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### **Title**

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### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/45z9q23z>

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### **Publication Date**

2019-04-10

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English 184

20 March 2019

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In many of her short stories, Rosario Ferré creates her female characters as centers of magic, which subverts the tendency of magical realism to focus on giving male characters power within the socio-political problems of Latin America (Caloca 3). Although "Sleeping Beauty" at first appears highly realist and more postmodern, magic still exists and focalizes around the protagonist, María de los Angeles. Throughout "Sleeping Beauty," María de los Angeles continually rejects the expectations and standards of an upper-class daughter, but each time, she finds herself undermined yet again, eventually leading to her final (and beginning because the story starts out of chronological order) staging of her own death. Because of the structures around her, María's life embodies contradiction, and all her choices occur as both constructive and destructive (Netchinsky 105). The existence of death as her only source of freedom critiques the standards of Puerto Rican patriarchal society at the time, but despite these constant confines, María de los Angeles continues to successfully carve out areas of freedom. The postmodern interweaving of documents suggests a realist narrative, but magic still persists within the text through María herself. Magic gives her agency over reality because within the structures of reality, magic is unexpected and unique to the individuals who possess it, giving them abilities others do not have. Therefore, magic is power. Ferré gives María de los Angeles control over her narrative within the structures of patriarchal society and asserts hope for a more feminist future

by making María the source of the magical aspects of the story: the altering of time and reality, her magical coma, and mysterious death.

The rejection of chronological order by the inclusion of María's voice at the beginning and ending of the story displays her control and how she lives beyond the physical constraints of the documents and other people in the text. The timeline of her thoughts is nonlinear, giving María the power to transcend chronological time in the story. Ferré structures the letters and news clippings in a linear timeline, following the pattern of magical realism as a genre that rebels against the standards of Western genres (Slemon 10). Kathleen Glenn asserts in her article "Text and Countertext in Rosario Ferré's 'Sleeping Beauty,'" "the structural fragmentation of the narrative and the absence of dialogue underscore the lack of true communications among the characters" (208). Without traditional story elements of dialogue and narrator, the collection of these letters appears like a compilation of primary sources, forcing the reader into the position of a historian creating a timeline or approximation of events from the sources. However, this idea of historian raises the question of how are María's thoughts integrated among the documents. The beginning with María de los Angeles' voice through her letters along with the incorporation of her thoughts suggests María ultimately oversees the narrative. Because no one else would have access to her thoughts, their inclusion suggests María herself could be the compiler, which gives her even more authority over her own narrative. Through the anachronistic inclusion of letters at the beginning that signal the end of the story, Ferré gives them the highest significance of all the letters. María's letters become the most powerful, surpassing those of her father and the Reverend Mother who possess more power in society, but in the world of the story of "Sleeping Beauty" María de los Angeles is the most powerful. These letters also represent the inception of her planned death, so no matter the other letters and attempts to control her life she ultimately

chooses the direction of her narrative by bookending the story with her voice in letters and thoughts.

Ferré tells the sections of María de los Angeles' thoughts through stream of consciousness, jumbling time while the other types of text remain trapped in traditional time, which gives María the power to circumvent time and reality. These sections of the story are entirely in italics, signaling their difference from the documents. The italics appear more fluid than the vertical words, leaning into each other. The italics lead into each word one after another, increasing the speed and urgency of these thoughts. The content of these sections emphasizes this fluidity without any periods, each phrase leads into each other unendingly. The only section that contains formal sentences with periods is when she describes the events leading to her death. The inclusion of periods indicates her end. The other characters in the story only exist in the formal constructs of letters and news clippings, which have set structural components that they must follow, such as headings, dates, and salutations, but in the thoughts of María, there is no structure. There is no time and no reality she cannot change, giving her the power to control her narrative.

The first section of italics in María's stream of consciousness occurs after the news article about her *Coppélia* performance and suggests a loss of time through its childlike tone. This first section contains no references to other concrete events mentioned by letters or the news, unlike her other thoughts later in the story do, so this section could be from any time in her life. She begins to discuss her father's mistress, Carmen Merengue, without any time period, so these thoughts could come from the timeline shortly after *Coppélia* or from when she was an actual child. She describes Carmen as "*about my age*" but never explains when Carmen is María's age, if they are the same age at the same time or if Carmen is from the past (Ferré 92). It appears she

is around María's age when she is in her father's life, although when she is in María's father's life is unclear. Some of the other language also suggests María is a child in these thoughts such as the child's game, "*skipping over cracks, from crack to crack break your mother's back,*" interwoven into her descriptions of Carmen Merengue (Ferré 92). Because of the lack of clarity and time markers in these sections, these elements of childhood could indicate her naivety and childishness as a young adult in the present of the letters, or these thoughts could be pulled from her childhood. The fluidity of these thoughts allows both interpretations to stand. By suggesting she pulled these thoughts or partially pulled these thoughts from childhood, Ferré gives María the power to transcend the timeline of the story in her thoughts, and although she cannot control the narrative in the letters and news clippings, she gains control over herself and the narrative of the story as a whole.

In addition to her control over time, María de los Angeles also seems to control reality, which she demonstrates through the character of Carmen Merengue. Carmen only exists in María's thoughts, suggesting Carmen is not real to anyone except María. Many of María de los Angeles' assertions about the people and events in her thoughts, such as "*Felisberto is my boyfriend*" are facts corroborated by the other letters, but none of the other texts ever explicitly reference Carmen Merengue (Ferré 94). In his crumpled letter, Felisberto alludes to Carmen Merengue, describing a "redhead wearing an Afro" who "danced on a tightrope" (Ferré 114). Without any other references to this scene, this woman could be another circus performer with a resemblance to Carmen rather than Carmen herself. Given the immense importance of image and status in María's family, it seems unlikely her father would risk the scandal of keeping a mistress so obviously close to the family that María would be able to learn this level of information about her. María states thoughts and feelings from Carmen Merengue that she could not know without

a close relationship, stating, “*Carmen Merengue would never marry, no, she’d shake her head*” (Ferré 94). While Carmen Merengue may be real as her father’s mistress, because María likely does not know the real Carmen, these details about her, including Carmen’s feelings about the circus and her return, are fictional and created by María. Through the introduction of Carmen, María demonstrates her ability to fictionalize and create reality for herself. Ultimately, María becomes Carmen, inserting herself into the image of the character she created. María de los Angeles breathes life into Carmen, creating a living doll whom she can live vicariously through in her own imagination. The formation of Carmen Merengue illustrates María’s power of creation and fictionalization throughout the story, almost writing her own story.

Reality becomes further distorted, along with María’s sense of self, which begins to include Carmen Merengue, even before she literally tries to become Carmen in her death scene. In the beginning, all of María’s descriptions of Carmen Merengue are in the third person. Statements like “*she was about my age I remember her well, Carmen Merengue the trapeze artist*” keep the third person, Carmen, separate from the first person, María de los Angeles (Ferré 92). However, later María begins to slip between third and first person with Carmen. In her second section of thoughts María describes Carmen Merengue as “she” by thinking “*she rose to look at herself in the shard of a broken mirror that hung on the wall,*” then shifts to the first person in “*after all that’s what I am, a circus dancer*” (Ferré 95). The section ends “*and that very day she went back*” shifting back to the third person descriptions of Carmen Merengue (95). This slippage between third and first person indicates the beginning of the blurring of lines between the personas of María and Carmen and relates back to María’s imagination of Carmen’s thoughts and fictionalization. Carmen Merengue represents the influence of native culture unwelcome in the high society of María’s family (Netchinsky 112). By her conflation with María, Carmen

begins to enter the upper echelons of society through María. In this way, María helps Carmen regain some of the respect she loses in María's father's mistreatment of her as a mistress.

Because these changes and distortions of reality only occur in María de los Angeles' thoughts, she becomes the source of this magic and power throughout the story.

With her power to twist and shape reality, María de los Angeles manifests an entire fictional realm for herself in the fairytale world of Sleeping Beauty. Because of its placement, this section of her thoughts between her father's letters describing the beginning and end of her coma seems to occur during her coma. She creates a world where she lives in a castle, saying, "*she thought she'd make a tour of the castle*" (Ferré 100). Even in this imagined world, her only freedom to explore the castle exists when her parents leave on "*dappled mares,*" which further emphasize the imagery of old European aristocracy associated with fairy tales (100). She proceeds to wander through the castle in an ethereal way, dancing through the halls, ignoring the ban on dance. She dances until "*her fingertip got pinched,*" alluding to the spindle that causes Sleeping Beauty's hundred-year sleep and in this case, ten-day coma (100). Rather than acknowledging the real reason for her distress and coma, María dances around the subject and instead creates for herself this fictional reality.

Through her many details of this fictional reality, she forces her imagination to become her reality, at least during her coma. As she, as Sleeping Beauty, falls into her sleep, she describes "*everything slowly dissolving, melting around her*" which blurs the lines between fiction and reality further even within her own fiction (Ferré 100). The world around her cannot literally "dissolve" or "melt," but through her imagination she blends the literal and the magical. She then details almost everything and everyone in the castle, listing "*the horses,*" "*the saddles,*" "*the guards,*" "*the lances,*" "*the cooks, the bakers, the pheasants, the quails, the fire in the*

*fireplace, the clock under the cobwebs*” (100). This long list of other people, animals, and items in her fictional castle takes up a little over three lines of text and demonstrates the elaborate nature of her imagination. These details serve to make this fiction more real, and so this fiction becomes reality to María. Towards the end of this section, she adds details from reality and thinks through Felisberto’s voice, “*the hundred years are up, your parents are dead, the social commentators are dead, the society ladies and the nuns are dead*” (Ferré 101). These lines meld her fiction and reality, the hundred years from the fairytale with characters from her life.

However, this scene still remains fantasy because she kills these characters, not literally, but she forces them to die in the fantasy she controls, therefore effectively killing them. While these people are elements of her reality, they still become a part of her fiction in their fictional deaths. This section begins the association of death with freedom. She thinks the only way to gain her freedom is through death, first those of her controllers and later in the story through her own death. By combining these people from her reality with the world of her fiction, she moves her fiction closer to reality. Although these changes and magic may seem isolated to María’s interior thoughts, they become manifest in reality through the confirmation of her mysterious coma in letters from her father.

The most obviously magical realist part of the story, the ten-day coma with no scientific cause centers around María de los Angeles, demonstrating her as the source of magic in the story. María falls into the coma in direct response to being told she cannot dance anymore. Her father offers the first association in his descriptions, stating, “The very day we told María de los Angeles about our decision to forbid her to go on dancing, she fell seriously ill,” (Ferré 99). The structure of this sentence gives the cause, the forbidding of dance, and then the result, illness. Later at the end of the story, María looks back on her coma, thinking, “*I’ll break your forbidden*



*it's forbidden so just keep on dancing sleep sleep sleep sleep sleep sleep*" (Ferré 118). This format follows the same structure as the statement from her father beginning with the cause and then the result, suggesting a purposeful sleep. The repetition of "*sleep*" suggests a command to herself or mantra to keep herself in the coma. This repetition can also be read as merely a description of her condition as "*sleep[ing]*" but the association with the statement of "*forbidden*" seems a clear reaction only solved by finally getting what she desires, the ability to dance. This choice to remove herself from life, although temporary, stands as a scene of strong rebellion and foreshadows her final rebellion and removal from life. Netchinsky describes this coma in her article, "Madness and Colonization: Ferré's Ballet," as "the passive resistance of comatose sleep" (114). However, because of the words "*I'll break your forbidden*" which demonstrates María's force of will, this act appears more active (Ferré 118). The act of coma becomes a conscious choice on the part of María de los Angeles to remove herself from continuing as a commodity for her father and the Reverend Mother to battle over in their attempts to control her. By actively removing herself through force of will, her coma exists as a magical tool to achieve her own desires. While her distortions of time and reality in her thoughts can be dismissed as madness, the presence of the coma as a reality for the other characters in the story proves her magical abilities.

After her temporary break from life, María brings her fictions to reality by creating her own death and linking herself to one of her ballet heroines, Giselle. Ferré then links her protagonist's mysterious death to the mystery surrounding Giselle's own death. While many details survived from the original production of the ballet, how they performed Giselle's death is unknown (Smith 68). There are two possible death performances: Giselle either stabs herself with a sword or less violently swoons and dies of a broken heart (69). Different ballet companies

choose to perform her death in either way, but each method contains the same intention. Giselle dies of a broken heart after discovering the deceit of her love interest, Loys, so “the impact of the story is virtually the same: Giselle is a Romantic heroine who dies tragically” (Smith 77). Like Giselle, María de los Angeles stages her own death, although it is unknown if she literally kills herself in the same way. Despite the mystery around her death, as Smith states about Giselle’s death “the impact of the story is virtually the same” because the confines of her life drove María to creating her own death (77). Throughout the story, the text mostly confines María’s magic and control to her own thoughts, so except for her coma, only she experiences this magic and control. Through the execution of her own death, María creates her final piece of magic in the mystery within the text, leaving the exact manner of her death unclear to characters in the story as well as to the readers.

María de los Angeles creates part of the mystery around her death in her own thoughts, where the language of her death parallels the language describing Carmen Merengue’s return to the circus, suggesting María might not be dead but has disappeared. Given the blurring of time and reality within María’s thoughts, it is unknown if her assertions about Carmen’s return to the circus are accurate, so the lack of clarity about Carmen’s reality add to the blur of María’s death. These descriptions appear to be accepted as reality by María whether or not other characters would agree with this reality. When the circus pulls Carmen Merengue back, María thinks, “*something tugged, tugged at her knees, at her ankles, as the tip of her dancing shoes, an irresistible current pulled and pulled... and that very day she went back*” (Ferré 95). The same phrase “*something tugging at her shoes*” is repeated when María is in her coma and thinking of her desire to dance (100). These two instances show María associates this phrase with freedom and the desire to dance. In her final thoughts, she thinks “*she couldn’t help it something was*

*tugging at her ankles at her knees at the tips of her shoes eastsidewestside onetwothree something was pulling dragging her faraway*" (Ferré 119). These lines repeat the words "tug" at her "ankles" and knees" and "the tips of her shoes" almost quoting the previous section. By relating these scenes so closely, Ferré suggests María may also survive and leaves her father and family like she claims Carmen Merengue does earlier in the story. This interpretation is still unclear and more a potential suggestion rather than an idea completely proven in the text and ties into María's power of circumventing reality by creating multiple possibilities. These last lines can also be interpreted as her thoughts trailing off into death, and death is now the one "*tugging at her ankles*" (Ferré 119). Through this language, her death becomes part of her idea of dance and freedom. Although she likely dies and does not disappear, the end shows María is free because of the associations of freedom and dance with the language of "*tugging at her ankles*" (119). In death or disappearance or whatever her end may be, she finds freedom in the way she imagines Carmen Merengue does when she supposedly leaves with the circus.

Adding to the mystery surrounding María de los Angeles' death, the obvious lies in the explanation of her death from her father gives María power as the only character with the true knowledge of how she stages her death and how it ultimately transpires. The only character in the story who explicitly claims her death is her father in his letter to the Reverend Mother, asserting Felisberto kills her accidentally and then the choreographer kills Felisberto also accidentally. This letter manages to absolve María, and by extension the family, of blame. Her father's story blames everything on Felisberto as the outsider and "neurotic, ambitious young man" to remove any suspicion of María being involved in any activities of ill repute because she is an extension of her father's reputation (Ferré 116). Through this careful cultivation of narrative and the purposeful omission of her affair, this narrative of her death becomes

unbelievable, leaving more questions about the reality of how her death transpired. While this crafting of the story of her death seems to give her father the power of control over the accepted reality, the known falsehoods in his words negate this power for readers which is later reclaimed by María.

While her father controls the narrative of her death in the reality of the story, in the text of the story itself, María de los Angeles ultimately controls the narrative through her final thoughts. Throughout the story, the structure relegates María's voice to the shadows of her own thoughts and two letters only read by her husband, but at the end, she still gains the final word from beyond the assumed grave. Like a ghost, she corrects her father's story and reclaims the power in creating her own end. She rejects lines seemingly spoken by Felisberto to her "*say yes my love say you're happy*" by stating "*no I'm not happy Felisberto you betrayed me that's why I've brought you here*" (Ferré 119). In these words, she reclaims her intention behind her death and the power of a manipulator and puppet master through her ability to tempt her own husband into their joint demise. By explaining "that's why I've brought you here" she demonstrates her intent for revenge for his betrayal, and in death she finds freedom from that betrayal. Because these thoughts occur after her own thoughts implying her death and her father's letter describing her death, María becomes a ghost and reclaims her narrative in the story. Managing to live beyond her death, like Giselle with the Willys, María de los Angeles exhibits her final piece of magic: living beyond the end of the story, reminding readers of her ultimate control.

Through her demonstrations of the negative effects brought by the confines of the patriarchy, Ferré establishes María's magic and power beyond those confines and creates "Sleeping Beauty" as a magical feminist story. Patricia Hart creates the term "magical feminism" in her book *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende* (31). While Hart specifically uses

the term for the works of Allende, a genre of magical realism centered around female lives and issues that “uses magic to demonstrate a truth about the female condition” is applicable to Ferré’s work (Hart 32). Through magic and realistic documents, Ferré demonstrates the narrow path for women of María’s status and background. From the point of view of her family and by extension the patriarchy, María’s only purpose is to marry and produce a male heir to inherit the family money. With the power of magic both Ferré and María reject these restrictions. Hart also asserts that parts of Allende’s work ask if “magic may at times be the opiate of the oppressed” (32). In a way, the offering of magic as María de los Angeles’ only solace from the constant control of her father and the Reverend Mother follows this idea. The only way for María to escape is through her magic. However, this magic offers a positive message that hope can be found even within the darkest places. Ferré does not create a utopic world for female magic nor does she ignore the problems of the oppressed, specifically women. Although her magic helps her navigate her world of patriarchal confines and somewhat escape it, magic does not destroy the patriarchy in the story, and María’s death as her final escape reminds readers of the harsh reality and effects of patriarchal structure.

Through her combination of realism and magical power, Ferré creates a story that critiques the structures of the patriarchy while also offering some solace. The documents of letters and news articles throughout the story serve to emphasize realism further than traditional storytelling convention which assumes fiction through the creation of narrator and dialogue. These documents represent reality, while María’s thoughts represent fiction. The juxtaposition of intense reality and intense imagination demonstrates the constant confines surrounding María and her thoughts as well as her ability to defy these confines. Through her magic of distorting time, creating a new reality, the physical manifestation of rebellion in her coma, and the mystery

surrounding her death, María regains power stolen from her by the patriarchal structures she lives in. She finally gains control over her narrative through the inclusion of her thoughts and her final words, giving her the final statements over her life represented in the story. Through these final words, Ferré offers hope to female characters out of control, so while her story is tragic, María de los Angeles possesses ultimate control and power over the narrative of “Sleepy Beauty.”

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