>30</sup> The format of the fictitious letter gives Storni the chance to expose the ludicrousness of young ladies’ slavish submission to fashion standards without the need to make an outright denunciation or too serious a social criticism. Through Mercedes, Lita, and Alicia, among others, the writer penetrates into the minds of the “feminine types” that she anatomizes elsewhere in her journalism.

Storni’s “Diario de una niña inútil” (“Diary of a Useless Girl”) can be seen as a manifesto representing the interests of all the “feminine types,” and the portrayal of the diary’s author revealed through the different entries as a matrix for the rest of Storni’s deceptively innocent young personas.<sup>31</sup> The “useless girl” introduces herself as an absurdly naïve young lady whose days are wasted envisioning possible ways of finding a prospective husband. Emulating the romantic heroines of her favorite literature, the girl, whose name we ignore, devotes herself to recording her innermost emotions and thoughts in a personal diary. Nevertheless, there is in reality not much to be recorded. In this column, Storni uses the first-person to parody the female subjectivities she has mercilessly attacked in her other articles, whose lives revolve around finding in successful marriage the answer to all of their problems. It is to this goal that the girl directs all of her efforts, which materialize in ten rules outlined in a decalogue that she receives from her friend Mechita, the president of the “Asociación secreta de niñas inútiles pro defensa de sus intereses” (“Secret Association of Useless Girls Pro-Defense of Their Interests”). Once again, fashion mandates are represented as being of utmost importance in the game of seduction being played, and the decalogue accounts for these through an addenda detailing specific fashion cues to be followed by the useless girls if they are to succeed. Inhabiting the interior subjectivity of “the useless girl” enables Storni to reflect ironically on the artificiality inherent in social constructions of gender and makes her denunciation all the more powerful.

Tania Diz’s thorough examination of the so-called feminine article in early-twentieth-century Argentinean magazines in chapter two of her book *Alfonsina periodista* adds still another dimension within which to analyze Storni’s prose. Diz points to two main threads running through the whole corpus, each complementing the other in the delineation of women as new social subjects.<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, the body is constructed as central to the formation of female subjectivities—a body predicated on health, beauty, and social etiquette. On the other hand, there appears a whole gallery of “feminine types” with the aim of endorsing certain female subjectivities, while admonishing against others. I would argue that these two threads intersect with each other inextricably in ways that make it almost impossible to consider one without the other, since the female subjectivities portrayed in the articles are themselves perceived as beautiful, healthy, and sociable bodies circulating through newly inaugurated urban spaces. Health and beauty both become in the

“feminine columns” the occasion for the inscription on women’s bodies of scientific precepts coming from hygienists and doctors preoccupied with bodies that, unless overseen, could pose a moral threat to society.

In her article “Los detalles; el alma” (“Details; the Soul”), Storni herself borrows the authoritative tone of the pseudoscientific discourse favored by doctors and hygienists allegedly interested in women’s well-being. Referring to women’s well-known weakness for the corset, she pronounces, “el mismo corsé comprime el estómago, dificulta los movimientos intestinales y afecta el funcionamiento general de casi todos los órganos internos” (the same corset compresses the stomach, hinders intestinal movements, and affects the general functioning of almost all the internal organs).<sup>33</sup> With these words, the writer echoes the recurrent warning commonly heard at the time about fashion’s disregard for women’s health and about the consequent pernicious influence of fashion mandates, a concern present in Gilman’s writing as well. Advocating the benefits of physical exercise, the American thinker and reformer states, “I once knew a girl whose vanity led her to decline gymnasium work, on the ground that it would make her hands large. The same vanity would have urged her to it if she had even known of the beauty of a well proportioned, vigorous, active body. She had read and heard of small soft hands as a feminine attraction, but never of a smooth, strong neck, a well set head, a firm, pliant, muscular trunk, and limbs that cannot be beautiful unless they are strong.”<sup>34</sup> Gilman’s disapproving tone brings her once again close to her Argentinean counterpart. Having propped her discourse up on medical expertise as well as historical evidence to lecture women about the impracticality and unwholesomeness of high heels and corsets, Storni concludes, “Acaso, mucho más que el corsé y los altos tacos, favorecieran la elegancia femenina, sanos ejercicios, prudentes masajes, arte tan exquisito y saludable como la danza clásica, practicada como ejercicio” (Perhaps, rather than the corset and high heels, what could help feminine elegance would be healthy exercise, prudent massage, an art so exquisite and healthy as classical ballet, practiced as exercise).<sup>35</sup> Like Gilman, although less vehemently, Storni upholds a new standard of beauty associated with physical exercise and healthy habits.

Underlying the criticism made by both writers, there is the understanding that women have ruined their health at the expense of pleasing and attracting men, and satisfying male standards of beauty. As a result of this, women are portrayed by both writers as being trapped in a ludicrous sense of beauty that anchors them in preconceived notions of so-called femininity. This idea is embodied for the Argentinean writer in the image of the armor as representative of rigid constructions of gender that have been passed down from one generation of women to the next: “Además no son las mujeres modernas las que han inventado sus actuales armaduras. De otras Evas les vienen; junto con la herencia espiritual del sexo, han llegado las herencias materiales” (Besides, it is not modern women that have invented their current armor. These come from other Eves; together with the spiritual legacy of their sex, there have come material legacies) (876). The image of the armor, recurring



throughout her verse, will figure prominently as the title and motif of one of the poems in *Languidez* (Languor, 1920), Storni's book of poetry that appeared a year after her publication of "Los detalles; el alma." Corsets thus turn into armor weighing down on women's self-realization:

Bajo armadura andamos: si nos sobra  
El alma, la cortamos; si no llena,  
Por mengua, la armadura, pues la henchimos:  
Con la armadura andamos siempre a cuestras.  
[We move around under an armor: if the soul  
Overflows, we trim it; if it does not fill,  
Diminutive, the armor, we expand it:  
We are always burdened by the armor.]<sup>36</sup>

Women's obedient acceptance of inherited notions of beauty is also critiqued by Gilman, albeit in slightly different terms.

The image of the armor assumes for the American writer larger proportions as she attributes women's artificial sense of beauty to their isolation in the domestic sphere and to the narrowness of interests that follows from it. Gilman starts her diatribe by bitterly describing the physical appearance of most women in these terms: "In their enforced restriction they have lost the beauty of expression that comes of a rich wide life, fully felt, fully expressed. Look at the puffy negation of a row of women's faces in a street car. Plump women, 'pretty' women perhaps, well dressed, 'stylish,' not ill-tempered,—and not anything else!"<sup>37</sup> Adopting an ironic tone that almost verges on ridiculing women, Gilman uses mockery to shake her female readers out of their domestic complacency and, by the same token, spur them on to join the public sphere. Having described the women under scrutiny, she moves on to add, "Their range of experience is absolutely domestic; their interests and ambitions are either domestic or what they fondly call 'social'; they do not feel, know, or act in the full sense of human life, and their faces show it" (23). "The Beauty Women Have Lost" attests to Gilman's furious resistance against women's confinement to the domestic realm, which restricted their sphere of action and denied the existence of any needs or desires outside of this private domain.

The identity of Alfonsina Storni's "useless girl" is also entirely shaped by her domestic aspirations, themselves the target of Storni's criticism, as was pointed out earlier. The "social" life of "la niña inútil" is in actuality entirely shaped by the quest for a husband, to the extent that she recognizes, "He dejado ya de ser una mujer; soy un decálogo en acción" (I have ceased to be a woman; I am a decalogue in action).<sup>38</sup> Her quest is colored by a sense of urgency reminiscent of, and at least partly dictated by, the fast pace of the incipient modernity spreading through the city of Buenos Aires. At the same time, and true to Storni's denunciatory style, this urgency constitutes an indirect allusion to the poor working conditions affecting the mass of

young women who had recently joined the workforce and therefore wanted a way out via marriage. Interestingly enough, the economic dependence of women on men hereby described lies at the foundation of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's theorization of the gendered construction of subjectivity. Of her works, *Women and Economics* (1898) probably best describes her ideology, although glimpses of it appear everywhere both in her literary and nonliterary production. To Gilman's mind, women's material dependence on men for survival makes the relationship between the sexes an economic one and exaggerates sex distinctions, which leads the thinker to believe that it is the "sexuo-economic relationship" between the sexes that lies at the root of gender inequity and imbalance. Hence, "the male must be attracted as a means of livelihood," as Gilman suggests in "The Beauty Women Have Lost,"<sup>39</sup> and this premise justifies women's worship of ridiculous fashion standards at the expense of their health and physical well-being. We have come full circle.

Like her Argentinean counterpart, the American thinker and reformer aims her denunciation at those "feminine types" that are willing to go to all lengths to "catch" a good husband. In this sense, both writers do lay the blame partly on women for their limited presence in the public realm and their confinement to the domestic sphere. For Gilman, however, it is a situation that can be at least in part explained in evolutionary terms. As the male subordinated the female and became her sole environment, her dependence on him led to the intensification of those qualities associated with "sex attraction." If the female wanted to survive, she needed to be able to attract the male, on whom her survival depended. As Gilman herself describes it, "women's economic profit comes through the power of sex attraction."<sup>40</sup> In "Her Hair," for instance, women's nonsensical adherence to uncomfortably long hairstyles is justified by Gilman once again in terms of the sexuo-economic relationship between the sexes. "It is purely a matter of sex decoration, a part of the insistence that woman's chief mission is 'to please,'" admonishes the writer.<sup>41</sup> Like Storni in the articles above-mentioned, Gilman resorts to the use of imperatives as well as to the inclusive pronominal "we" to exhort her female readers to join in her campaign to free women from the enslavement of fashion mandates. Women's fashion therefore becomes for both writers the stage on which to enact their criticism of women's pursuit of marriage and domesticity as their life-ambitions, the platform from which to alert them to the dire consequences of their decisions and from which to advocate for immediate social change.

Within the frame of Gilman's peculiar appropriation of evolutionary theory, it was precisely "the limits imposed by her [woman's] childbearing capacities" that led both to women's economic dependence on men and to their ensuing confinement within the domestic sphere.<sup>42</sup> To her mind, such confinement bespeaks retardation in the process of social evolution and reveals a prejudiced and narrow understanding of female subjectivity based on women's reproductive function. In a piece entitled "That Obvious Purpose" in *The Forerunner* issue for June of 1911, the writer lashes out at the upholders of this view in these terms: "If women had no other relation to life than

that of a queen bee, this ceaseless insistence on their feminine functions might be justified, but, being what they are, it is only explicable as a piece of androcentric prejudice pure and simple.”<sup>43</sup> The pervasive “androcentric prejudice” permeating all levels of society both in Argentina and in the United States during the first decades of the twentieth century is in fact largely responsible for the equation of marriage and motherhood in the young minds of the women portrayed by both writers. For the “useless girl” of Storni’s essay-diary, a woman marries, first, to guarantee her economic survival and, second, to become a mother and serve her reproductive duty to society. “El país necesita mi concurso maternal” (The country needs my maternal contribution), the girl confesses, justifying in this manner the urgency underlying her search for a prospective husband.<sup>44</sup>

It seems safe at this point in the discussion to assume that the bodies advertising themselves for marriage in Storni’s column, the useless girl’s among them, are indeed reproductive bodies bearing the domesticating influence of official discourse. In her chapter “Mujeres, feminismo y literatura,” Delfina Muschietti examines how, in early-twentieth-century Argentina, the female body was subject to the regulation of the current religious, medical, scientific, and even advertising discourses. The body targeted, as well as constructed, by these discourses is, for the Argentinean scholar, a body obsessively preoccupied with its beauty as a means to either enter “the market of prospective husbands” or “keep one [a husband]” once acquired. It is also a body whose sole function is to “reproduce” and ensure the survival of the species. Closely watched in its physiology and guarded in its behavior, it is a body exposed to a dual message: simultaneously encouraged to “consume” by advertising campaigns and reprimanded by the male—husband, father, boss—for not “saving.”<sup>45</sup> The body Muschietti describes is therefore subject to a strict ideological operation aimed at its domestication—both in the sense of taming it and containing it in the domestic sphere. In Storni’s social vignettes, the healthy, beautiful, and sociable bodies that circulate throughout the city in search of a husband are sites where motherhood is traversed and controlled by discourses on the private and the public. Consequently, marriage and motherhood appear to Storni as the loci where the confinement—both literal and figurative—of female subjectivity takes place, and, as a result, constitute the target of her criticism. Confined and imprisoned by and within the marriage contract, women tend to see in their mothering duties the validation, in their own eyes, of their restriction to the domestic sphere.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s examination of prevailing mothering practices throughout her whole writing career indeed mirrors Storni’s argument, suggesting yet another transnational comparison. The American thinker comes up with the term “primitive motherhood” to describe “the entire devotion of each and every mother to her own children.”<sup>46</sup> Her piece “An Unnatural Mother,” opening the issue entirely dedicated to motherhood, creatively stages the writer’s critique of this conceptualization of mothering as a practice to be performed exclusively in the isolation of the domestic environment. Inspired by the belief that a child’s healthy

development and growth can only arise out of an exclusive bond with the mother, the women in the mill village of Toddsville chastise Esther Greenwood for failing to conform to this pattern. While gossiping about the natural disaster that led to the death of Esther and her husband, Miss Briggs and Miss Jacobs express their horror at Esther's treatment of her little child by exclaiming, "Why, that woman never seemed to have the first spark of maternal feeling to the end!"<sup>47</sup> In the eyes of the two women, the fact that Esther managed to save about "fifteen hundred people" from dying amounts to nothing when compared with her decision to leave her child behind in the house when she saw the dam giving way. From their perspective, her "unnaturalness" comes from her habit of caring for all children instead of just focusing on one—her own.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's well-known talent for approaching a subject through a multiplicity of genres helps her in the motherhood issue to blur the boundaries between genres to perform once more an interesting discursive operation. The short story "An Unnatural Mother" opens this issue and is immediately followed by the poem "Mother to Child," which functions as some kind of disclaimer for the previous piece, as if authored by the character of Esther Greenwood herself in response to the criticisms leveled at her by the ladies of Toddsville. In language saturated with emotion, the poem appeals to sentiment to demonstrate through superlative phrasing that, however deep and incommensurable a mother's love can be, it never suffices to save and protect the child from pain and sorrow. Gilman is able to advocate for a social motherhood via her explanation of why this is so: "Thou art one with the world—though I love thee the best; / And to save thee from pain I must save all the rest—." Right after the series of protestations whereby the mother as lyrical subject of the poem undertakes "to save / all the children on earth from the jail and the grave," the analytical essay "The New Mothers of a New World" outlines in highly rational fashion how this social motherhood can help give a sense of direction and purpose to the "world-wide movement among women."<sup>48</sup> "The Mother's Prayer" follows, again advocating a social motherhood, but this time through the parable of a mother who, while praying for her child's health, is shown by Jesus Christ the suffering of all the children living in inhuman, unhealthy, and exploitative conditions. Throughout this issue, Gilman slips into different enunciating positions to articulate different aspects of one and the same dilemma, via a rhetorical maneuver reminiscent of Storni's discursive overlapping of subject positions as she impersonates Lita, Mercedes, Alicia, and numerous others.

Against "primitive motherhood," Gilman places "new motherhood," located outside the home and in the hands of trained professionals, and in so doing manages to sever the deep-seated connection that exists in people's minds between marriage and motherhood. Severing this connection allows her, by extension, to attempt to shatter the sexuo-economic dependence ingrained in the marriage relationship. No longer confined to the house to serve their reproductive duties, women are forced to venture out into the public world, and look beyond marriage and beyond

housekeeping for self-fulfillment. Such was the narrowness of interests deprecated by Alfonsina Storni. Once the equation of motherhood and domesticity is disrupted, there follows for both writers a new understanding of female subjectivity.

What this article has meant to elucidate is how, emerging as well as departing from a tradition of canonical essay-writing, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Alfonsina Storni disrupt the form of the essay to enact a critique of female subjectivity that is traversed by an interrogation of the private/public divide. Gilman and Storni are both deeply aware of the codification characterizing so-called feminine publications, and of how such systematization results in an equally powerful codification of the ways in which female subjectivity is constructed and perceived. Accordingly, the urgency confronting their writing is how to foster a similar awareness in their predominantly female readership, and it is to this end that they undermine the laws that have traditionally governed essay-writing. Like a host of other women writing before, together with, and after them, Gilman and Storni reappropriate for themselves the essay form and twist it to suit their own purposes. In this manner, they express their refusal to acquiesce in the presuppositions underlying publications targeted at women, as well as their desire to steal from patriarchal ideology a language in which to fly, unsettling the order of things and upsetting hierarchical binary oppositions, a commonality that defies national and geographical boundaries.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In the original, there is a note by the translator indicating “*illes* is a fusion of the masculine pronoun *ils*, which refers back to birds and robbers, with the feminine pronoun *elles*, which refers to women.” Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 258.

<sup>2</sup> Constance S. Richards, *On the Winds and Waves of Imagination: Transnational Feminism and Literature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Gwen Kirkpatrick, “Alfonsina Storni as ‘Tao Lao’: Journalism’s Roving Eye and Poetry’s Confessional ‘I,’” in *Reinterpreting the Spanish American Essay: Women Writers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Doris Meyer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 134–47.

<sup>4</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires, 1920 y 1930* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1988), 79.

<sup>5</sup> Delfina Muschietti, “Las estrategias de un discurso travesti (Género periodístico y género poético en Alfonsina Storni),” *Dispositio* XV, no. 39 (1990): 85–105.

<sup>6</sup> Alicia Salomone, *Alfonsina Storni: Mujeres, modernidad y literatura* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2006); and Tania Diz, *Alfonsina periodista: Ironía y sexualidad en la prensa argentina (1915–1925)* (Buenos Aires: Libros del Rojas, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “‘Making a Change’: Strategies of Subversion in Gilman’s Journalism and Short Fiction,” in *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Joanne B. Karpinski (New York: Hall, 1992), 234.

<sup>8</sup> Denise D. Knight, “Charlotte Perkins Gilman, William Randolph Hearst, and the Practice of Ethical Journalism,” in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Her Contemporaries: Literary and Intellectual Contexts* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Fishkin, “‘Making a Change,’” 235.

<sup>10</sup> Knight, “Charlotte Perkins Gilman,” 56.

<sup>11</sup> Aleta Cane, “Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Forerunner*: Text and Context” (PhD diss., Northeastern University, 1996), 81–82.

<sup>12</sup> Fishkin, “‘Making a Change,’” 237.

<sup>13</sup> Knight, “Charlotte Perkins Gilman,” 56.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, “‘Don’t Interrupt Me’: The Gender Essay as Conversation and Counter canon,” in Meyer, *Reinterpreting the Spanish American Essay*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “A Summary of Purpose,” *Forerunner* VII, November 1916, 286–87. All references to *The Forerunner* throughout this article are drawn from its reprinted version by the Greenwood Reprint Corporation of New York in 1968.

<sup>16</sup> Pratt, “‘Don’t Interrupt Me,’” 16.

<sup>17</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Coming Changes in Literature,” *Forerunner* VI, September 1915, 230.

<sup>18</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Statement of Purpose, *Forerunner* I, January 1910, 31.

<sup>19</sup> Gilman, “Coming Changes,” 230.

<sup>20</sup> Mariselle Meléndez, “Obreras del pensamiento y educadoras de la nación: El sujeto femenino en la ensayística femenina decimonónica de transición,” *Revista Iberoamericana* LXIV (1998): 575.

<sup>21</sup> Gilman, “Coming Changes,” 235.

<sup>22</sup> Alfonsina Storni, “Feminidades,” in *Obras*, vol. 2, ed. Delfina Muschietti (Buenos Aires: Losada, 2002), 801.

<sup>23</sup> Salomone, *Alfonsina Storni*, 261.

<sup>24</sup> Alfonsina Storni, “Tipos femeninos callejeros,” in *Obras* 2, 850. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

<sup>25</sup> Diz, *Alfonsina periodista*, 78.

<sup>26</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Her ‘Charms,’” *Forerunner* VI, January 1915, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Fishkin, ““Making a Change,”” 236.

<sup>28</sup> Gilman, “Her ‘Charms,’” 26.

<sup>29</sup> Salomone turns to Susana Rotker’s definition for clarification, where the chronicle is characterized as the meeting ground for journalistic and literary discourses. This is a process that for Rotker is commonly charged with the tension coming from the fact that linguistic signs serve, on the one hand, the purpose of conveying information but, on the other hand, are informed as well by an aesthetic dimension (Salomone, *Alfonsina Storni*, 208–9).

<sup>30</sup> Alfonsina Storni, “La Carta al Padre Eterno,” in *Obras 2*, 836–39.

<sup>31</sup> Alfonsina Storni, “Diario de una niña inútil,” 827–32.

<sup>32</sup> Diz, *Alfonsina periodista*, 31–32.

<sup>33</sup> Alfonsina Storni, “Los detalles; el alma,” in *Obras 2*, 876.

<sup>34</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Beauty Women Have Lost,” *Forerunner I*, September 1910, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Storni, “Los detalles,” 877.

<sup>36</sup> Alfonsina Storni, *Obras*, vol. 1, ed. Delfina Muschietti (Buenos Aires: Losada, 2002), 253–54.

<sup>37</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Beauty Women Have Lost,” *Forerunner I*, September 1910, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Storni, “Diario de una niña inútil,” 832.

<sup>39</sup> Gilman, “Beauty Women Have Lost,” 23.

<sup>40</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 63.

<sup>41</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Her Hair,” *Forerunner V*, July 1914, 176.

<sup>42</sup> Ann J. Lane, *To Herland and Beyond: The Life and Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (New York: Meridian, 1991), 240.

<sup>43</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “That Obvious Purpose,” *Forerunner II*, June 1911, 162.

<sup>44</sup> Storni, “Diario de una niña inútil,” 829.

<sup>45</sup> Delfina Muschietti, “Mujeres, feminismo y literatura,” in *Historia social de la literatura Argentina*, vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: Contrapunto, 1986), 139.

<sup>46</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The New Motherhood,” *Forerunner I*, December 1910, 17.

<sup>47</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “An Unnatural Mother,” *Forerunner IV*, June 1913, 143.

<sup>48</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Mother to Child” and “The New Mothers of a New World,” *Forerunner* IV, June 1913, 144–45.