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December 1997**

**Framing a pose in immortality:
Discourse, myth, representation in the
death and life of Eva Perón**

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts**

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ABSTRACT

This work consists of a combination of approaches to understanding the mythological workings of the death and life of Eva Perón. Using the Foucauldian notions of discursive regularities, the study of materialization and meaning in the 'body that matters' by Judith Butler, along with Baudrillard's definition of simulacra and simulation, this thesis traces the diverse constructions and significations of the 'names' and 'bodies' surrounding Evita's life, the treatment of her death, and the period which followed. Throughout the course of this analysis, her names and bodies are subjected to the conception of 'myth' as defined by Roland Barthes, bringing to light the entwining of factual and fictional narratives that continually supply them. Derrida's notion of *différance* is used to illustrate the resistance to closure in the histories/stories which emerge from her once single and singular existence and its infinity of derivations.

Ce travail consiste en une combinaison d'approches visant à comprendre les mécanismes de création du mythe qui entoure la mort et la vie d'Eva Perón. En utilisant les notions de "régularité du discours" de Michel Foucault, l'étude de la matérialisation et du sens du corps de Judith Butler, ainsi que la définition du simulacre de Jean Baudrillard, cet essai retrace les diverses constructions et significations des "noms" et "corps" qui entourent la vie d'Evita, le traitement de sa mort, et la période qui suivit. Tout au long de cette analyse, les "noms" et "corps" d'Eva Perón seront soumis au concept du Mythe comme le définissait Roland Barthes, dévoilant ainsi l'entrelacement de récits fictifs et factuels qui le nourrissent. La notion de *différance*, telle que définie par Derrida, sera aussi utilisée afin d'illustrer et de tenter d'expliquer le refus de clore ou de limiter la multitude de récits qui n'ont cessé d'émerger de cette vie qui fût, pour un temps du moins, unique et singulière.

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INTRODUCTION

So I go on, day after day, advancing along the razor-thin edge between what is mythical and what is true, slipping between the lights of what was not and the darkneses of what might have been. I lose myself in those folds, and she always finds me. She never ceases to exist, to exist me: she makes her existence an exaggeration.

✎ Tomás Eloy Martínez, SANTA EVITA

Myth invents itself ceaselessly (...) in it, history evaporates. It is a kind of ideal servant: it prepares all things, brings them, lays them out, the master arrives, it silently disappears: all that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it comes from.

✎ Roland Barthes, MYTHOLOGIES

A WOMAN REACHES HER ETERNITY

In an article for a January 1995 issue of the Argentinean magazine *La Muga*, novelist Abel Posse explains that his interest in Eva Perón as “one of the major adventures of our century: from a feminine point of view” stems from her extraordinary accomplishment of arriving in Buenos Aires at age fifteen with a small brown suitcase, seeking work as an actress, and, ten years later, having a rendez-vous with the Pope as the first lady of Argentina.¹ At first glance, I speculated that this incredible success story probably accounted for Broadway’s, then Hollywood’s, initial interest in telling the saga of María Eva Duarte de Perón. But then again, born of Argentinean parents who followed the strong anti-Peronist tradition in my family, I, too, had always thought she was just another material girl.

I carried that conception until January of this year, when (unknowingly) the course of my own history began to take a turn. As images of the two celebrated blonds with ambition emerged with Madonna’s movie, I was challenged by Professor Berkeley Kaite to analyze the numerous representations of Evita for a course on public discourse. Despite the general apathy which consumed me up until that moment, I undertook it because, for the first time ever, the subject of Eva Perón flamed my curiosity. With the original purpose of revealing (and understanding) why Evita still continues to appeal and intrigue the North American mainstream entertainment industry, even after 45 years from the date of her death, I wanted to discover what, exactly, made the wife of Juan Domingo Perón stand out from other Latin American women leaders and/or personalities such as Rigoberta Menchú, Frida Kahlo, and Isabel Allende, to name a few.

¹ Abel Posse. “Abel Posse narra como escribió *La pasión según Eva*” in *La Muga*. Buenos Aires: January 4, 1995. (p. 40)

Who was, after all, the material girl of Argentina that called so much attention?

In order to answer that question (thinking it was possible), I engaged madly into a quest for Evita, playing Sherlock Holmes and having fair Watsons scattered throughout the two hemispheres of the New World - from my mother in Buenos Aires (doing archival research at the Biblioteca Nacional) to my dentist in Montréal (seeking American videotapes with footage of Evita during his trip to Arizona). I thought I would have an answer, but little did I know... The extent (and impossibility) of my task became evident as I dug through biographies, the musical, the film, articles, novels, Web sites, literature - only to (delightfully) realize that fact and fiction collide at every turn of her story. My sole discovery then, and now, is that the 'real' Evita had been buried perpetually, just as her body rests in peace inside the Duarte vault at La Recoleta: out of sight, out of reach, enigmatically. It was at this point, nonetheless, that my real 'desperately seeking Evita' began.

As each finding triggered another discovery, each answer posed a million questions, and each revelation filled me with light, I realized the extent to which the narratives, constructed by the media, contained a number of blank, inexplicable spaces within them and that, moreover, there no longer was a single and singular Eva Perón. The infinity of rewritten Evitas made way to my conclusion that the first lady did not exist outside of the very texts which 'spoke' her and therefore, I began to think of Evita not as a woman, but as a *text*: "text" derives from *texere*, to weave or compose; Evita derived from the 'authors' who 'spoke' and 'wrote' her. Evita became, to me, a single knot of threads, a sequence of strings woven in an infinity of texts. My task was to untangle them. And from that moment onwards, like Tomás Eloy Martínez, "I have rowed with words, carrying Santa Evita in my boat, from one shore of the blind world to the other."²

² Tomás Eloy Martínez. Santa Evita. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996. (p. 369)

TELLING A STORY

During my rowing through the extreme shores of the New World, from the St-Laurent in Montréal to the Río de la Plata in Buenos Aires, the many faces of Evita leaped into my boat. In my *compañera* (“companion”), I discovered a ‘textual woman’ with seven different names and eight different bodies, all of which amounted to an infinity of metaphors, representations, materializations, meanings. Navigating in a river of both turbulent and peaceful margins, I placed myself in the middle, filling the gaps interspacing history and myth, fact and fiction, truth and fables; streams departing from the only source regarding Evita certain to exist: her legend.

The textuality of Evita, in its infinity of histories and stories, is one that does justice to a sentence she has pronounced as myth, not as woman: *Volveré y seré millones* (“I will return and I will be millions”). Though she never actually said it, her myth supplies the voice which ‘speaks through’ her: Evita returns in millions of constructions, reconstructions, and deconstructions of herself in narratives which linger, dwell, and endure. As the tales which ‘speak her’ arrive and depart, Evita leaves a multiplicity of meanings, allegories, symbols and metaphors behind her. Her pose in immortality is not framed in one but numerous poses; each of her faces carries millions of stances within it.

My boat, therefore, took the *course* of navigation represented in the *course* of this thesis: a combination of approaches to understanding the mythological workings of the death and life of Eva Perón. Following the discursive structuring of those narratives (in the Foucauldian sense), this essay observes the variety of factual and fictional versions that suspend and/or superimpose each other as they fill in the blanks which supply ‘meaning’ to Evita; revealing, at once, the recollecting and

deciphering of enigmatic forces underpinning the public imaginary. The discursive constituents do not reside in the verities or falsehoods contained in those narratives, nor are they present in the adoration or hatred on the part of Argentineans but they are, rather, comprised within the symbolic effect which 'informs' Evita's names and bodies. The purpose of this thesis is not to discover the "true facts" of Evita's life but, instead, to reveal the simplified details that historic discourse leaves behind, working with the unexplored domains and unexplained gaps which emerge in the fantasy of fictional accounts. By merging fact and fiction in a sequence of threads (establishing distinctions solely when relevant to the analysis), this essay traces the diverse constructions and significations of the 'names' and 'bodies' in the numerous (re)presented and (re)written Evita/text.

The first chapter of this thesis explores this idea by looking at the media vehicles, in fact and fiction, which have 'told' the story of Evita's life. More specifically, it consists of an analysis of the mythological workings of Evita's 'personality' and the 'facts of her life' seen in Alan Parker's *Evita*, Madonna's interpretation and representation of the first lady, the original Broadway production, and the Evita-invasion brought about with the exorbitant publicity campaign that accompanied the making of the motion picture: the emerging of documentaries, the re-editions of biographies, the publication of works of literature about her. This portion of the essay subjects 'Evita' to the Barthesian conception of 'myth,' bringing to light the creation of her legend through Broadway and Hollywood and various other sources which have depicted 'her life' in fiction.

The second chapter of this thesis simulates a biography - a *simulography* - of the first lady by looking at the seven different names which have given rise to seven different representations of Evita. Taking Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, this chapter explores the creation and materialization of a woman who has ceased to exist 'as herself' and was substituted by the 'double'

which ‘speaks’ her. As each of her seven names fills her with meanings and symbolizations, the discursive constituents underpinned therein give rise to the different women which ‘exist’ in one, how they came to be, and what they signify.

Using the definition and concept of the ‘body that matters’ of Judith Butler, the third chapter of this thesis is a study of the *materialization* and *meaning* which *matter* the eight different bodies of Eva Perón. Like the first chapter, it ventures into the boundaries between reality and myth by looking specifically at *Santa Evita*, a resplendent work of fiction about the post-mortem journey of Evita’s embalmed cadaver. Taking into account that language (in the Barthesian sense) *signifies* reality rather than *represents* it, this chapter utilizes the novel by Tomás Eloy Martínez to illustrate the reconstruction of the Evita-in-myth intertwined with the Evita-in-history through the semiological value of the literature. The multiplicity of manners that attempt to register both the real and the imaginary, allowing for an infinity of readings in each and every portrayal granted to the many aspects of Evita (i.e. her life, her death, her body, Argentinean politics, identities, hegemony), place Evita in a Derridean abyss as they resist closure against the infinity of derivations which arise from her once single and singular existence. Jacques Derrida’s notion of *différance* is used in the latter part of the third chapter to illustrate this point.

Finally, the majority of the captions seen in subdivisions within each of the three chapters are excerpts of the numerous (re)written texts of Evita: some originate from the lyrics by Tim Rice, others from the novel by Martínez, and others from words that Evita pronounced or is said to have pronounced. They are included therein in an attempt to illustrate that Evita ‘exists through them’ because ‘they speak her’ as narratives, phrases, words, and fragments which endure in the everlastingness of her myth.

ONE

Little by little Evita began to turn into a story that, before it ended, kindled another. She ceased to be what she said and what she did to become what people say she said and what people say she did.

✪ Tomás Eloy Martínez, SANTA EVITA

But who is this Santa Evita? Why all this howling hysterical sorrow? What kind of goddess has lived among us? How will we ever get by without her?

✪ Andrew Lloyd Webber & Tim Rice, EVITA

I WILL RETURN AND I WILL BE MILLIONS...

She has not returned, for the images of Eva Perón never fled the dominions of public discourse in the first place. Though she has been dead for 45 years, and it was once forbidden to even mention her name, María Eva Duarte de Perón, Argentina's most famous and celebrated first lady, has never been absent from popular conception. Therefore, the first portion of the famous prophecy attributed to Evita cannot be realized as long as her body (dead and/or alive) continues its evocations. Images of Evita have been enchanting and intriguing the world for more than half a century, and there are no indices that they will be departing so soon. As long as those traces remain, Evita will not leave. Therefore, she will not return.

Nevertheless, her facsimiles are indeed millions - and so fantastical - that even the thought of Evita rising from the dead no longer seems preposterous. Her legend has been so ceaselessly summoned, her story so continuously reinvented, and the details of each narrative have been so explicitly disclosed, that they have attributed multiple personalities to her character and given birth to millions of Evitas in the process.

As would be expected, the vast number of myths which encompass Eva Perón are often completely oppositional and contradictory of (and within) each other, but the public discourse surrounding this renowned Latin American woman goes far beyond a saint versus prostitute dichotomy, and both converses have diminished and augmented in this process. Consequently, taking the binary oppositions as a point of departure is a useful analytical strategy to illustrate the diversity of personalities attributed to Eva. This is so because, upon juxtaposition, they appear so extremely antagonistic that an entire lineage of differing narratives can be traced along the margins where the opposing ends of this mythological spectrum reside.

Furthermore, the myriad of personae attributed to Eva Perón - whether they lie at opposing extremes or abide between those borders - is so vast that attempting to uncover the 'real' woman who lies behind (and whose life and death has given birth to) all the constructed narratives is virtually an impossible task. According to Marysa Navarro, professor of History at Dartmouth College and author of *Evita* (considered by historians to be the definitive biography of the first lady), these difficulties exist "because 'Evitist' mythology still continues to expand at horrifying proportions and works pertaining to historical investigation about Evita, in Argentina and elsewhere, are still scarce."³

This essay, however, is not concerned with the 'true' facts (assuming they exist) of Evita's life and death. Rather, it consists of an attempt to illustrate the diversity of answers which could be given to the question of 'who she was' and to look at approaches to understanding how these very answers work mythologically. Though the 'true' facts and the public discourses about Evita are intertwined, this essay is solely concerned with the narratives that endure.

As an approach to illustrate these narratives, I propose a return to the abovementioned mythological spectrum of embodied Evitas. I will be portraying the main aspects surrounding the public discourse of Eva Perón as they are supplied by various authors (in the Foucauldian sense) and sources while establishing a relationship between them. A justification for my personal selection of Evita facets for this analysis is provided by Walter Benjamin in *Illuminations* as his third point on the philosophy of history: "A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past

³ Marysa Navarro. *Evita*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 1994. (p. 11)

- which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l'ordre du jour* - and that is Judgement Day.”⁴ I am not in a position to distinguish among the grandiosity of the events that I shall be narrating. I am just supplying them, and providing my own analysis of how they were brought about as I do so.

Moreover, I am also carrying the Foucauldian definition of authorship throughout the course of this essay. According to Mukerji and Schudson, Foucault explains that because authors “use characters from their culture and use language they have heard in others’ mouths, they are inappropriately isolated as the sole source of their work.”⁵ In other words, Evita has been written and rewritten a number of times by the discourses that inform, for instance, the body, femininity, and Argentinean politics, rather than by the ‘authors’ themselves. Different versions of her story could have seemingly been told by both her friends and her enemies, but all of those sources, nonetheless, ‘speak’ a language structured and instructed by the abovementioned discourses, originally and residually.

Finally, I am working under the assumption that the once single and singular Eva Perón no longer exists, and therefore the question of ‘who she was’ cannot be answered on that level. What does endure is the discourse that encompasses her many different names (both literally and figuratively in their own representation and meaning) and bodies (both alive and dead). Furthermore, it is, precisely, the various analyses of this discourse which will ‘supply’ the answers to that question.

⁴ Walter Benjamin. “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in Illuminations, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken, 1968. (p. 254)

⁵ Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson. Introduction: Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies. Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1991. (p. 49)

Evita 'was' all of those women as each of the differing facsimiles which usurped her 'once original' name and body supplied her with millions of character traits. Walter Benjamin explains that "historically, the various modes of communication have competed with one another. The replacement of the older narration by information, of information by sensation, reflects the increasing atrophy of experiences."⁶ For almost half a century since her death, those modes of communication have engaged in hotheaded rivalry to circulate the myth of Eva Perón from mouth to mouth, erasing the borders between 'what was' and 'what was said' as they fed off Evita's brief 33-year-old existence in their attempt to 'tell the story of her life.' In addition, her life is undoubtedly a fountain of surmises in itself, effervescent in speculations gushing from an illegitimate birth to a frustrated acting career only within its wellhead.

Each different vehicle brought about a variety of ammunition - making Evita millions of women and dollars within each facsimile - during the uninterrupted quarrel since her death. Interestingly enough, the predominant part of this myth squad is just as illegitimate as the childhood they condemn: the theatrical force used weapons ranging from a stage performance dramatized by transvestites to a Broadway pop opera later developed into Hollywood's screen adaptation of the musical. The literary force came with best-selling novels in dozens of translations, the reeditions of Evita's pseudo-autobiographies, coffee-table books with 'thin histories,' scripts containing lyrics, to name a few. Finally, the audio force evolved in the same pace as did the millions of Evitas: from vinyl to cassettes to compact disks, they skyrocketed to the top of *Billboard's* charts and made *Don't Cry For Me, Argentina* one of the most common elevator music tunes.

⁶ Walter Benjamin. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in Illuminations, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken, 1968. (p. 159)

In numerous attempts to unveil 'the woman' accountable for being millions came the legitimate squad, offering speculations and underpinnings to each and every Evita reproduced in formats ranging from biographies to documentary films. Paradoxically, as information competed with sensation and vice-versa, most of these sources only served to affix supplementary clouds in the currently infinite mythological sky.

In order to travel the outlying destinations led by a ticket to Evita, I propose departing in two different airplanes, one for each trip: the first for the journey she lived, the second for the journey she died. While crossing the skies, in both instances, I will carefully remark the cumuli of legends, depict the nimbi of myths, and penetrate the strati that fog occurrences. In the process, the millions of Evitas will emerge as we follow the route suggested by Jacques Derrida: we shall not look "at the source *itself* in order to learn what it is or what it means, but rather to the turns of speech. the allegories. figures, metaphors, as you will, into which the source has deviated, in order to lose it or rediscover it - which always amounts to the same."⁷ According to Derrida, "proper meaning derives from derivation" and its primordially is no longer simply the source but rather "the deported effect of a turn of speech, a return or detour." Our Derridean source in this instance is, of course. Evita, defined as being, simultaneously, "the effect of that (for) whose origin it passes."⁸ By traveling - and departing - Evita in the attempt to grant her primal meaning, our very source, the first lady herself, will guide us in unearthing the undiscovered territories of her domain.

The first airplane departs.

⁷ Jacques Derrida. Margins of Philosophy. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982. (p. 280)

⁸ Ibid, p. 280.

(EVITA) PERÓN'S LATEST FLAME

In 1996, almost half a century after Evita's death, Hollywood's gigantic entertainment industry took arms in a megaproduction directed by Alan Parker and starring well-known celebrities as Jonathan Pryce, Antonio Banderas, and, of course, Madonna. The result was a 60-million dollar screen adaptation of one of Broadway's most famous musicals to date, *Evita*, also carrying its name. In order to play the Señora Perón in this cinematographic version, pop industry's illustrious Madonna Ciccone was up against other renowned celebrities, including actresses Meryl Streep and Michelle Pfeiffer, singer Mariah Carey, and others. As she was lobbying for the role in 1994, Madonna wrote Parker a letter consisting of ten reasons why she was the one and only, ideal celebrity who was capable of portraying Evita. Her main argument was that she fully understood, and lived, "her passion and her pain."⁹ However, Madonna did not 'play' Evita. Rather, the pop icon played herself in a role which features the star at what she does best: singing and dancing to the catchy lyrical stanzas in what was rather a gigantically budgeted, lengthy music video of 136 minute-duration, more than an epic about one of the most dominating women of the century.

The screen adaptation of *Evita* does justice to the original Broadway script as it continues to 'tell the life' of a power-hungry *campesina* who emigrated to Buenos Aires with the hopes of pursuing an acting career and ended up becoming the most powerful Argentinean first lady of all times. Of course, it would be unfair to expect that a musical - especially a *pop opera* of this magnitude in this instance, whatever the term was intended to mean - would serve to illustrate an historical moment or persona in an 'accurate' meticulous manner 'telling/informing' events as they

⁹ Madonna. "Madonna's Private Diaries." *Vanity Fair*, November 1996. (p. 174)

have 'happened' in their entirety (it is also not difficult to visualize how Madonna's career could have benefitted by her portrayal of Eva; this point will be argued later on in this essay). Therefore, it would be expected that both the Hollywood and the original Broadway production carry throughout them a linear thematic which gives the script a universal leitmotif. This construction, I argue, gives the *pop opera* a widespread appeal, making it readily available to the consumers of mass media.

What, then, were the thematics that North America created for *Evita*, and what were the personalities they attributed to our heroine? The first evident theme, carried consistently throughout the movie and the musical, is the rise to power *à la* rags-to-riches (we could also call it "American dream," of course). Of the fifteen-year-old Evita Duarte who fled to the 'big city' (*to be a part of B.A., Buenos Aires, Big Apple!*¹⁰) from the 'country' (*But this is Junín! If this were Buenos Aires...*) with the hopes of making it big in the acting milieu; the omnipresent narrator, in the character of Che Guevara, says she lacked virtually everything (*Now Eva Perón had every disadvantage you need if you're going to succeed. No money, no class, no father, no bright lights...*). Che proceeds to give full credit to Augustín Magaldi's character for giving Eva her chance to leave Junín, mentioning, of course, her 'utilization' of this man in the process (*...There was nowhere she'd been at the age of fifteen, as this tango singer found out. A tango singer! Augustín Magaldi, who has the distinction of being the first man to be of use to Eva Duarte...*). This is further illustrated in the lines of an obviously ambitious Eva who is more than willing to seduce the opposite sex to get what she wants: be it by 'innocently' putting herself down before a great tango singer (*To think that a man as famous*

¹⁰ Phrases in *italics* are direct excerpts of the characters' lines contained in Alan Parker's *Evita*. The speaker of each specific stanza is directly indicated and commented in the body of the arguments in this essay.

as you are could love a poor little *nothing like me!*) or by, later, using her bewitching power of persuasion at full capacity with Colonel Perón (*I don't always rush in like this, twenty seconds after saying hello, telling strangers I'm too good to miss - if I'm wrong I hope you tell me so. But you really should know, I'd be good for you - I'd be surprisingly good for you...*).

Evita's rags-to-riches ascension is upheld in Parker's movie by a symbolic train marching briskly from Junín to Buenos Aires, with Madonna waving her hand in the air in a free-at-last gesticulation, representing her country-to-city transition. Much speculation has been offered regarding the circumstances that led (and helped) Evita to leave Junín. This is one of the many black holes regarding the mythology that surrounds her, and biographer Alicia Dujovne Ortiz offers a nice summary of four different versions of Eva's departure:

In the first version of her departure, the one according to Erminda Duarte,¹¹ Evita asked her mother to accompany her to Buenos Aires to audition for the National Radio. After much hesitation, doña Juana finally agreed. Evita recited Amado Nervo's poem, *Adónde van los muertos* (from Spanish, *Where are the dead going?*), and the radio director, Pablo Osvaldo Valle, offered her a small contract. The young actress settled in Buenos Aires at the house of friends of her mother's.

The second version is from biographer Fermín Chávez. Evita asked her mother to accompany her to Buenos Aires for an audition at Radio Belgrano. With the help of Palmira Repetto, the teacher whom she loved so, she had rehearsed three 'poetries' for a month, one of which was Nervo's *Muerta* (from Spanish, *Dead*, gendered female). Mother and daughter went to Buenos Aires, Evita auditioned, and they returned to Junín. But the radio station's response took a long time. Even so, Evita announced to her teacher, 'with or without a response, I am leaving.' Juancito [her brother], who was completing his military service in Buenos Aires, would protect his little sister from the perils of the big city.

The third version, the one adopted by journalists Jorge Capsitski and Rodolfo Tettamanti among others, is that the tango singer Augustín Magaldi appeared at a theater in Junín. Juancito approached him to talk about his sister

¹¹ This version of Evita's departure is featured in Erminda Duarte's biography of her sister, entitled accordingly in Spanish *Mi hermana Evita*. Buenos Aires: Centro de Estudios Eva Perón, 1972.

who wanted to be an actress. Eva visited the singer in his dressing room and begged him to take her with him to Buenos Aires. Magaldi agreed, the trip wrapped in an exemplary decency since his wife was traveling with him.

The fourth version, this one from Mary Main, the most ferocious and unforgiving of her biographers, is that Evita sneaked into the singer's dressing room, became his mistress, and that is how she got to Buenos Aires, with him, to live a life of debauchery.¹²

It is evident that Broadway and Hollywood told the tale of the last version. As far as the first two narratives, it is interesting (though obvious) to note that they make absolutely no reference to Magaldi. Consequently, we can easily deduce that Erminda's rendition is one which deliberately attempts to rescue 'the integrity' of both her sister and her mother. This is clearly depicted by showing a poetically artistic Evita (in earlier accounts, Erminda mentions that her sister used to recite poems at school during her childhood before a substantial audience who came to hear her speak - a 'fact' which has also been elaborated upon by numerous biographers), an obedient daughter who evidently needs the help and support of her mother in order to engage in a career which was not very well-received by Argentinean society in the 1930s. Of course, her mother objects at first but then agrees to accompany her daughter and bless her with patronage.

The first and second versions are in Eva's favor as both state that she stayed with members of the family upon her arrival. Openly confirming that Evita did in fact meet Magaldi, as he was the one "who introduced her to the theater critic Edmundo Guilbourg, a serious intellectual whose recollections (...) leave no ambiguity"¹³ Ortiz describes the most-likely scenario of Eva's departure as "the third, the one where Magaldi and his wife drove this poor young girl in her maroon pleated skirt and white blouse (...) or better yet, Magaldi gave her his address so that Evita could visit when

¹² Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. Eva Perón. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995. (p. 25-6)

¹³ Ibid, p. 26-7.

she arrived in Buenos Aires, and she took the train.”¹⁴ Moreover, the biographer continues to embrace Evita’s ambition as “she left behind a flat land and a flat existence. Of course, Buenos Aires is built on the same flatness. It just tries to trick us by erecting tall buildings like the thirty-three-floor Kavanagh, the highest building in all of Latin America. It was with the Kavanagh that Evita secretly identified herself in her heart. She would do whatever was necessary to rise higher than all the others.”¹⁵

Nevertheless, Evita did rise from her poor origins to become *High Flying, Adored* in Alan Parker’s tale. The apogee of this ascension is portrayed by Madonna’s Evita as she addresses her *descamisados* during the famous scene on the balcony of the Casa Rosada vocalizing *Don’t Cry For Me, Argentina* (*I had to let it happen, I had to change. Couldn’t stay all my life down at heel, looking out of the window...*). Following this act comes the lyrical materialization of her success, narrated in the voice of a Che who calls her “the instant queen” in *High Flying, Adored* (*What happens now, where do you go from here? Did you believe in your wildest moments all this would be yours, that you’d become the lady of them all?*).

The thematics in this production are indeed so visible that they could even be given fairy tale adaptations. Parker’s rags-to-riches is *à la* Cinderella, featuring plebeian Evita leaving Junín to attend ‘the ball’ in Buenos Aires (the means of transport is a train, of course, as the usage of a pumpkin-shaped carriage would be a too explicit *déjà-vu*) until she finally finds her prince, Juan Perón, and marries him (*My story’s quite usual, local girl makes good, weds famous man. I was slap in the right place at the perfect time. Filled a gap, I was lucky - but one thing I’ll say for me: No one*

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 27.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 27.

else can fill it like I can!). As this is a fairy tale placed in the twentieth century, the Cinderella in question couldn't help but become a *nouvelle riche* who rapidly hires a crew to look after her looks (*Christian Dior me from my head to my toes!*) and asks her prince to route her on a trip to Europe (*People of Europe, I send you the Rainbow of Argentina!*), the fashionable thing to do in the Argentina of the 1940's. During the abovementioned Casa Rosada scene, and many others where Madonna's Evita is featured speaking in public and/or appearing in a number of social functions, her three sisters (though they are not evil for they, too, rose from poverty in this version), the trio composed of mythical Erminda, Blanca and Elisa applaud her success with excitement from backstage.

Parker's second evident thematic in the movie, which I shall now discuss under the terms rise-and-fall, flows in a narrative reminiscent of Snow White, but Evita plays, in this instance, both the heroine (Snow White, of course) and the villain (the wicked witch). As Madonna's body lies in a glass casket and is mourned by Argentina at the sound of *Requiem for Evita*, the viewer is still under the impression that the form inside the transparent coffin is not that of a cadaver, but rather the one of a 'sleeping beauty' at rest slumbering patiently as she awaits for her prince to appear and awake her from an only seemingly-perpetual repose. However, this particular Snow White was under an enchantment which could not be broken, as she had poisoned her own apple with, of course, her voracious undying ambition and her ever-quenchless thirst for revenge against the oligarches who never accepted her. In this instance, Snow White Eva was also Eve: she sinned by biting the forbidden fruit, thus bringing forth the curse of uterine cancer.

This witch did not talk to a mirror, but she did want to be the fairest of all and destroy those who dared to oppose her. She did so without forgetting her origins and consistently speaking of

herself as “the actress” who “hasn’t learned the lines you’d like to hear” (*She won’t join your clubs, she won’t dance in your halls, she won’t help the hungry once a month at your tombolas - she’ll simply take control as you disappear!*). Parker’s Evita was persistent as she wrote her own success story and did it her way, with the interminable strength of a warrior even as she was stricken with an incurable disease (*I’m not that ill, bad moments come but they go. Some days are fine, some a little bit harder, but that doesn’t mean we should give up our dream. Have you ever seen me defeated? Don’t you forget what I’ve been through and yet I’m still standing!*). But she fell, betrayed by her own “little body slowly breaking down” (*Oh, what I’d give for a hundred years! But the physical interferes every day more, oh my Creator! What is the good of the strongest heart in a body that’s falling apart? A serious flaw, I hope You know that!*), a decline which commenced in a failed attempt to redemption: just as she was hearing mass in a church.

Evita’s thirst for revenge against the middle and upper classes can be observed within the identity politics of Argentinean society which condemned Juan Duarte’s youngest illegitimate daughter from the very moment she was baptized as Eva María Ibarguren¹⁶ and, consequently, Parker selected the ‘greatest trauma’ of Evita’s childhood as a point of departure for portraying and depicting the source of her river of vengeance, in both ‘her life’ and the movie: the funeral of her father. In *Evita*, this milestone is narrated visually in juxtaposition to Eva Perón’s own funeral in Buenos Aires with *Requiem* (the opening song) resounding in the background as the images shift from one event to another. The viewer is left astonished as the switch from the first lady’s monumental funeral in Buenos Aires, 1952, to the one of her father in Chivilcoy, 1926, occurs. The 1952 funeral portrays Evita’s second rise, in immortality (following her fall to cancer), as Argentina

¹⁶ Otelio Borroni and Roberto Vacca. La vida de Eva Perón. Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1970. (p. 14)

mourns her loss with tears, candles and flowers. The 1926 funeral depicts the source of her initial desire to rise - followed by the fall as a result of her own character flaw during the movie's unfolding - as a seven-year-old black-haired child is denied the opportunity of giving her father a last farewell by his real wife, Doña Estela Grisolia, and her three legitimate half-sisters.

Though it is believed that Estela Grisolia died in 1922¹⁷ (three years before her husband), the pilgrimage of Juan Duarte's illegitimate family to attend the funeral in Chivilcoy, as well as, of course, the excruciating rejection suffered by Doña Juana and her children, is still the most constant attribution to the formation of Eva's maniac enmity towards the classes who never accepted her. Therefore, despite the fact that the addition of Estela to the funeral in Chivilcoy is erroneous. Parker still managed to capture the significance of the event in 'Evita's life' as well as its importance in the formation of her 'character' upon two portrayals. The first is circumstantial, shown in society's cruel obstruction towards a child who wishes to mourn the loss of her father only as a result of the name she was denied at birth. The second is 'characteristic' of Evita, who (at even the young age of seven) was capable of defying this refusal by running madly, with tears of anger and hurt in her eyes, towards her father's coffin in order to give him a last kiss as the rest of her family stood at the church gate. This traumatic moment, according to *Evita*, propelled the young girl's hatred towards the upper classes and stayed with her throughout her life. Moreover, it is brought about in subsequent scenes, such as the one where Eva persuades Magaldi to take her to Buenos Aires and allow her to rise and, later, take revenge upon conquering Argentina's 'Big Apple' (*Screw the middle classes! I will never accept them! (...) My father's other family was middle class and we were kept out of sight, hidden from view at his funeral*).

¹⁷ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. *Eva Perón*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995. (p. 11)

The third and last evident thematic that I shall discuss in Parker's production, following Cinderella's rags-to-riches and Snow White/Wicked Witch's rise-and-fall, is one which is brought about directly out of Evita's deified ascent as she became immortal in addition to her original desire to rise: the motif of Robin Hood Evita, the princess of thieves. The Robin Hood in Parker's tale, as would be expected, is one that does justice to the character's ambition, one who takes from the rich to give to the poor only in order to justify her own actions. By portraying this side of Evita, Parker is once again giving his movie a universal moral while incorporating another common intermittent facet of Evitist mythology at the same time.

The legend embracing the Eva Perón Foundation (Evita's social work organization), as well as, of course, the 'true' intentions of its founder, can be placed under an entire mythological spectrum of its own. On one margin, Evita is the kindest soul of beneficence, working sixteen-hour days to help those who need her by listening patiently to their concerns and giving them hope, making generous donations ranging from cooking pots to shoes to sewing machines, and overseeing the opening of hospitals, shelters for the homeless, medical centers, clinics, etc. On the other margin, Evita is a deliberate thief who only gave a small, insignificant fraction of what she stole to the poor, kept absolutely no records of her charitable efforts, and shamelessly mismanaged funds as her Swiss bank account grew.

Legitimate sources have also continuously fed on Evita's Robin Hood myth. In its *The Most Intriguing People of the Century* special issue, for instance, *People Weekly* goes as far as claiming that Evita's social work was the sole (and essential) tool available to the "ruthless actress turned first lady" who "created a cult - and got rich - championing the poor." The magazine's passage on Evita, placed under the "Gone Too Soon" category, reads:

She was the bastard child of a rancher and his cook. But Eva Duarte, a vivacious actress, gained instant legitimacy by marrying then-Colonel Juan Perón and helping propel him to Argentina's presidency in 1946. He hogged the power. She got the glory, fighting for women and redistributing wealth to the poor. Together they also stocked a Swiss bank account. Their demagogic tango ended when Evita died of cancer. Supporters begged the Vatican to make her a saint. Opponents stole her body to frustrate cultists. Almost 25 years passed before she was laid to rest by Juan, safely buried under three layers of steel plate.¹⁸

Parker's movie, however, is more accurate than the account in *People* because it depicts Evita's glory prior to the introduction of the Robin Hood myth. In his version, the appearance of the princess of thieves only takes place after her trip to Europe in *Rainbow Tour*, therefore it precedes the peak of her ascension on the scene of the balcony of the Casa Rosada. As this last scene correctly illustrates, Evita was already a consecrated icon in Argentina as a result of her charismatic appeal and her notorious, celebrity-like style and, additionally, she proceeded to become one of the most famous women in the world due to the vast global media exposure, depicted by Parker in *Rainbow Tour*, immediately following.

The European tour in 1947 signified both the landmark of Evita's worldwide appeal and the consolidation of her success in Argentina, as the first lady finally touched the grounds of the Old World, an act which her country's culture sees as an absolute must and an emblem of triumph. Evita's expedition is captured in Parker's production in a similar manner that Perón's government did at the time it took place: one where the Lady of Hope, as she was called, amalgamated the determining bridge between the northeast and southwest extremes which the Atlantic Ocean divides. Upon returning from Europe, Evita adhered to her work with the masses as loyally as she did to the new hairstyle adopted in Europe: the practical chignon on the nape, which according to hairdresser

¹⁸ Eric Levin (editor). People Books: The Most Intriguing People of the Century. New York: Time Inc. Home Entertainment, 1997. (p. 140)

Julio Alcaraz was created so that Eva would have an impeccably kept hairdo from morning to evening “thanks to a hairpiece and a few hairpins.”¹⁹ In Parker’s tale, the birth of Robin Hood Evita occurs in the last scene where Madonna is depicted wearing her hair part-down under a hat and is confronted with representing “anyone’s cause but your own” by the character of Che Guevara. Upon replying that “everything done will be justified by my foundation,” Evita discards her frivolous image forever, along with her previous hairstyle, and immerses herself entirely into her charitable organization, La Fundación de Ayuda Social María Eva Duarte de Perón.

As *And The Money Kept Rolling In (And Out)* breaks out, Che Guevara narrates the operations of the dreams-coming-true factory created by Evita on June 19, 1948. On one side, the foundation became the temple where the *descamisados* came to adore their goddess of justice, who took from the rich to give to the poor and attended to their needs. On the other, Che elaborates on the deliberate mismanagement of funds by the founder and her husband’s party. Both myths were a direct product of this factory - two sides fogged into yet another cumulus in Evitist mythology.

As was argued previously in this essay, it is indeed unfair to expect that a production along the lines of Parker’s *Evita* be representative of a historical moment or persona. However, the collision of fact and fiction, myth and reality, verity and fables, could be seen as an integral approach to the depiction of Argentina and its many legends, especially where the Peróns are concerned. In essence, the country’s historiography works in a manner similar to Lavoisier’s scientific principle whereby nothing is lost, everything is transformed. Therefore, Parker’s film is actually quite effective in capturing certain aspects of the discourses encompassing Evita although it could be argued, paradoxically, that the production is filled with historical errors. This assertion, however,

¹⁹ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. *Eva Perón*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995. (p. 207)

should not be applicable to *Evita* because a 'source of information' of this nature - a Hollywood fictional megaproduction based on true facts - cannot be expected, and evidently was not intended to, historicize.

As long as the images in this production are perceived as discourses and are **not** taken *après la lettre* in the dimension of 'facts,' they do no damage and are rather quite useful in penetrating some of the clouds in Evitist mythological sky. Conclusively, the 'history' contained therein should be regarded only in the same manner that Argentineans viewed Evita during her childhood: as illegitimate.

Though the three major thematics argued previously in this essay were probably constructed in order to give *Evita* a widespread appeal, they originated, nevertheless, out of the discursive residue surrounding the name and body of the once single and singular Eva Perón. Therefore, Parker's illegitimate portrayal of the first lady is quite useful in depicting some of the enduring narratives that encompass Evita. For instance, the movie snatches one of the most common jokes repeated by an entire generation of Argentineans during the Peronist regime:

Eva takes the elevator with a retired general. The elevator boy looks at her out of the corner of his eye and whispers under his breath, "Whore!" When Eva gets off the elevator, she complains to the general, who responds, "Pay no attention. It's been ten years since I retired, and they still call me a general."²⁰

Again, nothing is lost; the joke is transformed as it is transposed to the big screen but, nonetheless, its essence remains. When Madonna's Evita complains about a similar comment made during her visit to Italy in her European tour to a retired admiral (*Did you hear that? They called me a whore! They actually called me a whore!*), he replies with an answer comparable to that of the general's in

²⁰ Ibid, p. 160.

the abovementioned joke (*But Signora Perón, it's an easy mistake - I'm still called an admiral, yet I gave up the sea long ago!*).

Needless to say, Alan Parker was certainly aware of the difficulty that exists in attempting to infiltrate the hazes in the myth of *Evita*, claiming that the "one-line synopsis of her rags-to-riches story and tragic early death is not just the stuff of musical theater or the Hollywood dream machine, but also has resonance in the classic operas from *Tristan und Isolde* to *La Bohème*."²¹ The director offers a brief account of the challenge he undertook in defying the impossibility to "accurately describe a woman whose image has been used by both left-wing guerrillas and right-wing extremists," in a coffee-table book entitled *The Making of Evita*, which carries an introduction by Madonna and consists mostly of snapshots of the production taken by the crew's unit photographer David Appleby.²² This book illustrates the entire trajectory of the making of the film, from the fifteen-year saga of the merry-go-round celebrity and director shifts to the crew's struggle during the heat of Buenos Aires and the cold of Budapest during the shooting of the movie. But this publication - which sold for forty dollars in its hardcover edition - is but another exemplification of the commercial trend in the milestone that Parker's *Evita* became. The consummation of Hollywood's most ambitious and expensive musical to date, which put a final period to a virtually two-decade endeavor to give the Broadway musical its big screen adaptation, came in a package of three: the movie, of course, the abovementioned coffee-table book, and Madonna's double-CD, which sprang to sixth position in *Billboard* magazine's ranking the very week it was launched.

Parker's movie contributed to making millions of Evas - and dollars - at the same time.

²¹ Alan Parker. *The Making of Evita*. New York: Collins Publishers, 1996. (p. 13)

²² Ibid, p. 11.

BUT WHO IS THE NEW WORLD MADONNA AFTER ALL?

The revised lyrics for Rainbow Tour adapted for Alan Parker's *Evita* show clear competition between two blonds with ambition for the gift of Midas: in the 1970s, Broadway described *Evita* as "the New World Madonna with the golden touch." Notwithstanding, in the 1990s, Madonna usurped *Evita*'s saintly-profane title as she changed the first lady to "our lady of the New World with the golden touch." To whom do the lines belong, Madonna or Eva Perón?

Even at a first glance, it is easy to speculate on how Madonna could have identified herself with 'Evita' and, additionally, how the singer's portrayal of the first lady was a somewhat strategic move in her career. For over a decade and a half, Madonna has been reigning as queen of pop industry's chameleon-like tendencies (Michael Jackson, of course, would be the king governing by her side), having portrayed and explored virtually every feminine personality imaginable during her career. For the past 15 years, we have seen Madonna shifting from the incarnation of a virginal and/or material girl in the 1980s, with some Marilyn Monroe in between, to the depiction of a sadomasochistic dominatrix in the early 1990s. As her career swung heavily up and down, causing tremendous scandal in the interim (from the public to the Pope...), it is simple to understand Madonna's claim that *Evita* was her spiritual sister as she declares that "it's comforting to know that I'm not the only person the press picks on."²³ But Madonna, nonetheless, is famous for sympathizing with the pain of Latin American women tortured by evil husbands and/or sickness: the story of the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (and her love affair with Diego Rivera), who, like *Evita*, suffered a slow and painful death, has also been a favorite of the pop star's.

²³ Richard Zoglin. "Mad for *Evita*." *Time*, January 20, 1997. (p. 41)

But what are the similarities if any, between the two New World Madonnas of the century? Going back to the gushing fountain of 'Evitist' myths, it is astonishing to notice, at first glance, a direct parallel between Madonna and Evita from the very first moment of their conception. As I've mentioned previously, young Eva María Ibarguren was born the fifth youngest illegitimate child of Juana Ibarguren and Juan Duarte²⁴ in Los Toldos, a small village in the province of Buenos Aires in 1919. Years later, in 1954, little Madonna Louisa Ciccone was born, one of nine children, in Bay City, Michigan. The two girls have shared a childhood trauma: Evita lost her father at age six, Madonna lost her mother at age five.

During adolescence, Evita and Madonna lived by dreaming and desperately desiring careers in show business, the former as an actress like Norma Shearer, her idol, in the role of Marie Antoinette; the latter as a dancer and performer. Both were equally brave in their escapes to the Big Apple: Evita, at age 15, fled to Buenos Aires, the Paris of Latin America. Madonna, at age 17, arrived in New York City asking a cab driver, it is said, to take her where the action was - only to be dropped off at Times Square, despondent. Amidst the many legends that encompass the pop icon's arrival in the North American Big Apple (equal in magnitude to the ones which surround Evita's, as mentioned previously), legend has it that eating out of garbage cans and posing in the nude were among some of Madonna's attempts to survive.

It was an American dream which took a decade, but they made it. In the mid-1930s, Evita was a small-time radio announcer, but on December 10, 1945 she married Juan Domingo Perón and by 1947 was greeting the Pope at the Vatican as first lady of Argentina. Likewise, the unheard-of,

²⁴ It is curious to notice the recurrence of Johns in Evita's life: her father and brother were *Juan Duarte*, her husband was *Juan Domingo Perón*, and her mother, finally, was *Juana Ibarguren*. Evita was registered as *Eva María*, carrying both instances of Mary in her name, *Mary Magdalene* and/or the *Virgin Mary*, in a life of *Juanes*.

anonymous Madonna of the mid-1970s became the world's most famous 'material girl' by 1985. And within these two remarkable success stories came a legion of devoted (and fanatic) followers: Evita was the mother of the *descamisados* who adored her at the temple of the Eva Perón Foundation; Madonna is the sole proprietor of *Maverick*, a millionaire corporation dedicated to maintaining her worldwide celebration.

The massive throng of fans in the case of both women stems from another aspect they have in common: their tremendous facility and aptitude to correlate with the yearning and fantasies of their public. Curiously, both incorporated religion into their image, and both Catholics practiced what they preached. Madonna, *like a prayer*, wore crucifixes and shocked the world as she advocated freedom of expression and included sadomasochistic and masturbatory acts when she performed on stage. Evita, like an enshrined follower of Christ, was not afraid of kissing lepers and kept Father Hernán Benítez, her confessor, by her side as she worked with the poor.

But the main affinity between these two legendary populists lies in, undoubtedly, their ability to adapt and change their images, inventing and reinventing themselves, in a manner which only increased their fame, very effectively so. As I've mentioned before, Madonna has been the chameleon of pop industry throughout her career, and 'her life as Evita' has been her most recent adaptation of her image. As for Evita herself, she was the primordial example of feminism (though she could have been ignorant of what the ideology signified) as she played the role of the 'ideal' women, in the hegemonic patriarchal society of Argentina in the 1940s and 50s, to perfection. The first lady created herself, in this instance, by playing a distinctive political position: acting as the bridge of love between her husband and her people. She reinforced the bond between the masses and their leader through her fervent declarations of love/idolatry towards her husband, and did so

with intensity and flair.²⁵ As a result, Juan Domingo Perón came to be regarded (by Peronists, of course) as the perfect and ideal leader on two levels. First, the people admired Perón for being what Evita claimed he was, as well as for being worthy of having such a wife by his side. The second concerns the people's projected desires towards Eva Perón, envisioning her as the ideal wife: men desired to have her, women desired to take after her. In this instance, Evita existed as a function of her husband. Evita's intelligence and ability to invent herself lies in the fact that, of course, this existence was on a mutual basis and she was attentively aware of that. Perón could not have existed, in this manner, without having Evita by his side as the vehicle which brought him closer to the masses. The powerful duo of Argentina was co-existent; the leader needed her just as much as Evita needed him. It was an electric partnership.

In this illustration of Evita's ability to invent herself lies, however, the principal dissimilarity between the first lady and Madonna. Had it not been for Perón, Evita would not have accomplished her conquest. Evita created her space within the political grounds of her husband's party, with his blessing and support. Madonna, on the other hand, conducted herself entirely on her own throughout her career.

Here lies Madonna's main difficulty. Unlike her spiritual sister who died at 33 and will be remembered by her people as a political woman who changed the course of her country's history, Madonna, as an entertainer, is perpetually condemned to reinventing herself.

²⁵ Following *Don't Cry For Me, Argentina*, Madonna's Evita delivers the following speech from the balcony of the Casa Rosada when the crowd wildly calls her name as if asking for an *encore*: "I am only a simple woman who lives to serve Perón in his noble crusade to rescue his people! I was once as you are now! I have taken these riches from the oligarches only for you, for all of you! One day will inherit these treasures! ¡Descamisados! ¡Mis compañeros! When they fire those cannons, when the crowds sing of glory, it is not just for Perón, but for all of us! All of us!" This is considered one of the most exciting moments in both the movie and the original Broadway play, as well as representative of the original scenario.

In conclusion, *Time*'s critic Richard Corliss points out another difference between the two which could be noted according to a given interpretation of *Evita*'s lyrics. Of Madonna's performance of the song *Buenos Aires*, Corliss says that, "when [the character of] Eva spits out the line 'shoot up with your blood, warm me up with your nights, watch me coming,' the last three words could be Madonna's motto for the past 15 years: an invitation to voyeurism, an expression of orgasm."²⁶ With this reading, the lines are, undoubtedly, Madonna's.

JUST A LITTLE TOUCH OF STAR QUALITY

Throughout the production of Alan Parker's *Evita*, Madonna's reinventions of herself as a well-behaved, hard-working actress²⁷ was seen from a different angle as she was also soon to be the mother of little Lourdes María. But the star, nevertheless, did not fall short in the provision of numerous accounts to parallel *Evita*'s struggle to her own, not only during her career and life but also during the production of the movie. In the introduction she provided to Parker's *The Making of Evita*, Madonna speaks of the publication as being "not just a picture book, a collection of photographs taken on the set of a movie" but rather as "a testament of blood, sweat, and tears that were shed by many to make this film a reality." Madonna makes a brief description of her struggle, along with the crew's, from working in countries wherein were not welcome to watching while angry slogans were painted on walls telling them to 'Get Out!' Using her customary vulgarity during such instances, she described how "we pissed off presidents and bishops and probably a few executives

²⁶ Richard Corliss. "Evitas Past and Present." *Time*, January 20, 1997. (p. 45)

²⁷ Parker repeatedly spoke of a very professional Madonna, and the actress described her vigorous working routine during the making of *Evita* in her private diaries published by *Vanity Fair* herself.

as well."²⁸ She then elaborates on how, at night, they crawled into bed "wondering if there was ever going to be an end to the madness and at one time or another we all wanted to quit. But we didn't." What saved them, then? As expected, Madonna offers the help of her spiritual sister from the heavens: "Was it Evita herself who crept into our dreams at night and cast a magic spell on all of us?"²⁹

The November 1996 issue of *Vanity Fair* featured Madonna on the cover and a headline reading "The Madonna Diaries: Her baby, her life as Evita, her dreams and heartache." The cover's picture shows Madonna wearing an *haute couture* black fur coat and hat, blond hair in a chignon, black contact lenses in a nearly impeccable visual reproduction of Eva Perón. The feature contains, along with the star's diaries during the making of *Evita*, a ten-page portfolio of her wardrobe for the movie.³⁰ Madonna begins:

This is a diary of sorts: a sketchbook of feelings, ideas, and dreams, all relating to one subject - the making of *Evita*. By the time this movie comes out, I will have been living vicariously through her for two years. I remember sitting down during Christmas of '94 and writing an impassioned letter to the director, Alan Parker, listing the reasons why I was the only one who could portray her, explaining that only I could understand her passion and her pain. I can honestly say that I did not write this letter of my free will. It was as if some other force drove my hand across the page.³¹

In this paragraph, Madonna grasps essential elements in her treatise of Evita's personality (her intensity, her emotion, her grief, and, of course, the recurrent apparition of her spirit) and writer Abel Posse was generous in attributing to her "the transmission of the fundamental Evita: pain,

²⁸ Alan Parker (intro. by Madonna). The Making of Evita. New York: Collins Publishers, 1996. (p. 7)

²⁹ Ibid, p. 7.

³⁰ Madonna. "Madonna's Private Diaries." *Vanity Fair*, November 1996. (p. 174)

³¹ Ibid, p. 7.

passion, anger, courage, love” in a critique of her performance in the movie.³² However, the North American press was much more eager to speak of her fantastical wardrobe as the covers of *People* and *Vogue* featured, like *Vanity Fair*, Madonna’s flawlessly constructed ‘Evita look’ with praise in their October of 1996 issues (the headline in *Vogue* reads “Madonna’s moment as Evita, mother, and fashion force”).

Parker is not short of words in describing the 5,500 costumes from 20 different costume houses in London, Rome, Paris, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, and Budapest used in the production. As for Madonna’s wardrobe, he delineates its 85 changes, 39 hats, 45 pairs of shoes and 56 pairs of earrings (almost all items created in London) along with, of course Martin Samuel’s (the chief hairstylist) formulation of 42 different hair designs for Madonna.³³

In a number of succeeding instances, the shooting of *Evita* saw its main protagonist continuing to draw a direct ocular parallel to that of the character she interpreted throughout the course of 1996. But though the star’s attire visually “switched to pastel colors, soft makeup and a demure, Catholic-schoolgirl hairstyle,”³⁴ and Madonna claimed, furthermore, that she only put on the ‘Evita look’ for the film’s Hollywood premiere. “You are not going to see me with my hair up in a chignon, wearing padded shoulders and a nipped-in-the-waist suit every day, that’s for sure,”³⁵ she told her public. On visual grounds, Madonna mirrored Evita in near-perfect reflections, in both her life and in the movie.

³² Abel Posse. “El estruendoso retorno de Eva.” *La Nación*. Buenos Aires, February 14, 1997. (p. 17)

³³ Alan Parker. *The Making of Evita*. New York: Collins Publishers, 1996. (p. 23)

³⁴ Richard Zoglin. “Mad for Evita.” *Time*, January 20, 1997. (p. 42)

³⁵ Ibid, p. 42.

One could, therefore, conclude that Madonna continued to be Madonna for she was much more interested in portraying a visual and superficial interpretation of the first lady, especially as this was the sole instant she received unanimous praise from the press.

As Madonna featured in an avalanche of publicity surrounding her 'Evita look' in 1996, the New York Times referred to the 'original Evita' as, undoubtedly, a woman who knew how to dress.³⁶ As a result, an entire fashion trend can be traced along the period of the movie's anticipation, following, of course, the style of Madame Perón and the fad initiated by Madonna. Bloomingdale's nine boutiques, for instance, exhibited part of Madonna's wardrobe in their windows during the Christmas season of 1996, prior to the movie's upcoming première. A line of make-up and a scent in vaporisateur d'après Evita were created as well.

During the month of December, Bloomingdale's also held exclusive rights for the sale of Carolee pearl necklaces that replicated Evita's originals worn by Madonna in the movie (rights which were later shared with other New York shops as Saks, Marshall Field's, and Neiman Marcus). Madonna's footwear came from Ferragamo, the same designer who adorned Evita's feet. As expected following Salvatore Ferragamo's (the company's founder, in the times of Evita) tradition, an entire line of shoes reproducing the style of Señora Perón was created. The recurrence of Evita also occurred, of course, in hairdressing and styling as a variety of techniques to imitate and reproduce the first lady's famous chignon was developed. And if this weren't enough, New York's MMA exhibited Christian Dior's 'New Look' style in both jewelry and fashion (considered by many the antithesis of sexy attire) which followed the tradition of his most famous client, Eva Perón, in the 1940s and 1950s.

³⁶ Jorge Elias. "Abanderada del merchandising" in La Nación. Buenos Aires: December 13, 1996. (p. 5)

THE RECEPTION OF PARKER'S LADY OF HOPE

Images of Evita continued to resound throughout the entire production as well as during the period that preceded and followed its conception. Parker's *Evita* came in millions of different molds outside the movie, the book, and the CD, in transfigurations ranging from a line of makeup to the creation of a boutique at Bloomingdale's to the filling of Barnes and Nobles' windows with Evita literature. This was due to, certainly, the profuse and prolonged publicity campaign that accompanied the saga of the movie's production as well as, of course, the ceaseless summoning of the never-departing evocation of Eva Perón. Hollywood's *Evita* alone accounts for an entire transformation of successive myths surrounding the name and body of the Argentinean first lady. Moreover, its production brought about an entire battle of different ammunition during the Evita media war as well.

Regardless, Parker's film was not well-received by Argentina's critics as a result of the movie's construction of Evita's character and by the director's carelessness in its production. For instance, as she reprimands a historically and culturally erroneous production jam-packed with misinterpretations, journalist/biographer Alicia Dujovne Ortiz writes, in a critique for *La Nación* entitled "Una película caníbal" ("A cannibal movie"),³⁷ that the dissimilarities between Madonna and Evita go right down to the different lunar shape of these women's lips. This distinction is very evident upon looking at the mouth of each face as it appears in the first lady's official portrait: Evita's point upwards, Madonna's downwards. Ortiz explains that the lips above are those which portray the smile of the true Evita, the lips below are incapable of reflecting the 'innocent' look. The

³⁷ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. "Una película caníbal." *La Nación*. Buenos Aires: February 14, 1997. (p. 17)

critic then poses the rhetorical question: "To which hemisphere do they belong?" This, certainly, offers speculation in the differences regarding the way Evita was portrayed between two different cultures (and two different languages) divided by the Equator. Ortiz points out Madonna's interpretation is a question of (lack of) perception: a moon is seen as waning or crescent according to the hemisphere (north or south) from which it is seen.³⁸ But isn't a true smile, in any case, one that points upwards? Is the North American Evita upset at her interpretation and portrayal of the South American one? Or one could say, perhaps, that the two New World Madonnas are simply reflecting each other - but is the pop star scowling at the South, and is the first lady smirking at the North?

PERONIST PRINCEHOOD

Also in 1996, Argentina's film industry retaliated to the Hollywood interpretation of Eva Perón by coming up with their own cinematographic version of her life. This time around, director Juan Carlos Desanzo stayed away from bubble-gumish ballads or a Che Guevara as omnipresent narrator in what was intended to have been a much more 'serious' and historically accurate chronicle.

In this instance, Argentina's Esther Goris played the role of a warrior Evita, who fought perpetually through life from the moment she was born as an illegitimate child to the moment she died surrendering to uterine cancer. She was most successful in that role and was acclaimed by the critics, but her co-protagonist, Victor Laplace, was perceived as a dubious Juan Domingo Perón who

³⁸ Ibid, p. 17

actually cried as he sat by his wife's deathbed. This was also a mistake of the Parker version, which shows Jonathan Pryce's Juan carrying a moribund Evita up a flight of stairs in his arms. Rumor has it that General Perón would go days without checking in on his sick wife. In a testimony to biographer Ortiz, former Minister of Culture Castiñeira de Dios acknowledges that "Perón loved Evita, but less than she loved him. He was more distant. While she was in agony, he smoked and talked in the hallway, impassive."³⁹ But Ortiz explains that Evita had moved to a room far enough way from her husband during her illness so that she wouldn't disturb him, as Perón "could not tolerate her screams or her smell. Uterine cancer, in its terminal phase, emits a terrible odor, and a doctor can detect the illness from the moment he or she enters the patient's room."⁴⁰ Others have actually said that Perón feared that uterine cancer, coincidentally the same disease which killed his first wife Aurelia Tizón, was contagious.

Though Desanzo's attempt is to depict a more 'soberly accurate' version of his country's most celebrated first lady, his production is nevertheless a 'docudrama' and should still be regarded in the same manner suggested by Parker's *Evita*. This is so because his craftsmanship of Eva Perón is, like Parker's, yet another blend of fact and fiction which stems from the colloquial vernacular of Evitist allegory. Both directors' portrayal of a romantically heart-rending Juan Perón, for instance, could be considered commonsensically 'wrong' as a result of the discourse which speaks and instructs his harsh military background and origins. Moreover, numerous testimonial affidavits (in addition to the abovementioned) have actually 'confirmed' the austerity expected from this colonel. However, both the sources and the discourses through which they speak only serve to

³⁹ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. *Eva Perón*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995. (p.277)

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 273.

substantiate and authenticate this 'fact' on the surface. The 'real' relationship between Juan and Eva, the 'man' and the 'woman,' is lastingly forfeited in the murkiness and can only be recaptured as it is rewritten.

Parker and Desanzo chose to narrate them as prince and princess in a fairy tale adaptation, a valid version in fictional terms. Nonetheless, Parker's *Evita* does manage to explain a particular facet regarding the intimate relationship between Argentina's most celebrated couple, a question mark that public discourse loves to pose regarding Juan and Evita: Did she really love him? Did he really love her? Or were they just using each other? There is enough room to admit, in this instance, that the couple's relationship consisted of an 'electric partnership' where, together, they gave each other power as they conquered the Big Apple. Eva and Che explain, in *Evita*, that it is only natural that lovers advocate and promote each other within their ambition (lyrics they sing in unison: *There is no one, no one at all, never has been and never will be a lover - male or female - who hasn't an eye on, in fact they rely on, tricks they can try on their partner. They're hoping their lover will help them or keep them, support them, promote them - don't blame them, you're the same!*).

Leaving the issue of love to one side, there is no question that, without Perón, Evita would have remained an overpaid actress with a bad reputation and, on the other hand, the President of Argentina would not have established the kind of relationship he had with his people, one of adoration, without his wife. Evita claimed, in her speeches, that she was nothing without Perón and, in so doing, she made herself heard while giving her husband the popularity he needed. By helping him she was helping herself, and the same applies for her husband. Whether they loved each other (for that or on its own) or not would therefore depend on one's definition and conception of love and, according to *Evita*, the Peróns were indeed *surprisingly good for* each other. Maybe they had no

choice but to fall in love, conquering themselves first and then, together, conquering Argentina. If the word *love* connotes devotion, admiration, affinity, and attachment on one hand, and alliance, affiliation, and merger on the other, then the term could certainly be applicable to the electric partnership of Juan and Eva Perón. Therefore, the term's connotations of passion, romance, and emotion could only naturally be regarded as essential elements to append to the tales of Parker and Desanzo.

ILLEGITIMACY LEGITIMATED IN FILM

Roland Barthes writes that "the press undertakes every day to demonstrate that the store of mythical signifiers is inexhaustible,"⁴¹ and the year of 1996 continued to provide Evitist myths in a more 'accurate' format than the motion picture: the documentary film. Out of the dozens of films which recently took arms in this type of genre to 'tell' the story of Evita, one stands out in particular as a result of the gargantuan budget allocated to research and production in its attempt to tell the legends of her life.

Provided by A&E Television Networks under the authorship and production by Deirdre O'Hearn, the documentary attempts, once again, to unveil "one of the most controversial figures in history" in a 50-minute televisual biography entitled *Evita: The Woman Behind the Myth*.⁴² Throughout its depiction of rare photographs and films, juxtaposed with first-hand accounts from valuable sources ranging from historians and biographers to friends and enemies, the documentary's narrative river flows in two different courses: in one, Evita is a graven image, the Jehovah of the

⁴¹ Roland Barthes. Mythologies. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972 [1957]. (p. 127)

⁴² Deirdre O'Hearn. Evita: The Woman Behind the Myth. New York: A&E Television Network, 1996.

working poor; in the other, of course, she is the symbol of candid ambition and the crest of opportunism. Both streams, nevertheless, depart from the only source regarding Evita certain to exist: her legend.

Because the technical format of documentary film is regarded in a somewhat *Treason of Images* Magritte-like manner ("Ceci n'est pas une pipe" but rather the representation of one), the approach towards interpreting the portrayals of Eva Perón in this genre cannot function in a manner similar to that used on Alan Parker's *Evita*. This is so because, in this instance, 'Evita' is no longer a fictional character interpreted by a movie star but, rather, she is a 'real' woman whose 'biography' can actually be 'written'. Unlike Parker's and Desanzo's motion picture *Evitas*, A&E attempts in this instance to historicize and register the legend of Eva Perón, and actually aspires to achieve the unfeasible task of unveiling the 'real woman who lies behind the myth,' as the production's subtitle suggests. As a result, A&E's audio-visual biography should be viewed in the same lens of the microscope used to 'read' the literary ones, such as the publications which carry the pen of Marysa Navarro (a biographer and featured speaker in O'Hearn's production) and Alicia Dujovne Ortiz.

This is where the problem lies. A&E's home video 'biography' of Evita was evidently produced as a direct result of the continuous recurrence of Eva Perón's name throughout the extensive and far-reaching media blitz that encompassed the making and launching of Parker's movie. Therefore, it is not difficult to visualize the interest that emerged in 'the real Evita' as a result of Madonna's constant evocations of the subject she was interpreting, especially as the pop icon claimed to identify herself with the first lady she was dramatizing for Hollywood through constant repetitive declarations of the 'I did not *play* Evita, I *was* Evita' nature. As a result, the discourses which speak through the 'authorship' of both productions - Parker's and O'Hearn's - can

be directly paralleled to each other: both invoke her humble origins and illegitimate childhood, her opportunist prostitute-like ascension by deliberately using men in order to rise (in both performative and political grounds), her adoration by the masses as well as their 'crying' during her sickness and death, her seductive, charismatic appeal as a rhetorician, her Robin Hood-type social work, the rejection she suffered from the middle and upper classes, etc. These discursive parallels therefore indicate that the A&E biography was produced in order to give Madonna's Evita the 'personality' she 'really had.'

However, serious errors in A&E's *Evita: The Woman Behind the Myth* are noted in its inaccurate portrayal of Evita's visual image. According to O'Hearn (a version depicted by Parker, but not Desanzo), Evita was already blonde when she first met her future husband and this is, clearly, a biographical error which does not occur in the versions of Navarro and Ortiz, for instance. Ortiz, for example, makes a point of explaining that this transformation was essential in the paramount creation and self-creation of (the myth of) Evita claiming that first, her blondness was a sign of wealth and social ascent and, second, that this transformation became a virtual halo which Peronist propaganda would later evoke.⁴³ In addition, both Ortiz and Navarro elaborate on her husband's own memoirs, those of a man who casually overlooks peculiarities, as Juan himself later described Evita's hair on the day that they met as "a long blond mane that fell over her shoulders."⁴⁴ Of course, if this were Juan Domingo Perón's 'biography in film' idiosyncrasies of this sort would not be mentioned and, certainly, they would not be an issue. However, in the case of Evita, the presence of such details have profound significance in explaining how she came to create her own myth and cannot be

⁴³ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. *Eva Perón*. (p. 79)

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 58.

neglected, let alone appear incorrectly.

The genesis began in the first part of 1945, when she was still Evita Duarte, Perón's mistress who obtained leading roles in her acting career only as a result of their engagement. Her first transformation was on visual grounds, in two instances. The first is depicted in Evita's own demand to her personal fashion designer, Paco Jamandreu: "Do not think of me as your other clients," she told him, "as from now on, I will have a dual personality. On the one side, I am the actress to whom you can furnish poufs, lamé, feathers, sequins. On the other, I am what the Big Shot [referring to Juan Perón] wants me to be, a political figure."⁴⁵ Jamandreu's answer to Evita's demand was a double-breasted houndstooth suit with a velvet collar which she wore upon accompanying Perón to a May 1 demonstration and which, later, became her authenticated vestment, the one which would later signify the 'Evita look.' Her second transformation featured a month later, in publicity photos for *Antena* magazine, highlighting another approaching token of Evita: her newly acquired cherubic blond hair. Created by her personal hairdresser, Julio Alcaraz (who later fashioned the famous chignon in Evita's definitive transformation), the golden locks converted the fair brunette into an angel, imitating the effect of halos and backgrounds of divine paintings of the Middle Ages with the theatrical and symbolic effect of its artificiality.⁴⁶

Another major flaw is visible in the production's treatment of the October 17, 1945 labor movement. Though the documentary (correctly) denies her participation in the most important event in Peronism (wherein labor leaders organized the Buenos Aires working class to protest Juan Perón's jailing by military and civilian foes) it fails to elaborate on its significance in Evita's life, as well as

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 82.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 79.

differences between the two hemispheres in depicting an 'historical' leader. According to Broadway and Hollywood in the song *A New Argentina*, Evita was the heroine who mobilized the *descamisados* in order to rescue their leader. But Evita herself has denied having led the movement in her first autobiography, *La razón de mi vida*,⁴⁷ claiming that this was only a legitimate action of the people's desire (whose cause, of course, she defended and identified with) to free their leader. Indeed, they saved him - but her image was recurrent as well. The masses cried a chauvinistic little rhyme, "*¡Oligarcas a otra parte / Viva el macho de Eva Duarte!*" ("Oligarches, stay away / Long live Eva Duarte's mate!") as they took to the streets, Evita was "already becoming a necessary element in Peronist ritual" from that moment on.

Notwithstanding, the October 17 action adds crucial elements to the myth of Evita's influence upon the leader as well as her own self-creation. In terms of her influence, for instance, in a dialogue between Perón and his mistress during his imprisonment in Parker's *Evita*, the reply given by Madonna to Jonathan Pryce's proposition is one that is typical of one side of anti-Peronist discourse (EVA - *Don't think I don't think like you, I often get those nightmares too (...) Don't close doors, keep an escape clause, because we might lose the Big Apple! But what I have done - what I did - if I hadn't thought, if I hadn't known we would take the country?*). This reversal of gender roles between the leaders, where Perón is depicted in his fragile, flimsy, weak, fearful, brittle femininity while Evita, in her strong, intrepid, sturdy, dauntlessly-domineering masculinity, is a

⁴⁷ It is a known fact that the first lady's autobiography, *La razón de mi vida* ("My mission in life"), was written by Manuel Penella da Silva and corrected by Raul Mende. The book has been republished, along with *Mi mensaje* ("My message") and a selection of public speeches, in one volume in October of 1996 by Buenos Aires's Planeta Argentina. The Argentinean edition includes a prologue by Marysa Navarro and the North American version contains a foreword by Joseph Page, author of Perón's most respected biography.

favorite of anti-Peronist vernacular. As the essayist Ezequiel Martínez Estrada straightforwardly puts it, "in reality, he was the woman and she was the man."⁴⁸ Moreover, some hardcore anti-Peronists were not satisfied with the idea of Evita Duarte, nothing but a small-time actress with a dubious past, being capable of persuading her weak and cowardly lover to take power - a foolishly ludicrous assertion, they say, for 'women are not supposed to be indomitable.' Some Peronists, on the other hand, are not satisfied with the idea that Evita could have convinced their leader (who, it is said, desired to flee politics forever, marry his girlfriend and take off to Patagonia, his native land in the south of Argentina) to remain in the cause.

While illustrating Hillary Clinton's (alleged) 'influence' upon her husband, Pierre St-Amand explains that

It is as if an all-out ban targeting women had been declared: a ban on female influence. The wife's influence upon the husband is considered an attack upon the male's integrity and autonomy, his very "essence."⁴⁹

Visibly, in the case of Evita it was worse, for at the time of the events of October 17, not only was she *not* Perón's wife, she was his mistress. It is interesting to observe, in this instance, that two political sides in opposition (Peronists and anti-Peronists) come together in this consensus: Evita, in her condition of woman (an actress and a lover to make matters worse), could not have influenced Juan Perón in his decision to remain in politics and, moreover, she certainly could not have had the power to mobilize the masses in coming to his rescue. The October 17 event portrays the creation of 'the woman with the whip' and cannot be dismissed in any attempt to 'historicize' the first lady - a serious, unacceptable flaw in A&E's production, one which cannot be dismissed so carelessly.

⁴⁸ Ezequiel Martínez Estrada. *¿Qué es esto?* Buenos Aires: Ed. Lautaro, 1956. (p. 241)

⁴⁹ Pierre St-Amand. "Terrorizing Marie Antoinette," *Critical Inquiry* 20:3 (Spring 1994)

In terms of the myth of love between the Peronist couple, moreover, Marysa Navarro explains that the four days of Perón's imprisonment prior to the October 17, 1945 event serve to leave no doubt of the profound engagement which united Evita with Perón. According to the biographer, if her relationship with the colonel were one of convenience, his imprisonment would have been the ideal moment for Evita to leave him, for he would be no longer of any use to her. On Perón's end, moreover, this, too, would have been the ideal moment for him to leave her - but instead, he showed tremendous concern for her well-being, her health, her tranquility, and her future.⁵⁰ In this instance, Evita felt how much he cared about her. Two months later, after his release, on December 10, 1945, they were married.

Evita's creation was complete at this point, and the A&E's *Evita: The Woman Behind the Myth* fails to elaborate and clarify this. She was now legitimized, for the first time in her life, as María Eva Duarte de Perón, the wife of Juan Domingo Perón, candidate in the 1946 presidential elections. And, from that moment on, she would show her eternal gratitude and devotion to her husband and, of course, her people who rescued him and, in doing so, rescued her.

Evita Duarte came full circle to becoming Eva Perón during the year of 1945; this is also how the first lady herself later chose to tell the tale in *La razón de mi vida* in 1951. A&E's televisual biography, in another instance, makes absolutely no reference to either one of the publications which carry the name of Eva Perón beside the title - be it *La razón de mi vida* or *Mi mensaje*, her autobiographies - nor does it clarify, of course, how the composition of these works were brought about. Another parallel to the 'personality' of Alan Parker's Evita: at no point in the movie does Madonna hold a pen in her hand.

⁵⁰ Marysa Navarro. *Evita*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 1994. (p. 126)

AS SOON AS THE SMOKE FROM THE FUNERAL CLEARS

Walter Benjamin compares the occurrence in rhythms of the transformation of epic forms to “those of the change that has come over the earth’s surface in the course of thousands of centuries.”⁵¹ If we were to take a single event which would mark the beginnings of the *Evita* epic we would choose, undoubtedly, her funeral. Alan Parker, following the original Broadway script which took the pens of Andrew Lloyd Webber in score and Tim Rice in lyrics, it seems, would too; both the Hollywood and Broadway versions narrate the epic of her life by taking this remarkable event as a point of departure.

The script of Broadway’s *Evita* commences with the interruption of “a less than distinguished movie”⁵² in a cinema in Buenos Aires on July 26, 1952, the date of her death, as the secretary of the press is given “the sad duty of informing the people of Argentina that Eva Perón, Spiritual Leader of the Nation, entered immortality at 20:25 hours today.” As the spectators in this cinema break down in tears, the sound of *Requiem for Evita* is introduced along with images of her funeral; mourners sobbing sorrowfully while the coffin is led through the avenues of Buenos Aires. Meanwhile, however, the spectators of the actual Hollywood and Broadway productions are left wondering, with Che Guevara, the reasons behind this permanent sadness (*Why all this howling hysterical sorrow? What kind of goddess has lived among us? How will we ever get by without her?*). They are denied a decent explanation, in that instant and for the rest of the production.

⁵¹ Walter Benjamin. “The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken, 1968. (p. 88)

⁵² In both the original London and New York productions of *Evita*, a clip from one of Evita Duarte’s own movies (*La Cabalgata del Circo*) was used.

This explanation is denied for a simple reason. In order to comprehend the most essential 'Evita myth-making period', whose origins are marked by her funeral, it is essential to understand the occurrences in rhythms from 1952 until 1955, when Perón was overthrown by a military coup, as well as the period which succeeded his disposal. The Evita of Alan Parker, as well as the Evita of the Webber/Rice duo, is one who led the postmortem 'life' given to the first lady. The occurrences which followed her funeral transformed the epic and we could say that, as a result, the mourners in the abovementioned productions lament an Evita who was born on the day that she died; in other words, they lament the Evita in immortality, not the one who entered it on July 26, 1952. This overlapping of Evitas, of course, can leave a viewer completely flustered.

Let us first return to Evita's funeral in 1952. The colossal event reproduced by Alan Parker was first made immortal in its actuality in the film *And Argentina's Heart Stopped*. Raúl Apold,⁵³ in charge of propaganda, hired Edward Cronjagar from 20th Century-Fox to, as Walter Benjamin puts it, "make it possible for an event to be permanently recorded in terms of sound and sight."⁵⁴ The filmmaker was able, therefore, to capture the incredible parade of images which took place during the thirteen-day period that Evita was mourned: the incessant rain, the torches, the flowers, the crowds, their sacrifice. Waiting in the cold drizzle, enduring hunger or sickness, the gigantic line of mourners stretched for almost two miles through the streets of Buenos Aires as they patiently awaited to pay their last tribute to Evita, the Sleeping Beauty laid to rest in a glass casket at the

⁵³ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz is consistent in referring to him as "the Goebbels of Argentina" throughout her *Eva Perón*. The biographer states that Apold, to Evita's request, was the one who designated her as "*la Señora*" or as "the Lady of Hope" when Eva founded her Foundation for Social Aid (p. 92).

⁵⁴ Walter Benjamin. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken, 1968. (p. 186)

Secretariat of Labor. Holding the rosary beads given to her by the Pope, the perpetually reposing Evita seemed as pure as the whiteness of her shroud, as angelical as her freshly-dyed golden hair. She was adored as a saint. During the three years which followed this event, Evita continued to be venerated as a saint as two new figures, in the form of rituals, were added to Peronist iconography. The first took place at the 26th day of every month, in a procession of torches which were lit to keep her flame eternal. The second took place in nightly punctuations of her death at 20:25, when anchors would interrupt their programs to remind the audience of the precise moment of her entrance in immortality. Throughout that period, Peronist propaganda consistently revered her image, and the list of titles headed by the Spiritual Leader of the Nation became endless in the process: *la Primera Samaritana, el Consuelo de los Humildes, la Dama de la Esperanza, el Hada Maravillosa*.⁵⁵

In addition, children in primary school learned to read through the usage of texts which included sentences of similar effects to those sung by the chorus of infants in the Hollywood and Broadway productions (*Please, Holy Eva, will you bless a little child? Be my angel, be my everything, wonderful, perfect, and true - and I'll try to be exactly like you*). In secondary school, moreover, Evita's *La razón de mi vida*, the autobiography she did not write but accepted as hers, was mandatory reading for students. Classrooms featured her official portrait accompanied, always, by fresh flowers. Finally, the recollection of her name was all over Argentina: from schools to subway stations, from stamps to postcards, from cities to streets, from busts to plaques. Now, more than ever, holy, divine, humble Eva Perón, the mother of the *descamisados*, was Santa Evita; her presence, and the people's mourning of her loss, were ubiquitous in Argentina.

⁵⁵ Marysa Navarro. *Evita*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 1994. (p. 336) From Spanish, the titles: the First Samaritan, the Solace of the Humble, Our Lady of Hope, the Wonderful Fairy Godmother.

Undoubtedly, Evita's funeral was the most profound manifestation of collective grief by the people in the entire history of Argentina and, certainly, one of the century's most significant events of its kind. But where did the postmortem Evita which appears in the Hollywood and Broadway versions, *as soon as the smoke from the funeral clears*, come from?

In 1952, the newly re-elected Juan Perón adopted two new strategies along with his ideal of justice for all, *justicialismo* (a route to development that was neither communist nor capitalist): first, he attempted to enhance his moral and ideological appeal (the veneration of his late wife being a prime example of such actions); second, he began to employ greater force to suppress the growing opposition. But after a failed attempt in June of 1955, a successful revolt took place in September and Perón fled into exile. The period which followed marked the acceleration of a complete Peronist purge: the two parties were dissolved on November 24, the laws which declared Perón as Liberator of the Republic and Evita as Spiritual Chief of the Nation were abolished on December 6, the project for the construction of the Monument to Eva Perón was revoked on December 17, and the Eva Perón Foundation was disbanded on December 23.⁵⁶ While it was forbidden to pronounce their names, the new government's press campaign continued to stress that the Peróns were responsible for the country's economic and political misfortunes and, furthermore, engaged in a number of activities to denigrate their images.

During that period, a series of defamatory publications about Evita began to emerge in Argentina for the first time, some of which had been previously published abroad. These included Mary Main's biography (written under the pseudonym of María Flores) of the first lady entitled *La mujer del látigo* ("The woman of the whip") and Fleur Cowles's *Bloody Precent* (both which had

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 329.

first appeared in the United States), and Américo Ghioldi's *El mito de Eva Duarte* (first featured in Uruguay).⁵⁷ An ambitious, persuasive, callously frigid, domineering Evita began to be presented all throughout anti-Peronist literature in addition to the Argentinean publication of the three works mentioned above. And from that moment on (from Jorge Luis Borges to Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, from Leónidas Lamborghini to Rodolfo Walsh), every single Argentinean writer of the elite or opposition has written about Eva Perón.

Raúl Damonte Botana, known as Copi (his pseudonym), whose family owned the famous Buenos Aires daily *Crítica*, was a member of this elite. This bohemian prolific writer fled to France in 1962, where he composed eleven theatric plays which became notorious for their candid, sordid cruelty. In 1970, a week after the première of one of these plays at the Parisian Epée-de-bois Theatre, a pack of Peronist fanatics invaded the stage and turned the performance directed by Alfredo Arias into a battlefield. The play's leading protagonist was transvestite-actor Facundo Bo - and it was entitled, of course, *Eva Perón*. In this maliciously sarcastic act, Copi narrates Evita's last minutes on her deathbed, when she tells her mother that the cancer is a part of her husband's conspiracy against her, a fabrication of Perón's to get her out of the picture. With extremely mocking lines (as "They want to put me in surgery for cancer of the uterus, cancer of the throat, cancer of the hair, cancer of the brain, cancer of the buttocks!" and "I screw them in their filthy government!" and "When I die, he'll get me out of the parades, the coward! But he'll only rule over my dead body!"⁵⁸), Copi's Eva Perón was condemned by Parisian and Argentinean critics but, in the interim, the play was performed to a full house every night.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 331.

⁵⁸ Matilde Sánchez. Evita: Imágenes de una pasión. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1996. (p. 194)

Four years later, in 1974, Copi's *Eva Perón* had its debut in London's off-circuit, always with a cross-dressed protagonist in the leading role. As critics pointed out an Andy Warhol resonance in the dramatization, and the public continued to attend, the play caught the eyes of the British duo Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. Rice began investigating that same year and later traveled to Argentina to consolidate his research.

The result was an album released in 1976 consisting of songs which told the saga of an ambitious, revengeful, calculating, bitter, cold-hearted Eva Perón. The tale of this resented, domineering woman who conquered Argentina and made the masses cry for her is identical to Mary Main's woman with the whip - whose book, according to Rice, is "the definitive biography" of the first lady.⁵⁹ Julie Covington was the first Eva, Colm Wilkinson was the first Che.

Two years later, in June 1978, *Evita* was transported to the stage, premiering in London's Prince Edward Theater under the direction of Harold Prince and with the celebrated David Essex in the role of Che. Elaine Paige was the second diva in the role of Evita, whose performance has been considered unsurpassable by a number of critics until this day. Finally, *Evita* was staged in Broadway in 1979, propelling two uncelebrated performers into stardom, Patti LuPone (Evita) and Mandy Patinkin (Che). The musical later won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Musical and seven Tonys, running for 1,567 performances. LuPone remained the lead protagonist in all succeeding Broadway stagings of *Evita* until the end of the 1980s. Meanwhile, the hit *Don't Cry For Me, Argentina* became a favorite functional tune in elevators and hotel lobbies throughout the world. Finally, in 1996, Madonna appeared from the funeral smoke.

⁵⁹ Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. *Evita: The Legend of Eva Perón, 1919-1952*. New York: Avon Books, 1978.

LITERALLY EVITA

On the surface, one could assume that the massive publicity campaign that accompanied the production of Alan Parker's *Evita* was responsible for an invasion of Evita literature, filling the windows of New York's Barnes and Noble, or of the city's Coliseum Bookstore, during the 1996 Christmas season with a variety of works: *Evita: The Real Life of Eva Perón* by Nicholas Frases and Marga Navarro (1980 original), *Evita: First Lady* by John Barnes (1978 original), *Evita: Saint or Sinner?* by W.A. Harbison (which features portraits of Madonna and Evita on the cover),⁶⁰ and, of course, *The Making of Evita* by Alan Parker to name a few. Evidently, the first three publications returned to be millions as part of the fad initiated by Madonna, and this last one, of course, was a direct product of the movie. But it would be very unfair, and fallacious, to attribute the success of *Eva Perón* by Alicia Dujovne Ortiz and, especially, of *Santa Evita* by Tomás Eloy Martínez, Argentina's most widely-sold novel to date, to the trend initiated by the pop icon. In fact, Mary Main's legendary *The Woman With The Whip*, which Tim Rice claimed to be "the definitive biography" in 1979, did not return to be millions, for some reason, in 1996 with Parker's *Evita*, and is now considered a relic.

The never-departing evocation of the first lady - dead and/or alive - had its presence made throughout the literature of this century from the moment she entered immortality. Moreover, as I've mentioned before, every single celebrated Argentinean author has written about Evita at some point in a million different ways: plays, scripts, poems, novels, biographies, short stories, articles. Whether they loved her and fed off the white myth, whether they hated her and fed off the black

⁶⁰ Claudio España. "Una moda que hoy sólo se lee" in La Nación. Buenos Aires: December 13, 1996.

myth, or whether they attempted to 'historicize her' and fed off both or neither, the authors who adopted Argentina's most celebrated first lady as a subject, or as source of inspiration, were the mothers and fathers of millions of Evitas (and of phrases she pronounced posthumously, such as the very "I will return and I will be millions") and, certainly, the vital agents who never allowed her to return by not letting her leave in the first place. It is in literature, precisely, that her legend is registered perpetually.

As a result of its liberty to collide fact and fiction while filling every unknown gap with rich descriptions and feelings, no other genre is more effective in playing the ballads of Eva Perón than, in this instance, the literary novel. Novelists have the freedom to weave their texts in a multiplicity of manners in an attempt to register both the real and the imaginary, allowing for an infinity of readings in each and every portrayal granted to the many aspects of Evita: her life, her death, her body, Argentinean politics, identities, hegemony. For example, in his *La pasión según Eva* ("Passion According to Eva"), Abel Posse records the rags-to-riches ascension of a remarkable woman who "undoubtedly, we'll never really get to know"⁶¹ by collecting, in what he calls a "choral" novel, the various different voices of the characters who spoke her: her friends, her enemies, her confessor Father Hernán Benítez. The novel consists of a mosaic of different fictional accounts, collected by the author in testimonies and research, with continuous narrative shifts from Evita to the other characters. Posse makes a constant reference, throughout the work, to "Evita's little brown suitcase," her sole possession upon arriving in Buenos Aires and the predominant token of her origins and, subsequently, success. The author later explained what the arrangements of his building

⁶¹ Abel Posse. "Abel Posse narra cómo escribió *La pasión según Eva*" in *La Maga*. Buenos Aires: January 4, 1995. (p. 407)

blocks were based on: first, citing Mario Vargas Llosa, saying that novelists are only interested in registering ‘the intimacy of history’ as opposed to history itself, second, citing Marguerite Yourcenar, that the novelist inevitably ‘reconstructs the moment as it was’ in his own manner while ensuring that ‘the bricks remain authentic.’⁶² Fact and fiction are intertwined in such a manner that, unsurprisingly, the axiom that states that a lie repeated enough times becomes true is most applicable when it comes to Evita. An example of this occurs in Posse’s article about *La pasión según Eva*, where the novelist interestingly cites two famous sentences attributed to Eva in order to reveal her gratitude towards Colonel Perón: the first, upon meeting him (“Colonel, thanks for existing.”), the second, upon dying (“Thank you”). According to the author in this article, both were actually said by Evita, though the first, at least, is not true. “Thanks for existing” was a sentence created by another novelist, Tomás Eloy Martínez, in *The Perón Novel*⁶³ and used, later, once again in a succeeding work, *Santa Evita*, recycled by Posse as “Thanks, Colonel, for being, for existing.”⁶⁴ The phrase has actually been attributed to Evita in several other instances, newspaper articles as Posse’s being an example, and was engraved in perpetuity, in marble, on a plaque at the Museum of Peronism in Buenos Aires. Most importantly, in addition, it is a primordial example of the life that Evita was given after she died and, furthermore, that the best (and perhaps, the sole) genre capable of registering this post-mortem existence is, undoubtedly, the literary novel. This idea will be explored later in this work.

⁶² Ibid, p. 407.

⁶³ Tomás Eloy Martínez. *La novela de Perón*. Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1985. (p. 351)

⁶⁴ Abel Posse. *La pasión según Eva*. Barcelona: Emecé Editores España, 1994. (p. 155)

Two

She can be anything and everything. In Argentina she is still the Cinderella of television serials, the nostalgia for having been what we never were, the woman with the whip, the celestial mother. Outside the country, she is power, the woman who died young, the compassionate hyena who declaims from the balconies of the beyond: "Don't cry for me, Argentina."

✎ Tomás Eloy Martínez, SANTA EVITA

Everything happens as if Mao or Franco had already died several times and had been replaced by his double. From a political point of view, that a head of state remains the same or is someone else doesn't strictly change anything, so long as they resemble each other. For a long time now a head of state - *no matter which one* - is nothing but the simulacrum of himself, and *only that gives him the power and the quality to govern*. No one would grant the least consent, the least devotion to a *real* person.

✎ Jean Baudrillard, SIMULACRA AND SIMULATION

THE ACTRESS SIMULOPHILE

If we were to look at four major so-called ‘dictators’ of the twentieth century, we would notice something interesting about the lexicons accompanying their names. Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Francisco Franco and Juan Domingo Perón are/were not themselves; rather, these four ‘heads of state’ are their own simulacrum and have been supplanted by their double, granted a title in baptism by the country they governed: Germany’s *Der Führer*, Italy’s *Il Duce*, Spain’s *El Generalísimo*, Argentina’s *El Conductor*. The leaders, the superiors, the guides, the chiefs. These were the ones that were granted power in their condition of simulacra, for as Baudrillard has pointed out, there would be no consent bestowed to a *real* person. The ‘real’ person has died a long time ago while allegiance, as a result, was vowed to the double who replaced him.

In a short-story appropriately entitled *The Simulacrum*, Jorge Luis Borges speaks of two ‘mysterious, anonymous individuals (whose faces and secret names we do not know)’ who played, once upon a time, the role of husband and wife.⁶⁴ He was the president and she was the first lady who ruled Argentina in the late 1940s and early 1950s as the performance of a governing couple. He was an actor who went by the (abovementioned) name of Juan Domingo Perón, whose peculiar performance switched characters with his co-protagonist as, according to an elitist Argentinean essayist, “in reality, he was the woman and she was the man.”⁶⁵ This assertion, however, only goes as far as the performance, for though Perón often acted with the feebleness of a woman, and his wife, Evita, with the strength of a man (as far as the discourse of politics/gender roles of Argentina at the time), *in reality* Martínez Estrada has written an erroneous description, because there is *no reality*

⁶⁴ Jorge Luis Borges. “El simulacro,” in *El hacedor* (1960). *Obras completas II*, (1952-1972). Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores. (p.167)

⁶⁵ Ezequiel Martínez Estrada. *¿Qué es esto? Catilinaria*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Lautaro, 1956. (p. 241)

when it comes to the Perón duo: they were neither woman nor man, neither Perón nor Evita, neither president nor first lady. They were even more fiendish than their power-hungry representation of ambition, charisma, and leadership (whether or not the woman was the man or the man was the woman), for they were 'the reality which was not,' the reality they represented and pretended to be, the performative reality 'which was them.' In other words, to pose a question similar to Borges's, what evil lurks in the hearts of the actors who played the roles of the macabre widower and the little blond doll in an act considered one of the most grandiose funeral events of all times?⁶⁶

This chapter does not aspire to the unfeasible task of providing an answer, for the 'real' faces and names of the actors who played Eva and Juan, as well as their intentions, have been hiding perpetually behind their masks since their replacement by their double. It is impossible - if not pointless - to try to recover/uncover their 'real no-longer existant existence,' even if such an existence actually was. Rather, this work consists of an attempt to depict the female simulophile of the couple in question; the several simulacra incorporated by the 'real woman' (the actress) who lies behind the Borgesian 'little blond doll' in her brief thirty-three-year-old existence, the 'woman' who believed (apparently at least, for we cannot be sure of anything) she 'was' Evita and her other replicas. One could call it, for the purposes of this analysis, a *simulography* of Eva Perón: the (non)biography which reveals the performance instead of the actress - whoever she 'is' or 'was' - by depicting the many transformations and roles she has played. The 'real actress' is lost forever, for "all the real is residual, and everything that is residual is destined to repeat itself infinitely into phantasms."⁶⁷ The 'woman' who played Evita, whom I will call 'the actress' throughout the course

⁶⁶ Jorge Luis Borges. "El simulacro," in *El hacedor* (1960). *Obras completas II*. (1952-1972). Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores. (p.167)

⁶⁷ Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1995. (p. 146.)

of this analysis, has performed (and was performed through) several acts and was, moreover, ceaselessly reproduced into ghosts of herself: the 'life' of this actress actually dates from her birth on May 7, 1919 until the present moment; her death on July 26, 1952 was, in fact, another birth. The actress has always been dead, replaced by her double; but it is the double which endures, in many lives, names and bodies. The double 'exists' Eva Perón: her referent remains, her *post-mortem* life (her thirty-three-year-old existence and the subsequent posthumous lives) - shifting, adding, subtracting the lines of her script - endures.

The question I pose for this task, therefore, should be worded as follows: What are the simulacra represented by the seven variations of the names and bodies (alive and dead) of Evita Perón? Evita is 'the actress' who has been performing (and continues to do so) an act of more than 75 years of duration and, moreover, she has been performed and spoken by the discourses which encompass and depict her, legitimately and illegitimately. The 'real' Evita has been replaced by her very own seven signs, the seven faces of Eve: Eva María Ibargüen, Evita Duarte, María Eva Duarte de Perón, Eva Perón, Evita, María Maggi de Magistris, Evita (once again). None of these faces hide the truth; rather, they serve to reveal that there is no truth for the meaning resides in the representation: the representation exists, Evita doesn't. Each and every one of the seven references of Evita give rise to 'the actress' which is no longer herself but her sign for she ceases to exist as all of the above to become none of the above, then she appears again in another form. The referent ('the actress') is lost, remaining and enduring in representations and meanings.

It is important to establish, in this instance, the difference between Evita as dissimulation and Evita as simulation. According to Baudrillard,

To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence ... Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is

always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the “true” and the “false,” the “real” and the “imaginary.”⁶⁸

The Eva Perón in this analysis is one which bears no truth or falsehood, is neither real nor imaginary but rather ‘a woman’ who substitutes the signs of herself for herself in an *evading* of her own reality which no longer is, replaced by its liquidated referential. In Baudrillardian terms, Eva has been artificially resurrected in the system of signs, ‘becoming’ them. This analysis portrays the significative values contained within the carousel nomenclature of Evita.

EVA MARÍA IBARGUREN ILLEGITIMATE

In the beginning, there was Eva. Or let me rephrase that: in the beginning, there was a woman who “was born in two different places and on three different dates.”⁶⁹ Both the spatial and temporal dissimilarities regarding the birth of Eva María Ibarguren function, at once, as the referents which replace the youngest of five out-of-wedlock children born to Juan Duarte and Juana Ibarguren with a simulacrum of herself, feigning what Evita didn’t have upon baptism: legitimacy. Two of these birthdays reflect the same day and month (May 7, under the sign of Taurus) but are delayed by three years and differ in spatial terms. Let us look at each scenario:

If the year is 1919, she was born on the ranch of *La Unión* and registered as Eva María Ibarguren in the parish church of Los Toldos: Evita ‘is’ the bastard child of a middle-class *caudillo* who lived in Chivilcoy with his wife and three legitimate daughters. She was part of what doña

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Tomás Eloy Martínez. *Santa Evita*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996. (p. 119) A novel is, of course, an illegitimate source for it is a work of fiction.

Juana referred to as “mi pequeña tribu” (my little tribe) along with her brother Juan Ramón, and her three sisters Blanca, Erminda and Elisa. This ‘tribu’ lived in Los Toldos, a small Argentinean village on the pampas in the province of Buenos Aires named after the nearby tents (*tolderías*) which housed the Indians who had settled in the region in 1862, with their chief, Ignacio Coliqueo. Nonetheless, in 1879, Julio Argentino Roca had “cleansed” the pampas of the last few Indians; the ones who endured were now referred to as Coliqueos and worked as porters transporting wheat to the train station.⁷⁰ Both of these tribes - the five children of doña Juana and the Coliqueos - residing in the Argentinean Pampas were positioned, visibly, as the ‘other’ outside of Argentinean order, the ‘other’ who corrupts the ideal of the immaculate national identity that the country (i.e. through the abovementioned “cleansing” of Indians on the part of Roca) so desperately aspired to achieve (but didn’t; it turned into something else).

As a result, by extension, Eva María Ibarguren was the product of an atomic fusion: the fifth child of the ‘obscure end’ of Juan Duarte’s bigamy (as expected, a practice somewhat tolerated by society for the male) and of a beautiful, impoverished woman, doña Juana, who was an illegitimate child herself. The discrimination and maltreatment Eva suffered as a child remind us, at once, of Michel Foucault’s study of the isolation of lepers during the Middle Ages in *Discipline and Punish* and his first mode of objectification through what he calls “dividing practices”⁷¹ (both tribes being the ‘excluded otherness’), clearly reflected in the following passage of *Santa Evita*:

Argentines who thought of themselves as the depositaries of civilization saw in Evita an obscene resurrection of barbarism. Indians, blacks with no morals, bums,

⁷⁰ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. *Eva Perón*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995. (p. 5)

⁷¹ Michel Foucault. “The Body of the Condemned” from *Discipline and Punish*, in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow. Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1984. (p. 173)

hoodlums, pimps straight out of the Arlt, wild gauchos, consumptive whores smuggled into the country on Polish ships, party girls from the provinces: all of them had now been exterminated or confined to their dark cellars. (58-59)

In Baudrillardian terms, moreover, there is a residue which gives rise to a whole other national identity on its own, replacing it with itself. These 'dark cellars' resemble the 'trials' and 'castles' which Baudrillard, like Kafka, views as closed systems whose remainders are, at once, the colonization and evacuation by the sheer effectiveness of third-order simulation.⁷² In other words, if the illegitimate Evita - and the other abovementioned 'others' - is the 'other' which will eventually corrupt the 'we in history' of Argentina, then this 'we in history' becomes the *other* of this other: a culture which doesn't exist for its members but rather for images of itself. The 'depositories of civilization' are the representation of a national identity, the Argentina of civilization, the ethereal portrait of 'cultivated Argentina' which never was, the utopian ideal of a country which did not exist in a reality outside of impressions conveyed by the dominant minority. I will return to this idea within the subsequent names of Evita in the course of this chapter.

If the year is 1922, on the other hand, the child was María Eva Duarte, born in Junín. This information features in her certificate of marriage to Juan Perón wherein Evita feigned having everything she did not have: she was no longer illegitimate, for she substituted her mother's name for her father's so that Evita was no longer a child of adultery. She did not subtract three years off her age out of female vanity; but in order to place her birth after the death of Juan Duarte's legitimate wife (1922). The actress transformed herself into the 'appropriate' bride for a man of the military - she was María Eva Duarte, a representation of legitimacy and a citizen of a much more important urban center, Junín, than her 'original' native small village of Los Toldos.

⁷² Charles Levin. Jean Baudrillard: A study in cultural metaphysics. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1996. (p. 195)

The Eva of Scorpio is featured in a ledger (for the year 1935) kept by the Comedia Theater as: "Evita Duarte, ingenue. Junín on November 21, 1917."⁷³ Although this information could be illegitimate on its own (coming from a novel), it nonetheless performs/acts the absence of Evita's maturity: rather than being 15 years old upon arriving in Buenos Aires as a girl from Los Toldos, why not be, instead, a more mature woman aged 17 - one who migrated to the big city from another urban center like Junín?

Though the accepted place and date of Eva María Ibarguren's birth is the one I mentioned first (Los Toldos - May 7, 1919), let us return, for a moment, to the second date, three years later in the town of Junín out of nostalgia for a lost referential: Evita, and the greatest trauma of her childhood. Baudrillard explains that history has made its triumphal entry into cinema wherein objects shine in a sort of hyperresemblance "that makes it so that fundamentally they no longer resemble anything, except the empty figure of resemblance, the empty form of representation."⁷⁴ Of course, it would be unfair to expect that the screen adaptation of Broadway's *Evita* could possibly be an 'accurate depiction of an historical moment and persona' - but Alan Parker, the director, thought it was.

In *Evita*, Alan Parker (following the original script by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice) selected the 'greatest trauma' of Evita's childhood as a point of departure for portraying and depicting the source of her river of vengeance, in both 'her life' and the movie: the funeral of her father in Chivilcoy, 1926. In this event, a seven-year-old black-haired child is denied the opportunity of giving her father a last farewell by his real wife, Doña Estela Grisolia, and her three legitimate

⁷³ Tomás Eloy Martínez. *Santa Evita*, p. 119. Once again, I emphasize this is a novel.

⁷⁴ Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 44-45.

half-sisters. Although it is believed that Grisolia died in 1922, the pilgrimage of Juan Duarte's illegitimate family to attend the funeral in Chivilcoy, as well as, of course, the excruciating humiliation suffered by Doña Juana and her little tribe, is one of the most constant explanations for the formation of Eva's maniac enmity towards the classes who never accepted her. It may be said, therefore, that Parker's addition of Grisolia is nothing but the empty form of representation; why not add a little spice to the mythological quarrel between Juana and Estela - and aggravate little Evita in the process - by (literally) bringing the real wife back from the dead?

EVITA DUARTE INGENUE/ASPIRING ACTRESS

Once upon a time, there lived a fifteen-year-old girl in the Pampas of Buenos Aires who ran off to the movies and fantasized about being Norma Shearer in the role of Marie Antoinette. She dreamed of all the satin and luxury she knew existed in a world outside of her own, distant from her colourless, tedious reality. She desired to become part of that far-removed universe, the object of her desires, the mirage which became her *raison d'être*. The entertainment industry dispersed the magnificent faraway galaxy of the stars through pictures in magazines such as *Radiolandia*, *Sintonía* and *Antena* which she collected and traded with her girlfriends. But she was different. She was determined to actually become a part of the world the latter only used as an escape.

Driven. So ambitious was she, so tremendous was her longing to become somebody else that she fled to the grandeurs of Buenos Aires, the Big Apple of Latin America, in 1935. It is here, she thought, that her fairy tale would come true: she would find all the glamour, along with her prince, of course.

The girl went by the name of Evita Duarte, but for all intents and purposes she could have been Cinderella: both have ceased being themselves and became, at once, their own representation of ascension *à la* rags-to-riches. Evita Duarte, moreover, is a short-circuit of other images, the fusion of other paragons which load her ambitious 'character' with elements of greed, power, aspirations; the force of her urge to become somebody else. As I've mentioned, she wasn't going to sit and wait for her prince to arrive. Rather, she would go fetch him herself.

So she arrived in Buenos Aires in 1935 in the company of a dubiously talented tango singer (often referred to as the 'Gardel of the Pampas' and famous for singing with eyes turned to the moon) named Agustín Magaldi. It is said that he seduced young, daydreamer Evita during a performance in Junín, then took her with him to the Big Apple of South America (there is, nonetheless, enough room to doubt who really seduced who). Seductive play aside, Evita arrived and learned, quickly, that the glamorous city depicted in the magazines was not reality. Evita Duarte had fallen in love with a utopian metropolis which only existed in its representation of itself, in its own image and in what it aspired to be:

But its [Buenos Aires's] heart was divided. Its architecture represented the entire world. After all, the whole world had ended up on its muddy shores. It was as if every architect had played a child's game of pretend. Pretend we are England. Or pretend we are Spain. Or, better yet, pretend we are gothic and come from the Middle Ages, or baroque, or the Moors. As often happens when children imitate their parents, Buenos Aires surpassed its models.⁷⁵

Or was, rather, substituted by images of itself, becoming something else. At least in Evita Duarte's conception; a dreamer's fantasy of a heaven which was more likely to resemble hell. But she wasn't going to give up and became, in this instance, the warrior/actress who aspired to survive - and succeed - no matter the cost.

⁷⁵ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. Eva Perón, p. 29.

EVITA DURANTE

THEATRE, IN-BETWEEN/DURING

So she commenced, beginner's luck: in March of 1935, the actress played a servant in a theatrical play entitled *La Señora de los Pérez*, by Ernesto Marsili. Her line: "Dinner is served." A foot in the door? Not necessarily. She followed other roles, silently, in plays with suggestive titles as *Cada hogar es un mundo* (Each home is a world unto itself), *Madame Sans-Gêne*, *La dama, el caballero y el ladrón* (The lady, the knight, and the thief). Evita Duarte's name appeared in the programs of these plays, but theatre critics said virtually nothing of her performance - perhaps because for the most part, she hardly spoke.

Durante. Once *La dama* was over, Evita Duarte endured a four-month period with no work, but the wheel-of-fortune swivelled again. In May 1936, shortly after turning seventeen, Evita rendered other roles in plays entitled as aphorisms of what she had been and later would be: *Miente y serás feliz...* (Lie and you shall be happy...), *¿Trabajar?... ¡Nunca!* (Work? ... Never!), *Doña María del Buey Aire*, *Y así las estoy pagando* (And thus I'm paying accordingly), *Mis cinco papás* (My five daddies), *El beso mortal* (The mortal kiss), *Las inocentes* (The innocents), *La hora de los niños* (The Children's Hour). For this last performance she adopted the name of Evita Durante,⁷⁶ but it wasn't for long and no one knows why.⁷⁷

Maybe the real actress existed *durante* (during) the intervals of the titles of her plays. Maybe she performed them, maybe they performed her, maybe both, maybe none of the above. Or maybe she saved them for later.

⁷⁶ Juan José Sebreli. Eva Perón: ¿Aventurera o militante? Buenos Aires: Editorial La Pleyade, 1966. (p. 121)

⁷⁷ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. Eva Perón, p. 36.

EVITA DUARTE ACTRESS/LOVER

Or maybe Evita Duarte had a strategy. According to biographer Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, “during her artistic period, each one of her lovers was chosen with one specific objective, to get her a part” and furthermore that “to Eva, men were not an end, they were a necessary means.”⁷⁸ This ‘role’ was also performed by the Madonna simulation of Evita (in Alan Parker’s production), who is featured seducing and discarding men a number of times (getting pictures on the covers of magazines and roles in radio commercials in the process) and stopping once she reaches Colonel Perón. But unlike the Madonna/Eva Duarte, ‘the actress’/Eva Duarte did not switch dresses from one scene to another, was often paid a cup of coffee with milk for her acting, endured poverty and misery, took much longer to rise. Throughout 1937 (two years following her arrival in Buenos Aires), the aspiring actress underwent a tremendously harsh period with no work, an empty stomach and holes in her shoes.⁷⁹ But in March of 1938 she met Emilio Kartulowicz, editor of *Sintonía* magazine, and her luck changed, once again: her photograph finally appeared on the same publication which had featured the Norma Shearer biography she had read in Junín. And slowly but surely, a star was born as roles were gained and men crossed her path.

By mid-1943, Evita Duarte’s friendship with Colonel Aníbal Imbert earned her a show entitled *Mujeres Celebres* (“Celebrated Women”) broadcast by the most prestigious radio station at the time, Radio Belgrano. For this role, the September issue of *Antena* magazine announced that the “famous actress Evita Duarte” would interpret a variety of celebrated women (in a cycle which began

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

⁷⁹ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. *Eva Perón*, p. 38.

in October of 1943 and continued for two years). In this instance, the ladies of the Argentinean elite took tremendous delight in mocking the lowly, unrefined accent of this *campesina* as they tuned in to hear Evita Duarte's mediocre efforts in embodying the voices of grandiose feminine figures, among them Lady Hamilton, Isadora Duncan, England's Elizabeth I, Mrs. Chiang Kai-shek, Empress Josephine. In a testimony to Ortiz, Gloria Alcorta declared that

We [the women of the elite] began to listen to the radio (...) new experience for us: we had never heard it before. And randomly, we stumbled upon a certain Eva Duarte playing the part of Catherine of Russia. She was completely unknown to us. But what a revelation! And what a daily pleasure, this nasal voice who played the empress with rural tango accents! It was hilarious. We always anxiously awaited the start of the soap opera, and we even talked about it with our friends. I think we contributed a great deal to her stardom.⁸⁰

Like Eva María Ibarguren before her, the name and body of Evita Duarte establish, in this instance, the simulacrum of a Foucauldian condemned, for she is the materialization of everything the oligarchs convict: a low-class whore, an artist/performer who has probably slept her way to her position in the show and who dares to rattle the speeches of glorious women (as the ones mentioned above) who have once represented the entirety of she is not and will never be. They condemn her through the excluding practices of derision and ridicule, wherein at once, of course, the ladies of the upper class establish and reassure their own position in so doing.

Amidst the many different nicknames the opposition granted Evita when she later became a powerful first lady was the sole isolation of her name, Eva, with the definite article *the* (gendered feminine) placed before it: *la* Eva (the Eva). By isolating her name, they isolated her body - condemning both in the same condition *La Eva* was not, of course *Evita*: the latter was a term of endearment (as the diminutive form of "Eva"), the former was a term of fear, disgust, revolt, anguish

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 44.

from the part of those who opposed her. Even after she was married, if her enemies were to annex a last name to *la Eva* it was, as expected, Duarte instead of Perón: Eva Duarte (refer again to the above cited testimony by Gloria Alcorta). Pierre St-Amand makes a similar point regarding the isolation of Hillary Clinton's name:

By calling Mrs. Clinton "Hillary," by isolating her first name, these commentators [in talk shows during the last electoral campaign] demonized her as a series of monster types: the she-devil, the independent witch, the improper wife. The use of this unique signifier was intended to conjure up all sorts of negative female images. "Hillary" is a proper name turned heteronym - a *caconym* proper. Detached from the referent, it designates a particular guise of a universal stereotype. "Hillary" is the "possessed" name of Hillary Clinton.⁸¹

Likewise, "la Eva" became 'the proper name turned heteronym' and was the term most commonly used by her enemies to refer to 'that woman.' The isolated forms of 'Hillary' and 'Evita' designate, in this instance, what St-Amand refers to as 'a particular guise of a universal stereotype.' The term 'Duarte,' instead of 'Perón,' was the one Evita's enemies added to her name because it reminded them of 'who she was': Eva Duarte, 'the actress' blemished by a provincial, undistinguished, subordinate accent, also deficient in proper manners, whose vocabulary was filled with unrefined, raunchy terminology.

Nonetheless, to their dissatisfaction, she rose. The ascent started in January of 1944, when 'the actress' met her last and most prestigious lover, Colonel Juan Perón. As a result of his influence, the publicity of her radio show escalated; in March, Evita Duarte was granted the lead role in the film *La cabalgata del circo*.

⁸¹ Pierre St-Amand. "Terrorizing Marie Antoinette," in *Critical Inquiry* 20:3 (Spring 1994) (p. 383) St-Amand makes a similar point about the names of Marie Antoinette: the numerous nicknames (Messaline, Agrippine, Isabeau de Bavière) and variations of her name (Toinon, Toinette, Antoinette), in his view, "run the common thread of degrading the queen's image, of creating other characters, lascivious clones, in her place (...) the queen's final appellation - *Veuve Capet* - [Widow Capet] represents the ultimate endpoint of these processes of identification and substitution." (p. 393-4)

As her personal hairdresser, Julio Alcaraz, gradually *dyed* her hair from brunette to blond ‘the actress’ hoped her simulacra of illegitimacy and low-class would *die* with the chromatic switch, for her newly-acquired blondness could work as a sign of wealth and social ascent. The first publicity photo featuring the blond referent appeared on the cover of the June issue of *Antena*; however, it failed to erase the dark traits of her origin. It did not even serve as a mark of innocence, for though Evita would often jokingly repeat, “I am a repentant brunette” throughout her life, the dyes of Alcaraz never atoned her other ‘sins.’ Nonetheless, the Borgesian “mysterious individuals,” ‘the actress’ Evita and ‘the actor’ Perón mutually established the rules of their game by mid-1944: as Evita threw herself into a series of broadcasts entitled “Toward a Better Future,”⁸² Perón continued to help her with her acting career. With the aid of her lover, ‘the actress’ Evita Duarte obtained a role that ‘the actress’ Eva Perón would later encore: a woman who devotes her life to charitable acts. The film, entitled *La pródiga* (“The Extravagant”), featured the blond repentant brunette Eva as a remorseful sinner who helps the poor in an attempt to redress her depravities. Evita Duarte gave herself completely to that role; Eva Perón later did the same when it was her time to perform it - not on the movie screen, but on the political stage:

Evita would later [as Evita, not ‘Evita Duarte’] insert this message when addressing the underprivileged. She used other words, but everyone understood what she was really saying: “Do as I did! Desire! Request the most expensive, the most beautiful, luxury, happiness! It is all yours! Take it fearlessly!” For the time being [Evita Duarte], the violent desire that quickened the beat of her heart had the face of the Extravagant.⁸³

⁸² Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. *Eva Perón*. (p. 85) According to the biographer, this show was produced with the purpose of revealing Perón’s ideal image to the audience. Evita played the part of a woman of the people who exalted her lover; though Perón was not yet a candidate for the presidency, “this broadcast unequivocally presented him as the true leader of Argentina.”

⁸³ Ibid, p. 91-92.

MARÍA EVA DUARTE DE PERÓN

FIRST LADY OF ARGENTINA

In order to play that role, Evita Duarte had to change to María Eva Duarte de Perón, first lady of Argentina (and later to Eva Perón, the founder/benefactress). Undoubtedly, the turning point in the life of the actress simulophile resides in the first of these transitions (from Evita Duarte to María Eva Duarte de Perón). The former actress/lover had been condemned by both the oligarchy and Perón's military cohorts as a result of her being the mistress who openly lived with the colonel. The game was, once again, played mutually between the partners whose real names and faces we do not know: by marrying her on December 10, 1945, Perón granted Evita the legitimacy she lacked and so desperately sought; for himself, of course, the gladdening of his military buddies and the fostering of his reputation. Both were highly desired as a consequence of his candidacy to the 29th presidency of Argentina, which he obtained by a landslide victory.

In this instance, 'the actress' incorporates, at once, the two faces of a 'Western' woman: first, the carnal lover; second, the wife counterpart. The former resides in the Evita Duarte simulacrum, the latter in the María Eva Duarte de Perón simulacrum. The referent is lost permanently, and 'the actress' ceases to be 'what she was' to become 'what is made' of her; or, rather, what the system of signs residing in both of these terms - either of two simulacra - 'define' her as. To put it in Foucauldian terms, the 'whore/lover' and/or the 'wife' expressed by each definition do not emerge as a result of emotions propelled towards 'the actress' from the part of Argentineans (residing in national binary oppositions, i.e. Peronists versus anti-Peronists; *descamisados* versus oligarchs) but rather by the discursive constituents comprised by the symbolic effect of her name(s). In Baudrillardian terms, moreover, "there follows a draining of the social into societal forms of

regulation and reproduction” where “we discover again, as in a spiral, the same strategy of critical analysis: the repressed content - the social - reconfigures as the legitimizing projection of the repressing form.”⁸⁴ In other words, the Argentinean social (underpinned within the abovementioned binary oppositions which express and comprise social, cultural, economic, and political differences) is drained of itself, it becomes something else as it is replaced by the very societal forms which regulate and repress it. *Sans oublier* Foucault and merging his discursive regularities with Baudrillard’s conceptualization of simulation, I argue that both the Argentinean social *as well as* the first lady have become a third-order simulacrum of themselves: both have been replaced by the models and systems of signs supplied by Argentinean societal form; the latter which, by extension, acts as the generator of models of a real without origin or reality. The social which ‘speaks’ the representation of Evita (in Foucauldian terms) is nothing but its own definition and it is, rather, the repressed content ‘spoken’ by its own lost referent in a *succession* of discursive simulacra: Evita became the models supplied by the social, which had become the models of societal form before they ‘spoke her’ and originated, moreover, in a model of a reality which never was.

In another situation, the wife, Señora Perón, attempted to replace herself with the models of the social *nouveau-riche* by travelling to Europe (‘the fashionable thing to do’) visiting Spain, France and Italy and by, of course, dressing in Christian Dior and Balenciaga, wearing shoes by Ferragamo and jewelry by Van Cleef and Arpels. This model, however, is *nothing but* an effect of the social concealing *nothing but* the repetitive messages she attempted to convey to two distinct social classes (which, at once, had been replaced by representations of themselves). To the *descamisados*, the message was, ‘I was once like you, but look at me now - you too, can be like me,’ while to the

⁸⁴ Charles Levin. Jean Baudrillard: A study in cultural metaphysics. (p. 97)

oligarchs, on the other hand, 'your despicable class is dead, we (the excluded other) have killed you and will take over.' Her trip (referred to as the "Rainbow Tour") and her attire (the clothes, the shoes, the hats, the accessories, the jewelry, etc), the images which represent her desirable social position (or her ascension), function as the symbols and signs that Lévi-Strauss describes as agents "intermediary between two subjects," without which we cannot study social rules (i.e. if we fail to take them into consideration).⁸⁵ By extension, moreover, Baudrillard has placed the semiological approach of the structuralist articulation of the object in the "service of a critical interpretation of contemporary culture" and in order to achieve this, according to Levin,

Baudrillard had to purge structuralism of its claim to uncover an ideal systematicity; he had to reinterpret this claim instead as a response to the ordered abstraction of commodity culture and the self-regulating impersonality of systems of exchange and of signification in complex, late modern societies. In this sense, the formal elements of structural analysis - the arbitrary nature of the sign, the constitutive status of the system (as opposed to its user), and the manipulation of discrete, fungible terms according to the rules of a code - appear in Baudrillard's analysis as embodied features of commodity culture and contemporary social experience.⁸⁶

Applying Baudrillard's reinterpretation of the structuralist articulation of the object to Eva Perón's attire exposes the embodiment of the shifting grounds of commodity culture as perceived by the differing social classes in the Argentina of the late 1940s. In terms of the abstract order of consumerism, for instance, the possession of articles of clothing carrying the labels of French designers such as Christian Dior reveals, for the oligarchs, a reassuring confirmation of (the representation of) their own social position (especially if the articles were actually purchased in Paris). The object is, in this case, a simulacrum of an attained (and confirmed) social status; an

⁸⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss. The Scope of Anthropology. (p. 19)

⁸⁶ Charles Levin. Jean Baudrillard: A study in cultural metaphysics. (p. 77-8)

affirmation of their (the oligarchs') identity and position. For the lower classes, on the other hand, these abovementioned articles of clothing represent the luxury and indulgence denied to them as a result of their social status; this deprivation is especially evident in the very term used to describe them: the *descamisados* ("the shirtless ones") are workers who lack a modest shirt - let alone one fashioned by a European designer. Taking the ordered abstraction of commodity culture described by Levin we can clearly see how, in this case, these same objects function in oppositional terms as far as Evita's *grasitas* ("little greasers") are concerned: in this instance, they give rise to the image of a deficient social status, a struggle for basic needs; of a feeling of resentment towards extravagant items which can be yearned for, but never attained.

Finally, in a third scenario, if these same items are displayed in the body of 'the actress' (the first lady, in this instance), an entirely different representation is created. Seeing that "the jewelry of María Eva Duarte de Perón has a similar meaning to the diamond ring exhibited by Giuliano, wherein the peasants of Sicily saw a symbol of triumph over the rich and powerful,"⁸⁷ I argue that these objects of consumerism, when exhibited in her body, represent much more than a mere product of commodity culture. The symbolic effect of the attire and jewelry worn by María Eva Duarte de Perón represents the divisions, exclusions and oppressions which simulate (the ideal of) Argentinean national identity (the 'pure' society): the oligarchs, who propel hatred and resentment towards the ascension of the first lady on one hand; the *descamisados*, who propel adoration and admiration towards the success story of María Eva Duarte de Perón on the other. She ceases to be 'the actress' to become a vision of the desire to rise: threat/menace to the former, inspiration/motivation the latter.

⁸⁷ Juan José Sebreli. *Eva Perón: ¿Aventurera o militante?* (p. 51), translation mine: for the term wherein I employed *exhibited* is *ostentar* - which simultaneously means *to possess* (to hold, to have) and *to exhibit* (to show, to parade).

EVA PERÓN

PRINCESS OF THIEVES

While the system of signs within the referents of the attire and jewelry of María Eva Duarte de Perón replace themselves with their own representation (as mentioned above), the first lady herself, furthermore, is the perfect illustration (in her own naming and embodying) of the generation of Argentinean social relations as simulacra. As I mentioned previously, her condition of illegitimate child, of a rural *campesina* in a cosmopolitan metropolis, of her dubious acting career, of her provincial accent and lack of manners, of her lack of education and, finally, her condition of woman in a dominant patriarchal structure materialize the name and body of Evita into the repudiated 'other' which, according to Judith Butler, "is produced as the *unsymbolizable*, the *unspeakable*, the *illegible*" in a strategy of social abjection.⁸⁸

To put it in Baudrillardian terms, in other words, Eva Perón is the simulacrum of what Butler calls "a set of defining foreclosures [*Verwerfung*] and repressions that constitute the discontinuity and incompleteness of the subject,"⁸⁹ and, by extension, the ideal of Argentinean national identity, through these excluding practices, is nothing but a simulacrum of its own representations (simulated, feigning to have what it never had): the ethereal portrait of a 'cultivated' society, the Argentina of order and civilization in itself based on European ideals.

In addition, these very excluding practices perform the defining act in the construction of an identity. For Slavoj Žižek, following Jacques Lacan, the 'subject' is produced in language through an act of foreclosure wherein the refused/repudiated elements in the subject's formation continue to

⁸⁸ Judith Butler. Bodies That Matter. London: Routledge, 1993. (p. 190)

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 190.

determine it and, moreover,

What remains outside this subject, set outside by *the act of foreclosure which founds the subject*, persists as a kind of defining negativity. The subject is, as a result, never coherent and never self-identical precisely *because it is founded* and, indeed, *continually refounded (...)*⁹⁰ (italics mine)

The strategy of social abjection, represented in these excluding practices, functions as the political signifier which Žižek links with the notion of phantasmatic investment and phantasmatic promise, as “his theory makes clear the relationship between *identification* with political signifiers and their capacity both to unify the ideological field and to constitute the constituencies they claim to represent.”⁹¹ To this constitution of constituencies, Butler adds that

Political signifiers, especially those that designate social positions, *are not descriptive*; that is, they *do not represent* pre-given constituencies, *but are empty signs which come to bear phantasmatic investments of various kinds*. No signifier can be radically representative, for every signifier is the site of a final recognition that can never be achieved.⁹² (italics mine)

The Eva Perón who returned from Europe had an outrageous welcome-home from the masses: the Lady of Hope, as she was called, amalgamated the determining bridge between the northeast and southwest extremes which the Atlantic Ocean divides (hence the name “Rainbow Tour”), for Spain’s Francisco Franco had awarded her the Cross of Isabel the Catholic, and she had met Pope Pius XII at the Vatican. The tour in 1947 signified the landmark of her worldwide appeal; in Argentina, it marked the consolidation of her success on the part of the masses, delighted by images of her performance provided by the Peronist government’s propaganda of her expedition. From this point

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 190.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 191.

⁹² Ibid, p. 191.

onwards, and as a result of the power of her husband's ruling party, the *subject* of Eva Perón was *politically signified* to represent her own success story, the very possibility of 'breaking away' from the social abject which 'existed' previously. This occurred due to a shift on political grounds, for while Perón was president, the first lady would be perceived by her *descamisados* as the vision of success: 'she was once like them, but look at her now.'

In terms of national identity, however, from the part of the oligarchs Evita continued to bear the *phantasmatic investment* of the social abject, the repudiated 'other.' The oligarchs continued to mock the first lady because of her erroneous slips on the grounds of the Old World as a result of her origins: her lack of tact, class, education, *savoir faire* - typical of a girl from the provinces who was nothing but a B-movie actress. But Evita was strong, harsh, and determined to fight that subject positioning and incorporate the success story of Cinderella, rather than the one of a victim of the oligarchs. Her mission in life became herself: taking revenge upon the classes who despised her, and to save her fellow repudiated 'others'. According to *Santa Evita*,

It is not true that Evita resigned herself to being a victim, as her book *My Mission in Life* intimates. She could not bear the thought that such a thing as victims existed, because they reminded her that she had been one. She tried to redeem all the ones she saw. (170)⁹³

In order to achieve this, Eva Perón became the simulacrum of the Princess of Thieves: "the Robin Hood of the forties" (170) which is clearly seen in Madonna's simulation of Evita. In the tale of Alan Parker, Robin Hood Evita is, as expected, one that does justice to the character's ambition, one who takes from the rich to give to the poor only in order to justify her own actions. The Madonna/Evita simulacrum of Robin Hood is seen throwing money off a train, participating in

⁹³ Tomás Eloy Martínez. *Santa Evita*. Parenthetical references within the text refer to page excerpts from this novel.

numerous benevolent actions, and working incessantly in the foundation she created, *La Fundación de Ayuda Social María Eva Duarte de Perón*; with the slogan (and purpose) of offering, according to *Santa Evita*, “a life of dignity to the less favored social classes.” (173) Alan Parker’s ‘biography’ states that after returning from Europe,

and perhaps chastened by her frivolous image and her husband’s dubious politics (as viewed in the West), Eva threw herself into “good works.” She created her own charitable organization (...) and proceeded to work sixteen-hour days *righting the wrongs, as she saw them*, in Argentina’s unequal society.⁹⁴

The postmodern conception of *Santa Evita* momentarily halts the narrative of the novel and breaks down, in the eighth chapter (appropriately entitled “A Woman Reaches Her Eternity”), into an academic analysis of “the elements that went into the making of the myth of Evita,” (167) wherein the third item is, of course, the myth of Evita as Robin Hood. In his essay within the novel, Tomás Eloy Martínez explains that “nothing distressed Evita as much as seeing the foundlings [the oligarchs] turn out on Christmas Eve and the night before the national holiday” (170) where, according to the author’s illustrations, the poor were being more shamed than helped. As a result, “more than once, Evita swore that she would put an end to these humiliating annual ceremonies,” (170) and the essay tells an interesting story when the opportunity first presented itself, “in July 1946, a month later after her husband was sworn in as a head of state.” (170)

According to this version, which is also told in an Argentinean motion picture of her life (produced in retaliation to Alan Parker’s *Evita*) entitled *Eva Perón* and directed by Juan Carlos Desanzo, Evita should have been named honorary president of the Benevolent Association, a position which had always been filled by the country’s first lady. This time, once again, the ‘social

⁹⁴ Alan Parker. *The Making of Evita*. (p. 11)

vile,' seen in the subject of Eva Perón was foreclosed by "the estimable ladies" (171) who ran the organization and "were reluctant to mingle with a woman with such a dubious past, who had been born out of wedlock and lived with several men before marrying." (171) Martínez explains that, however, duty prevailed over principle and the distinguished ladies, therefore, "decided to follow tradition and offer the post to the Bimbo - as they called her in their catty gossip - while at the same time laying down so many conditions that she would be unable to accept." (171) When three members of the society finally met Evita at the presidential residence (and after Evita made them wait for three hours), they presented her with the proposal but interceded, as expected, with the argument that the first lady was too young to take the position. To their relief, Evita declined the offer explaining that playing bridge and having tea with petit fours 'wasn't her thing' though she inquired, nonetheless, how they would get along without an honorary president. As "the lady with the fox" (172) superciliously asked her to suggest someone, Evita replied, "Appoint my mother. She's fifty. She isn't a Bimbo, but she is better spoken than all of you are." (172)

As Evita turned around and gracefully climbed the stairs, Martínez tells that charity disappeared from Argentina a few weeks later and was "replaced by other theological virtues that Evita baptized 'social aid.' The Charitable Society vanished from sight, and the distinguished ladies retired to their country estates." (172) Although her prestige began to rise and her foundation was inaugurated two years later, the social abject did not vanish from Argentina, much to the contrary:

The worst part of this story is that *victims never stop being victims*. Evita didn't need to be president of a charitable organization. She wanted all charity work to bear her name, period. She worked day and night for that immortality. *She gathered up the troubles that were lying around loose* and made a bonfire of them that could be seen from afar. She did the job too well. The fire was so thorough-going it also burned her. (173) (italics mine)

EVITA

VICTORIOUS VICTIM/COMPAÑERA

Along with the Eva Perón Foundation, Evita-as-founder proceeded to please the masses (and anger the oligarchs) through a number of impassioned speeches where 'the actress' played a leader and a fellow subordinate in her call to arms to switch the social subject/object positions - and the subjects were, in this case, the very oligarchs and bourgeois of Argentina. She once delivered the following words to the maids (who now had a union, thanks to Evita's political activities) of Buenos Aires:

Your duty is to come to the Plaza de Mayo on May 1. Ask your boss for permission. She will tell you that there is laundry to be washed. Wash it. Ask her permission again. She will remind you that a skirt must be ironed. Do it a third time. If she uses another excuse, open the refrigerator, take a can of beer, and hit her on the head with it.⁹⁵

As she continued to express her hatred towards the upper and middle classes of Argentina, María Eva Duarte de Perón ceased to be first lady and became, instead, *la compañera Evita*. In a simulation of autobiography which carries her name,⁹⁶ Evita explains that no one other than the *descamisados* call her by the diminutive (affectionate) form of her first name and that, moreover, "by being Eva Perón I play an old role already performed by past women; but as Evita I live a reality which perhaps no other woman has lived in the history of mankind."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. Eva Perón. (p. 227)

⁹⁶ Entitled *La razón de mi vida* ("My mission in life"), this autobiography was much more political than it was personal (as for instance, this text was also mandatory reading for students in secondary school). Doubt remains whether she actually wrote it or not; most biographers claim that the pen belongs to the Spanish journalist Manuel Penella da Silva and that, furthermore, the work was corrected by Raúl Mende. However, the first lady approved this text as hers and it therefore should be accepted as such for the purposes of this work.

⁹⁷ Perón, Eva. La razón de mi vida. Buenos Aires: Ed. Peuser, 1951. (p. 90)

The first lady threw herself completely into doing more work for the poor and continued to take revenge upon the oligarchy through her acts and speeches. As a result, the adoration of Evita by the masses increased tremendously - but was equally proportional to that of the hatred towards *la Eva* from the oligarchs who now had their hands tied.

But whether Evita failed to admit that victims existed or was put in that position by the oligarchs of Argentina, therein lies the grandiose fatal strategy of 'the actress simulophile': she resigned herself to being a victim. According to Sebreli, "la Señora María Eva Duarte de Perón wanted to be adored like an idol - but the Hegelian dialectic of the master and servant: the woman who wishes to be adored becomes the servant of her adorer."⁹⁸ Beginning in her latter simulacrum, 'the actress' placed herself in a unique political position, acting as the bridge of love between Perón and his people. She reinforced the bond between the masses and their leader through her fervent declarations of love/idolatry towards her husband, and did so with tremendous intensity and flair, claiming that Perón was 'the nerve, the heart, and the soul of the people of Argentina.'

As performed by the 'Madonna *compañera* Evita' following the famous scene on the balcony of the Casa Rosada, 'Evita' was, on the other hand, "only a simple woman who lived to serve Perón in his noble crusade to rescue his people." It is a result of this act, Evita's strategic positioning as a woman whose mission in life was to serve the cause of her people by the side of her husband (through her acts, speeches and 'writings'), that 'the actress' played a role which undoubtedly distinguishes her from the other first ladies of Argentina and which transformed her, moreover, into the most famous Latin American woman of all times. In her condition of woman in a highly patriarchal society that was Argentina during the 1940s and 50s, this was the only role she could

⁹⁸ Juan José Sebreli. Eva Perón: ¿Aventurera o militante? (p. 51)

play in order to make herself heard, and she did it exceptionally well: proclaiming devotion, love, loyalty, adoration and admiration towards her husband and his cause; claiming Perón was their savior, their leader, their god - and that they (the *descamisados*) should worship only him as she did, for he would save them as he saved her. Anyone else using those words (and with the force and drive of her fanaticism) would have sounded ridiculous, but as the wife of the leader, Evita could get away with such remarks. Moreover, Evita became an essential political tool for her husband's party, for the masses adored her: her Peronist fever became contagious.

By consciously putting herself in that position, the powerful rhetorician exercised both a political *as well as* a Baudrillardian fatal strategy. Her political strategy is evident through her own awareness of the 'positioning' of her subject in relation to an object (her *descamisados*, her husband's party) or goal (the masses' adoration of the leader, the increase in power and popularity of Peronism, and her own desire to make herself heard).⁹⁹

But most importantly, and on an entirely different note (far from her political strategy and its intentions), however, Evita's fatal strategy lies in her outstanding ability to *seduce* the masses, her very (unconsciously done) strategy of seduction. Levin explains that the key to Baudrillard's fatal strategy (roughly defined for this purpose as "the strategy of choosing the wrong side of an argument, but seductively, so that the exquisite misery of losing can be dragged out indefinitely") does not reside in defending the object (in this case, the masses) against the subject (in this case, Evita herself, for she was speaking from the position of a first lady - and not as an *ex-descamisada*), but rather in taking the object's point of view in a world of subjects - in effect, to *become* the

⁹⁹ Charles Levin. Jean Baudrillard: A study in cultural metaphysics. (p. 271)

subject.¹⁰⁰ Evita did not revel in the illegitimacy of cultural dichotomies (she suffered them, and prophesized her suffering in her own seduction of the masses), but took equal pleasure in attempting to destroy them (and thus, by extension, prove the nature of their ridiculousness) by replacing the world of *descamisados* with the world that had been occupied by the upper classes she despised (for the very reason that they had condemned the rest of Argentina - which, at once, was the majority of Argentines - to the position of excluded 'other' in the first place). Evita placed her subject (of first lady) in the position of an object (the *descamisado*) to perfection precisely because she was the very incarnation of Cinderella (who had once been the object, then became the subject) - who wished that her beloved "little greasers" found their fairy godmother as well.

Perón was, of course, the fairy godmother. Herein lies the distinction between Evita's political and fatal strategies: in the former is her strategic positioning as the wife of Perón, his main worshipper, in order to gain grounds of speech which were unheard of then for a first lady; in the latter lies her (unconscious) ability to seduce the masses by becoming their object: the object of their dreams, the woman who represented everything they once thought was impossible to attain.

In order to obtain this role, the actress Evita Duarte had to transform herself into María Eva Duarte de Perón first and, subsequently, as she performed, into Eva Perón, the founder and benefactress. Upon these two transformations, 'the actress' found the solid grounds from where she could speak and could be heard; her stage, in other words. This was undoubtedly the best performance of 'the actress,' for this was the only instance that she 'acted' as herself. The masses, in turn, adored her. And when she died, their adoration rendered her immortal. She became Santa Evita, while her body became a relic and the most powerful political tool in Argentina at the time.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 137.

MARIA MAGGI DE MAGISTRIS

IN ABSENTIA/THE MISSING BODY

The art of the embalmer resembles that of the biographer: both try to immobilize a body or a life in the pose in which eternity is to remember it. *The Eva Perón Case*, a story that Ara completed shortly before his death, links the two undertakings to form a single all-powerful movement: the biographer is at once the embalmer, and the biography is also an autobiography of his funerary art. This is evident in every line of the text: Ara reconstructs Evita's body only in order to be able to recount how he has done so.

- Tomás Eloy Martínez, SANTA EVITA

On July 26, 1952, Evita Perón entered immortality as 'the actress' was reborn and perpetually reproduced in infinite forms which fed off her brief thirty-three-year-old existence: the canon of writers from the elite framed the blackness of 'that woman' while the worshippers venerated the image of their Santa Evita, and her body, in the interim, was in the process of being artistically-crafted by an embalmer. During the three-year period following her exalted funeral, Evita was venerated as a saint as two new figures, in the form of rituals, were added to Peronist iconography. The first took place at the 26th day of every month, in a procession of torches lit to keep her flame eternal. The second took place in nightly punctuations of her death at 20:25, when anchors would interrupt their programs to remind the audience of the hour that Eva Perón, Spiritual Leader of the Nation, entered immortality. In the period between 1952 and 1955, Evita was revered like a saint by her husband and his party, who continued to exalt her image. Santa Evita gained endless post-mortem titles such as the First Samaritan, the Solace of the Humble, the Wonderful Fairy and was perpetually worshipped as the holy, divine, humble Evita by her legion of followers. This cult was so vigorous, in fact, that following Perón's downfall in 1955, Evita's embalmed body, a powerful relic, became a threat to the new military government that deposed him and, as a result, was kidnapped and hidden. Its whereabouts remained a mystery for seventeen years.

During the period that Argentines desperately attempted to unearth the missing body, the pose of 'the actress' was embalmed in two distinct images - Santa Evita and 'that woman' - as an infinity of stories and legends emerged about the afterlife of the corpse of the nation. Some said her body was replicated in three distinct identical copies in order to confuse seekers (the numbers of copies vary, actually, all the way up to fifteen), others said she had been thrown in the Río de la Plata, and others actually believed she was buried on the moon.

In 1971, Evita's body was returned to her exiled husband in Madrid, who promised to bring it back to Argentina but never alluded to it again. Amidst this bacchanal of necrophilia, in the interim, a group of pseudo-Peronists called Montoneros (who fed off the red myth of Evita, *la pasionaria*, the revolutionary leader) that had been demanding Evita's return for a long time, desecrated the tomb of President Aramburu (who had replaced Perón following the coup in 1955) and removed his corpse, which they vowed to keep until their blond and luminous love was returned to Argentina. 'If Evita lived,' they cried, 'she would have been a Montonera.' (*Si Evita viviera, sería Montonera*) The beautiful blond *pasionaria* was one of them.

As a result of the incessant demands and threats from the part of the worshippers of Santa Evita throughout those years, Evita was brought back from Madrid in a charter flight on November 17, 1974 by the government of Isabel Perón who (as expected) used the image of her husband's second wife (Perón had been a widower once before Evita) to enhance her party's. On October 22 of the following year, the body was taken to the cemetery of La Recoleta in Buenos Aires, where a very small plaque announces her presence rendered invisible by the blank, cold walls of the Duarte crypt. Evita has remained there until today. But where had 'the actress' actually been during the period she disappeared?

As far as Evita's missing body, a certain Maria Maggi de Magistris, Italian, widow, immigrant in Argentina, was buried in a cemetery in Italy in 1956. Both Marias (Evita and the simulacrum) had been dead for five years before finding perpetual repose at plot number 86, section 41, in Milan. Evita had indeed been buried under a false name, and remained underground as Maria de Magistris for almost twenty years. In terms of 'the actress,' however, we return to the solidification of the two dichotomies emergent from her life: Santa Evita in idolatry, 'that woman' in blasphemy.

It is interesting to notice that "the fascination for her dead body began even before her illness, in 1950" (180) and that, moreover, every single celebrated Argentinean author has written about Evita at some point, in a million different ways: plays, scripts, poems, novels, short stories. They were the vital agents who never allowed her to return by not letting her leave in the first place, exalting (through fiction writing) a number posthumous phrases and actions attributed to the first lady in the process. It is in literature, above all, that the legend of 'that woman' is registered perpetually. Once Perón had fallen and they were finally free to speak of Evita, the writers of the Argentinean elite did not fall short of renditions about 'that bastard girl.' Evita had for long been the Baudrillardian form of Evil, "metamorphosed into all the viral and terroristic forms" that obsessed them.¹⁰¹

In 1950, Julio Cortázar's novel entitled *The Test* told "the story of a brutish multitude from every corner of Argentina that suddenly appears in the Plaza de Mayo to worship a bone." (180) Obsessed about her death and her origins, and with a tremendous desire to exterminate, obliterate

¹⁰¹ Jean Baudrillard. The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena. London: Verso, 1993. (p. 81)

Evil-Evita, the writers' pens marched with furious passion. Of their obsession in the years that Cortázar wrote *The Test*, Tomás Eloy Martínez, says that

[Evita, still in good health] with sharp fangs and cruel talons thirsting for blood, *inspired a sacred terror*. She was a woman who came out of the darkness of the cave and ceased to embroider, to starch the shirts, to light the fire in the kitchen, to brew the maté, to bathe the kids, and installed herself in the halls of government and lawmaking, which were domains reserved for men. "That strange woman was different from almost every other white woman," the *Black Book of the Second Tyranny*, published in 1958, says of her. "She lacked education but not political intuition: she was vehement, dominating, and spectacular." (181) (*italics mine*)

The sacred terror was Evil-Evita, and she obsessed them. The necrophiliac tendencies of the writers, moreover, also dated before her death, as "the intellectual elite imagined her dying with the same gestures with which, perhaps, she made love." (181) Martínez explains that, for them, Evita would die like the lowlife, the woman who's been around, and that "everything had to be done openly, shamelessly, intimidating the elite by her intimate, exaggerated, strident privacy." (181)

And within their desire to make real the practices Baudrillard labels "prophylactic measures, by annihilating its own natural referent (...) by exterminating all the germs and all of the accursed share, by performing cosmetic surgery on the negative,"¹⁰² Martínez explains that the best stories of the fifties in Argentina are a parody of her death, as "writers needed to forget Evita, to exorcise her ghost." (181) The author makes reference to a story written by Juan Carlos Onetti in 1953 (published forty years later) wherein the corpse of 'that woman' was dyed green and disappeared in a sinister greenness: "Now they were waiting for the rotting to spread, for a green fly to come down, despite the season, and alight on her open lips. Her forehead was turning green." (excerpt cited in the novel, 181) The body of Maria Maggi de Magistris could have been resting in peace, but the legend of 'that woman' who had been missing continued to torment - and delight - in subsequent decades.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 80.

The obsession to purge 'that woman' - after her death - out of Argentina was made immortal in literature as the simulacrum Evil-Evita. In a story entitled *Esa Mujer* ("That Woman," precisely), Rodolfo Walsh expresses the desire to sink her in the river (La Plata), throw her off a plane, burn her and flush her down the toilet, destroy her - then "piss on her."¹⁰³ In another example, Leónidas Lamborghini describes, in a poem, the desperate will to kill that dead body once and for all: "May it rot, may it dry / The cadaver that does not die."¹⁰⁴ But the cadaver of 'the actress' did not die then. It did not die ever, on the contrary, it gained more titles in the baptism which followed her death/rebirth. 'The actress' had as many nicknames as saint (i.e. Spiritual Leader of the Nation and the Lady of Hope) as she did as prostitute. In *Santa Evita*, Tomás Eloy Martínez cites some of them (i.e. Mare, Colt, Bug, Cockroach, Friné, Estercita, Milonguita, Butterfly) and explains their origin:

Mare and *Bug* were common ways of referring to Evita among the army officers opposed to Perón, at least from the beginning of 1951 on. *Friné* and *Butterfly* were nicknames for her popularized by Ezequiel Martínez Estrada's columns in the weekly *Propósitos*. According to [Helvio] Botana, *bug* and *cockroach* were words that meant "vagina" in Buenos Aires prison slang. *Estercita* and *Milonguita* come from the tango "Milonguita" composed in 1919 - the year Evita was born - by Samuel Linning and Enrique Delfino. (115)¹⁰⁵

According to the novel, for the *descamisados*, on the other hand, the words the Mare and the Filly (Buenos Aires slang which meant "hooker," "B-girl," "nut case" at the time) had not been given up as names for her altogether, "but they turned their meaning around so that they were no longer taken as insults. To them, Evita was the lead mare, the one that guided the herd." (14)

¹⁰³ Rodolfo Walsh. "Esa mujer," in Los oficios terrestres. Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1986.

¹⁰⁴ Leónidas Lamborghini. "Las patas en la fuente," in El solicitante deslocalado. Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1986.

¹⁰⁵ Through personal conversation with the author, I learned that these names were fictional. Nonetheless, their (though fictitious) nature applies to the purpose of this analysis.

EVITA

[FILL IN THE BLANK]

'The actress' survived until today, and still lives. At the time when Borges wrote *The Simulacrum*, 'the blond doll [who] was not the woman Eva Duarte' was only a mysterious individual whose real face and secret name we will not know. In the 45 years which have passed since the funeral event narrated in the short story, 'the actress' remains that mysterious individual, but has been replaced by a number of different models of herself: an illegitimate child, an actress, a lover, a founder, a benefactress, a wife, a renouncer, a first lady, a martyr, a saint, a prostitute. In simulacra: Eva María Ibargüren, Evita Duarte, Evita Durante, María Eva Duarte de Perón, Eva Perón, Evita, Maria Maggi de Magistris. None of these seven faces of Eve hide the truth; rather, they serve to reveal that there is no truth for the meaning resides in the simulacrum: the simulacrum exists, Evita doesn't. Each and every one of the seven references of Evita give rise to 'the actress' which is no longer herself but her sign for she ceases to exist as all of the above to become none of the above, then she appears again in another form. The referent ('the actress') is lost.

'That woman' has long been replaced by her double and her story can only be recounted through the narratives in a *simulography*, in the (non)biography which makes it possible to supply the many different women contained within the body of one, which is at once an un-body that has given rise to a number of other women in the process. 'The actress' acted all along, was 'acted' through by the many authors who 'spoke' her (in the Foucauldian sense), and still continues to act. Only time will tell how many more different chapters will be added to her simulography, how many times she will be modified to be none and all: history and simulation march on.

THREE

As her memory became incarnate and people folded within that body the folds of their own memories...

✿ Tomás Eloy Martínez, SANTA EVITA

She grounds predication without strictly speaking being marked by it; she is not determined through the application of such or such quality. She subsists "within herself" beneath discourse. As that which has also been called prime matter.

✿ Luce Irigaray, MARINE LOVER

FRAMING A POSE IN IMMORTALITY

I mentioned earlier that the Evita portrayed by the Webber/Rice duo, and later by Parker, was one which was born on July 26, 1952, the date of her death, as a result of the discourse that sprung from the moment she entered immortality. This, however, was not only the case of the fictional Evita but, most importantly, it was from this occurrence onwards that the once single and singular first lady ceased to exist at the source and became, rather, what Derrida would call the turns of speech, allegories, figures and metaphors which she has derivated.⁷¹ The 'Evita that lived' her 33 years of existence, born on May 7, 1919 is, in reality, over 75 years old and the first lady herself is, moreover, accountable for the numerous routes that emerged in the framing of her immortality: unsurprisingly, even the time of her death, officially announced at 20:25, is said to be another fabrication of her own as, according to Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, "whatever the actual time, Eva did not die at 8:25 p.m. But that was the time of her marriage to Perón, and it was the time she chose for her death."¹⁰⁶

Evita's pose in immortality was framed in two different instances, wandering in two distinct directions. The first, of course, regards her existence in life: her body alive, the Evita which existed from 1919 to 1952 as an illegitimate child, an actress, a lover, a first lady, a benefactress, a saint. This Evita was delivered on the day she was born, redelivered on the day that she died; giving birth to, concurrently, millions of Evitas in the process. The myth of this Evita has existed for over 75 years in uncountable transfigurations - its mythology marches on.

⁷¹ Jacques Derrida. Margins of Philosophy. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982. (p. 280)

¹⁰⁶ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. Eva Perón. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995. (p. 277)

Evita's existence on a second level, on the other hand, is one which occurs solely on the plane of her corpse and it is the story of a curse and of an afterlife which remained untold by Broadway and Hollywood: Evita, the phantom of the opera. Her name and (dead) body were the phantom, and the opera was, of course, Argentina. If we were to look at Evita's cadaver as a work of art, we should note that, as such, she would be, according to Walter Benjamin, "received and valued on different planes. Two polar types stand out: with one, the accent is on the cult value; with the other, on the exhibition value of the work. Artistic production begins with the ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult."¹⁰⁷ Benjamin's first polar type, the cult value, was accentuated during the period that Evita was a saint. As mentioned previously, her sainthood commenced in the latter part of her 33-year-old existence as the Spiritual Leader of the Nation, augmented as she was stricken with cancer, was glorified by her majestic funeral, and reached its apogee during the three years that followed the event. Once dead, Evita's body was a relic to her followers and the CGT (General Confederation of Labor) in Buenos Aires became a sanctuary which drew thousands of Argentines who came to mourn and worship her. Anonymity has been said to be Evita's biggest fear, but it was a fear that she surpassed, in life; a merit of her *descamisados* and of herself, of course. Evita, in life, secured her body's cult value in immortality. Her loyal followers, undoubtedly, never forgot her.

But it is through Benjamin's second polar type, the exhibition value, that Evita's dead body was transformed into an everlasting work of art, literally and figuratively - one which was conceived through Juan Perón's bizarre suggestion of framing his wife's pose in immortality. Perón's idea not only assured her cult value, granting her last wish (mythologically, "not to be forgotten"), but was,

¹⁰⁷ Walter Benjamin. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken, 1968. (p. 224)

furthermore, commensurate with Evita's proud refusal, as he later put it, "to waste away underground."¹⁰⁸ Her husband's manner of adding exhibition value to the perpetually immortal cult value of this work of art, Evita's corpse, could only be achieved through a funerary craft: the art of embalming. The existence of this work of art, the artistically-embalmed cadaver of Eva Perón, represents the second discursive journey of Evita through the excursion which transformed her into the most powerful and meaningful body of Argentina.

The second airplane departs.

SHREDS OF MY LIFE

In a 1949 speech, Evita defined her body as "a tended bridge towards the happiness of all," almost ordering her *descamisados* "to cross it (...) towards the supreme destiny of the new nation. I will give myself completely."¹⁰⁹ In life, Evita zealously offered (her heart and) her body as the junction between Perón and his people, the overpass of love between the masses and their leader. In the following three years after this declaration, this bond became indestructible and, paradoxically, progressively stronger as her body became, simultaneously, progressively feeble. Evita's will endured - and strengthened - though the physical bridge began to fall apart. The first lady had never allowed weakness.

Not even the frailty of her body would be an enemy worthy of her. Evita's permanently delicate health had never been a mountain she wouldn't climb, which probably accounts for the myth

¹⁰⁸ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. Eva Perón. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995. (p. 278)

¹⁰⁹ Matilde Sánchez. Evita: Imágenes de una pasión. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1996. (p. 129)

of the first signs of Evita's deterioration due to uterine cancer. It is believed, by some, that the crumbling of her body began upon her return from Europe, but by most, "the generally accepted date is January 9, 1950. On that day Evita was inaugurating the new seat of the taxi drivers' union when she fainted in front of Dr. Oscar Ivanissevich, Minister of Education. Three days later, Ivanissevich removed Eva's appendix and also diagnosed cancer of the uterus."¹¹⁰ Years later, the doctor declared that he had prescribed a hysterectomy to the first lady in 1950, claiming to have told Evita that her cancer required surgery. The first lady is said to have responded, "You will not touch me. I am fine." Some have said that a few months later, the doctor was back to insist on the operation and Eva is alleged to have hit him with her purse. This forced the irritated doctor to drop the subject.¹¹¹

Evita was invincible and nothing could stop her, least of all her frail body. Within less than a month following her appendicitis operation, she was back to her regular 18-hour day schedule; if she returned to her house at five in the morning, by eight she would be up and ready to start her day. Evita would neglect her health until the day that she died, even if it meant cheating her doctors and nurses. The denial was also accompanied by her husband, who never forced her to have an operation or to slow down. Aurelia Tizón, Perón's first wife, had also died of uterine cancer. This explains, perhaps, why the President would rather Evita spent her time out of his sight, working madly at her foundation, so that he wouldn't recognize in her all the symptoms he had encountered previously in his first wife. Or, simply put, maybe he couldn't bear to witness the death of the woman he loved.

¹¹⁰ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. Eva Perón. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995. (p. 260)

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 260. Some have added, "The fact is that they want to eliminate me so that I stay away from politics. And they will not succeed!" to her reply.

Denial only existed on the level of the two leaders. As the deterioration of Evita's body became progressively more evident, the discourse encompassing her physical breakdown magnified accordingly on two oppositional polarities: on one side, it was the victory of the enemy; someone went as far as inscribing LONG LIVE CANCER in the walls of a rail station in Buenos Aires. On the other, with the help of Peronist propaganda, the sacrifice was rapidly attributed to the saint: Santa Evita overlooked her own well-being for the love of her "little greasers," her *descamisados*.

The final year of Evita's illness defined and amplified her entire existence. Evita herself had transposed the defeat of her body to the augmentation of her cause. On October 17, 1951, her last *Día de la Lealtad*¹¹² in life, she marked the words which would remain in Argentina's memory eternally (and which the opposition, on the other hand, perpetuated through their mocking):-

I have never wanted, nor do I want, anything for me. My glory is, and will always be, the shield of Perón and the flag of my people. And if I leave shreds of my life on the road, I know you will gather my name in honour and will carry it as a flag to victory.

I know that God is with us because He is with the humble and despises the arrogance of the oligarchy, and this is why victory will be ours. We will attain it, sooner or later, whatever it costs, whoever may fall.¹¹³

Upon pronouncing those words, she fell into Perón's arms and cried. The shreds of her life had already entered immortality. In life, the puissant rhetorician was also a prophet. Evita was the architect of what her dead body would later become - almost as if she could predict her fantastic and unbelievable posthumous journey.

¹¹² From Spanish, "Day of Loyalty." October 17 is the most meaningful date in Peronist iconography. October 18, the holiday extended by the President as the day of San Perón, had been dedicated, in 1951, to Santa Evita. The act of October 17, 1951 marked, furthermore, the first broadcast delivered in Argentinean television. Evita's official portrait was the first image ever to be diffused by a Buenos Aires television transmitter.

¹¹³ Eva Perón. Discursos Completos, 1949-1952. Buenos Aires: Editorial Megafón, 1986. (p. 366)

EVA SE VA

Evita's last words reverberate like a chant. *Eva se va*, Eva is leaving. After vocalizing her strain in a tune which forbids her departure, these words return with an echo of the everlastingness of her name. The harmony of the notes resounds continuously through the superficial alteration of life and death in the moment Evita's body leaves grounds of signification: *Eva se va*, she sings, thinking she's dying while, in reality, she gives birth: the Deceased becomes the Immortal as her name vibrates continuously, granting perpetual life to her memory. Her cadaver gains a separate life.

Thirty-three years of existence grant the three different elements which juxtapose each other and, intertwined, mark the personality traits of her cadaver. These three ethereal realms give life to Evita's corpse and, simultaneously, enhance and secure the immortality of the life which, only superficially, has left this world. Evita never left, quite the contrary: she was once again multiplied, though this time, in a different form of life, her afterlife.

The first element is a mark of her myth in being: her short-lived existence. Her thirty-three years of life place Evita in the lineage of the two other great Argentinean icons of the century. Both of her *compañeros* are male, but, like Evita, lived in glory and died at the peak of their eminence: after exporting tango to the world, Carlos Gardel died in a plane crash at age forty-four; after becoming a symbol of revolution, Ernesto Guevara de la Sierna, affectionately nicknamed "el Che" by Fidel Castro, was shot to death in Bolivia at age thirty-nine. Like her fellow Argentineans, Evita died young at the pinnacle of her glory and, as a result, the hunger of her myth feeds on the splendor of her achievements. Her cult in life, moreover, was directly transposed into her body as her cadaver represents, in this instance, everything Evita was in life. In addition, as a result of her sainthood, it

becomes a relic, the symbol of the existence of Santa Evita. Eva Perón was Santa Evita during the later years of her short-lived life. According to Barthes, “signification is the myth itself, just as the Saussurean sign is the word (or more accurately the concrete unit)” but there exists, nonetheless, an essential correlation between the mythical concept and the mythical form.¹¹⁴ Evita’s brief existence functions, of course, as both, for, as Barthes would put it, her myth is not defined “by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no ‘substantial’ ones.”¹¹⁵ Therefore, once her brief life had been appropriated by discourse, Evita became a myth which, in a second instance, adapted “a type of social *usage* which is added to pure matter.”¹¹⁶ Furthermore, in this case, the already-existent myth of Evita remained a mode of signification and once transformed and transposed into the object of her body, gave rise to an entirely different, though parallel, myth of its own.

The second element regards the (myth of the) event of her death in the way it utters its message as it portrays the glory of a warrior. Both the mythical concept and the mythical form of Evita’s death supply her myth, in life and in death through alterations and transmutations, with a character trait Evita shares with Che (not with Gardel): both myths died in battle, fighting for their cause. Che was shot to death in Bolivia, Evita neglected her health and remained loyal to her *descamisados* until the last day of her life. Both sacrifices were witnessed by the public, and society, in turn, appropriated the message Evita and Che conveyed by their oblation. As Barthes explains that “there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear

¹¹⁴ Roland Barthes. Mythologies. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972 [1957]. (p. 121)

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 109.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 109.

completely” and that history can very easily suppress them precisely because they are historical,¹¹⁷ one could say that, therefore, the myth of the sacrifice, once it came into being, was modified (and suppressed by history) to give birth to a second trait (and myth) that Evita and Che have in common: their martyrdom.

The third and final element revolves around the myth of Evita's cancer. Her slow and arduous mode of perishing is the quintessential representation of what Barthes calls “the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature.” In *Mythologies*, he proceeds to explain that

We now understand why, *in the eyes of the myth-consumer*, the intention, the adomination of the concept can remain manifest without however appearing to have an interest in the matter: what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason.¹¹⁸

Therefore, Evita's prolonged death through the uterine cancer which slowly took hold of her body, and had every moment monitored by the masses and the oligarchs, extended two antitheses to the nature of her death myth for, according to Barthes, it is the reader who lives the myth as a story is at once true and unreal: for the *descamisados* and Peronists, it was a moment of extended heartache and sorrow, a collective grief; for her enemies, anti-Peronists and oligarchs heading the list, it was an anticipation of riddance, an impatient awaiting for the moment of purge. In the same manner, two polarities were added to the nature of her cancer myth: to the first readers, those who loved her, the cancer represented her courage; to the second, who despised her, the disease was a gift of the heavens sent to rid Argentina of the plague of Evita. Most importantly, as I've mentioned, both the cancer and her slow death served to magnify and enlarge her entire existence.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 120.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 129.

DEFINITELY INCORRUPTIBLE

The myth of the thirty-three-year-old Evita brought about by the three ethereal elements - her short life, her martyrdom, her cancer - were braided into her cadaver's hair as her memory embodied the wholeness of her corpse. Whether or not Perón's claim that his wife wished to be embalmed was true, Evita knew she would be exhibited and her vanity was a mannerism she carried to immortality, along with her cult. Her loyal hairdresser, Julio Alcaraz, arrived at her residence in the morning following the night she entered immortality, to style her freshly-dyed blond braid on the nape and preserve it forever. Following Alcaraz came her manicurist, Sara Gatti, who sat by the side of her client, removed Evita's dark red polish and applied a fresh new coat of a transparent Revlon hue to her nails.

But it was Pedro Ara, a Spanish anatomy professor, who artistically crafted Evita's body as a work of funerary art. During the dawn of July 27, he aided a sobbing Sarita in separating the fingers of her client, entwining his own fingers with the Deceased's so that she could finish her work. The embalmer, the manicurist and the hairdresser saw the sun shining through the window facing a garden and the Río de la Plata on the sorrowful morning after. From that moment onwards, the cadaver of Eva Perón was, as Ara later put it in memoirs he composed about his favorite work of art, "absolutely and definitely incorruptible."¹¹⁹ So was her memory. Ara, Alcaraz, and Gatti worked "as if in a dream"¹²⁰ (as Gatti later put it in a testimony); the three fairy godmothers granting Sleeping Beauty a splendor that would last one hundred years.

¹¹⁹ Pedro Ara. El caso Eva Perón. Madrid: CUS Ediciones, 1974. (p. 65)

¹²⁰ Marysa Navarro. Evita. Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 1994. (p. 314)

In order to prepare Evita for the upcoming exhibition, Ara began his labors shortly after her friends and family had left her bedroom on the night of June 26, 1952. He worked the entire night on a preparatory embalming which he would perfect, later, as soon as the memorial procedures had terminated. The long funeral began that morning and lasted until August 11. Those thirteen days were Evita's first journey in death. From her bedroom in the presidential residency, she was taken to the Ministry of Labor, where her body was displayed in a crystal-covered casket, with the rosary beads given to her by the pope placed between her fingers. On August 9, her casket was placed on a gun carriage and taken to Congress, then to the CGT, her final destination, where she would lay in rest until the construction of the Monument to the Descamisado was completed. The monument, a project created by her husband's party, where Evita's embalmed cadaver would be placed in a silver sarcophagus to rest in perpetuity. Though her temple of adoration - which was meant to be the world's biggest monument, carrying an image of the Peronist laborer twice as large as the Statue of Liberty - was never terminated, her veneration was always immortal.

During those thirteen days, Evita was displayed everywhere - her body and her image, in infinite reproductions - as a work of art. Her pre-embalmed cadaver was exhibited at the Secretariat of Labor, her official portrait was displayed in the major squares of Buenos Aires. The flowers, the procession of torches, the punctuation of her death at 20:25 hours: her cult was ubiquitous, omnipresently exhibited.

As Evita was being mourned by the people at the Ministry of Labor, a group of technicians had transformed the second floor of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), the final destination of her first journey in death, into an intricate technical laboratory to which only Pedro Ara and Juan Perón had the keys. Ara required the installation of three metallic tins filled with mysterious liquids

where he alternately submerged Evita's cadaver. Ara has never supplied details regarding the contents of the pools nor of the occurrences during the long hours that he spent crafting her pose in immortality, but this is only a minor representation of how specific elements in the making of her cadaver, and its posthumous journey, have remained a mystery and, in return, were 'spoken' and 'written' by a variety of versions that suspend and/or superimpose each other as they fill in the gaps which 'real facts' failed to supply. More than that. From articles in newspapers to personal testimonies, these renditions served to penetrate the invisible borders between fact and fiction in the myth of Evita, what Ara had previously done to her cadaver during its first night in immortality: an absolute and definite incorruption.

The boundaries between reality and illusion encompassing Evita's death are essentially invisible as factual and fictional elements are twisted in a knot forming a single, all-powerful movement: the myth of Evita and, in its extension, the myth of the creation and journey of her cadaver. Both of these elements - the real and the fantastic, the latter a direct consequence of the former and, in addition, of the public imaginary and the discursive regularities - could be regarded as the heroes and the villains of History. Historical texts aspire to be woven with the threads of 'actual facts' as 'they occurred,' ridding themselves of - if not discarding completely - the images forged by the imaginary, the distortion of information, in their desperate desire to narrate the 'real occurrences' of characters and events. With "no wish at the outset to exclude any effort to uncover and free these 'prediscursive' experiences from the tyranny of the text," Michel Foucault explains that a history of the referent is no doubt possible¹²¹ but that, in another instance, discourse is formed by a complex set of relations, which are not present in the object but are, rather, established between

¹²¹ Michel Foucault. The Archeology of Knowledge. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972. (p. 47)

institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization.¹²² One could argue, therefore, that a study of the historical conditions which give rise to the appearance of an object of discourse could be seen as a quintessential constituent of the portrayal of an element of history, and, in the case of Evita's dead body, provide an understanding of the corpus of regularities which extended her cadaver to represent Argentina. Foucault argues

(...) that discursive formation is defined (as far as its objects are concerned, at least) if one can establish such a group [of relations between authorities of emergence, delimitation, and specification]; if one can show how any particular object of discourse finds in its place and law of emergence; if one can show that it may give birth simultaneously or successively to mutually exclusive objects, without having to modify itself.

Therefore, in a return to the existence and emergence of the abovementioned 'legitimate' sources which incessantly supply elements to the myth of Evita, the various accounts and versions of 'what has happened' and 'what has not' which are perceived by History as detrimental to 'real facts,' are, precisely, the very determinants of what Foucault refers to as "the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyse them, classify them, explain them, etc."¹²³ In other words, by looking at the names, analyses, classifications, explanations of the portrayal and elaboration of these sources while trying to locate the relations that characterize a discursive practice, we would be enlarging the very realm of possibilities offered by historic discourse itself. In its attempt to narrate 'real' and 'factual' accounts,

¹²² Ibid, p. 45.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 46.

historic discourse presents itself as an objective reproduction of the past, when it is, in reality, a limited construction of specific - and selected - descriptions. Furthermore, in its desire to be an impeccable 'factual' reconstruction of the past, historic discourse weaves its texts by reducing them to a limited 'reality.' Myths, likewise, are easily suppressed by history precisely because they are historical, according to Barthes. He says:

The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the 'naturalness' with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history. In short, in the account given of our contemporary circumstances, I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there.¹²⁴

Taking into account that a writer's language, for Barthes, "is not expected to *represent* reality, but to signify it,"¹²⁵ the act of reconstructing the Evita-in-myth intertwined with the Evita-in-history through the semiological value of the literary novel can be, perhaps, the ideal manner to register manifestations of the complex set of relations which inform discursive practices by transcending what is strictly referential and incorporating the Barthesian *what-goes-without-saying* within the text's decorative display. Novelists can provide the latitude that 'historical facts' leave behind as they weave their texts in a multiplicity of manners in an attempt to register both the real and the imaginary, allowing for an infinity of readings in each and every portrayal granted to the many aspects of Evita: her life, her death, her body, Argentinean politics, identities, hegemony. A text of this magnitude, in an instance, redeems the semiological value of historic events and of myths,

¹²⁴ Roland Barthes. Mythologies. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972 [1957]. (p. 11)

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 137.

capturing within it, simultaneously, the secret desires of a community, its fetishes, compulsions, fantasies, trepidations, fears and obsessions and, in so doing, is able to recapture (at least parts of) the ideological abuse within its own rewriting. I do not intend to say, however, that this act would reveal the hidden complexities within ideology for, as Barthes says, both ideology and literary realism do not depend at all on the language spoken by the writer, for language is a form which cannot possibly be realistic or unrealistic.¹²⁶ Moreover, according to Judith Butler, this very ideal of a radical inclusivity is already impossible in itself.¹²⁷

I am saying, nonetheless, that the literary novel opens new ground as it is capable of comprising within the text, partially of course, the elements that History and Nature, intertwined or not, often leave behind. Applying this notion to the “corpse of Argentina,” one could say, therefore, that the discursive constituents do not abide in the adoration or the hatred of Argentineans but that, rather, they are constituted by the symbolic effect of Evita’s cadaver, where the divisions, exclusions and oppressions which constitute a national identity reside. According to Slavoj Žižek, “every discursive formation must be understood in relation to that which it cannot accommodate within its own discursive or symbolic terms”¹²⁸ extending, therefore, the possibility of such an understanding to the literary novel as its texts are capable of weaving the deconstruction of a myth through a reconstruction of a fictional character, working with the unexplored domains, the unexplained gaps, and the simplified details that historic discourse leaves behind. This text is capable of recollecting and deciphering the enigmatic forces underpinned in the public imaginary.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 136.

¹²⁷ Judith Butler. Bodies That Matter. London: Routledge, 1993. (p. 193)

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 192.

MADAME EVITA BUTTERFLY

Seeing that “the only thing that can be done with reality is to invent it again” (83),¹²⁹ Tomás Eloy Martínez intertwined the mythical body of Evita with the Eva Perón in history, converging the verities and fables of her life and death, along with the *postmortem* expedition of her embalmed corpse, into a postmodern fictional montage entitled *Santa Evita*. The author, represented as a fictitious character and narrator in the novel, rewrites and reconstructs biography, history and myth into a effervescently farcical and somberly perverse narrative which encompasses both the gist and its vicinities. The textuality of *Santa Evita* mellifluously illuminates the woman who “ceased to be what she said and what she did to become what people say she said and what people say she did” (13) and sheds new light upon details that biographers and historians commonly leave behind, seeking to unfold “the unexplained blank spaces” (368) of her domain while tracking the political, mythical, historical body of desires which Evita’s cadaver, the body of the nation, incorporates. “As her memory became incarnate and people unfolded within that body the folds of their own memories” (13); Martínez penetrates Argentina’s collective imaginary through the millions of marks Evita has left behind and, in doing so, recaptures the very essence of her history and, moreover, that of her country’s.

In addition, the textuality of *Santa Evita* undrapes the roots of the complex set of relations which provide an understanding of the corpus of discursive regularities that extend the representation of Argentina to Evita’s embalmed cadaver as the novel bares and reconstructs the miracles, desires,

¹²⁹ Tomás Eloy Martínez. *Santa Evita*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996. References contained in parentheses inside the text refer to excerpts extracted from this novel.

secrets, and hauntings including the fragments and revelations which triggered the narrative flow, as “little by little Evita began to turn into a story that, before it ended, kindled another.” (13) As its text works with the unexplored domains, filling the vacant spaces within the mythic and historic gaps, and augmenting the condensed details that historic discourse has left behind, *Santa Evita* deconstructs a myth and a historic figure through the reconstruction of a fictional character while it recollects and deciphers the enigmatic forces within the public imaginary. For this reason, there is no better work, to date, which serves to illustrate the public discourse of Evita’s wanderer corpse and, by extension, to show how this particular object of discourse finds its place and law of emergence. I will be using *Santa Evita*, from now onwards, to illustrate how this is so.

The essence of this cadaver - and of the novel - lies in the metaphor of the butterfly. In *Santa Evita*, (the character of) Martínez incorporates the hunter which chases Evita, the universal butterfly of desires - not only of the author’s but, furthermore, of the reader’s and of the characters in the novel. In the words of the author:

If this novel resembles a butterfly’s wings - the story of death flowing forward, the story of her life advancing backward, visible darkness, oxymoron of similarities - it must also bear a likeness to me, to the remains of the myth that I kept hunting for along the way, to the *I* who was *she*, to the loves and hates of that *we*, to what my country was and to what it wanted to be but could not be. *Mito* in my native tongue is not only “myth” but also the name of a bird that no one can see, and *story* means “search,” “inquiry”: the text is a search for the invisible, or the stillness of what flies. (54)

In his novel, Martínez recounts the tales of a rare and desired species and of those who hunted her in an interminable metamorphosis and intersection of bodies which fuse into a single nymph, the corpse of Eva Perón. *Santa Evita* is the cocoon which encompasses the veracities and illusions of the real and mythical bodies of Evita: the narrative follows the trajectory of Evita’s real body, her

embalmed cadaver and its journeys, as it simultaneously reconstitutes a mythical body which exposes the hopes, obsessions, fears, fetishes and desires of Argentina. The narrator-character recklessly chases the object of his desire as he penetrates the domain of the public imaginary, attempting to fill his net with everything the precious butterfly leaves behind her: he desperately seeks to find the Evita within the paradox of her omnipresence and ubiquity. She is everywhere, even unconsciously:

(...) I dreamed of her. She was an enormous butterfly suspended in the eternity of a sky without a breath of wind. One wing, a black one, was billowing forward, above a desert of cathedrals and cemeteries; the other wing was yellow and was flying backward, dropping scales in which the landscapes of her life lighted up in reverse historical order as in Eliot's verses: *In my beginning is my end.. / And do not call it fixity, / Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards, Neither ascent nor decline, / Except for the point, the still point...* (54)

His hunt knows no limits. As the narrator-character leads the reader through his own obsession with the chase of this butterfly, the novel becomes a document of his quest. He seeks to speak to those who knew her as "her mother, the steward of the presidential residence, her hairdresser, her film director, her manicurist, two actresses from her theatrical company, the comic musician who got her work in Buenos Aires." (53) He searches for her in newsreels, archives, documents, newspapers, testimonies, everything he can get his hands on, attempting to reconstruct her even if his sources "are not altogether reliable" for "only in the sense that this is true of reality and language as well: lapses of memory and imperfect truths have found their way into them." (126) As a result of his search, the narrator-character reconstructs the essence of his butterfly, precisely due to his own initial frustration to capture her. "Once I began trying to narrate Evita I noted that," he says, "if I approached her, she withdrew from me." (52) Evita's body was as flighty, roaming and unattainable as her fellow butterflies.

Likewise, the body of Eva Perón underwent a metamorphosis similar to her affiliate nymphs' on two levels. The first, of course, was her own conversion from a larva state (as an illegitimate child, a B-movie actress, a lover), her self-creation through the weaving of her own coccoon, to a butterfly state (as the beautiful Argentinean first lady who became the most powerful woman in Latin America during the late 1940's and early 1950's). This transition is portrayed within the third paragraph of *Santa Evita*:

She did not seem to be the same person who had arrived in Buenos Aires in 1935 without a penny to her name, and who acted in hopeless theaters where her pay was a cup of coffee with milk. She was nothing or less than nothing then: a sparrow at an outdoor laundry sink, a caramel bitten into, so skinny it was pitiful. She began to make herself look pretty with passion, memory, and death. She wove herself a chrysalis of beauty, little by little hatching a queen; who would ever have thought it? (3-4)

The second level of Evita's metamorphosis exists on the switch of others' perceptions regarding the transition, represented in *Santa Evita* through the character of Colonel Moori Koenig of the Argentine Intelligence Service, who was put in charge of the corpse, the major hunter for this butterfly: "My butterfly" (339) is the term of endearment he uses in a dialogue with the corpse towards the end of the novel, when, at the beginning, this cold and calculating, meticulous character, obsessed with etymologies of the word Evita, dared not even pronounce her name: "He would avoid the word. He would avoid the wholesome words close to it: *levity* [noun], frivolity, lightness; *levitate* [verb] (occult), to rise in the air without visible support; *vital* [adj.] pertaining to life. He would avoid all language contaminated by the aura of that woman." (115) From a term in his own dictionary:

EVITA. Verb. Conjug.: 3rd pers. sing. of *evitar* (from Lat. *evitare*, *vitare*). To avoid. To evade. To elude. To keep something about to happen from happening. (115)

AN INTERSECTION OF BODIES

Following a movement reminiscent of the wings of a butterfly, the narrative of *Santa Evita* hovers between two opposite directions, recounting the subsequent eventualities within the trajectory of Evita's body while disclosing, in reverse, the story of her life. The front portion of the narrative wings reveals the excursion of a real body, her cadaver, embalmed and stored for three years at the CGT, stolen and hidden by the military after Perón was deposed, replicated into three perfect copies to fool captors, smuggled across the Atlantic, furtively buried in Italy under a false name, seized again and returned to Argentina in 1971, and finally put to rest in the Recoleta cemetery in 1976. The back portion of the wings, on the other hand, reveals the mythical body of the everlasting life of the sacred object of national pilgrimage, reconstructing Argentina's hopes, fantasies, fetishes, passions and hatred within the narrative.

Judith Butler explains that the term *bodies that matter* is "not an idle pun, for to be material means to materialize, where the principle of that materialization is precisely what *matters* about that body, its very intelligibility."¹³⁰ The real and mythical bodies of Eva Perón, in the wings of narration in *Santa Evita*, give rise to a series of simultaneously juxtaposed and randomly superimposed tangents which, at their junction and separation, account for the very materialization which discerns it, an intersection of eight different bodies: the body of art, the body politic, the body of the nation, the body of identity, the body of the condemned,¹³¹ the body of desires, the body of fetishes, the missing body. In other words, Evita's embalmed cadaver, historic and mythic, is in reality an

¹³⁰ Judith Butler. Bodies That Matter. London: Routledge, 1993. (p. 32)

¹³¹ Michel Foucault, term extracted from Discipline and Punish.

octagon-body which, by extension, contains the corpus of discursive regularities which establish the Foucauldian group of relations between authorities of emergence, delimitation, and specification; the narrative of *Santa Evita*, moreover, describes how this particular object of discourse, as I've mentioned previously, finds its place and law of emergence.¹³² In *Santa Evita*, Tomás Eloy Martínez demonstrates that the body of Eva Perón "gives birth simultaneously or successively to mutually exclusive objects" (what I refer to as 'the octagon-body'), "without having to modify itself" (the embalmed cadaver).¹³³

According to Judith Butler, "to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where *to matter* means at once *to materialize* and *to mean*."¹³⁴ As the embalmed body of Eva Perón shifts and incorporates one and all grounds of signification, I intend to illustrate how this body matters by materializing and meaning at once disclosing, simultaneously, the corpus of discursive regularities contained and exposed within each of the abovementioned bodies utilizing, of course, the narrative of *Santa Evita*. I would like to emphasize, once again, that although this is a work of fiction which could be considered detrimental to historic discourse, it works, for the purposes of this analysis, in precisely the opposite manner. *Santa Evita* encompasses the spaces that History leaves behind; it is, moreover, a collection of Argentina's national memory and identity woven through a fictional narrative based on 'true facts' - whether or not they 'occurred' in the first place.

¹³² Michel Foucault. The Archeology of Knowledge. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972. (p. 45)

¹³³ Ibid, p. 45.

¹³⁴ Judith Butler. Bodies That Matter. London: Routledge, 1993. (p. 32)

THE BODY OF ART

I have mentioned previously that Evita's body could be regarded as a work of art received under Walter Benjamin's two values on polar planes: the first with the accent on its cult level, the second on the exhibition level.¹³⁵ Both the cult and exhibition levels function jointly to matter the body of Eva Perón, alive and dead, by simultaneously materializing and signifying. This occurs as two distinct artistic reproductions of her body, both which stem from its pre-existent cult value, as according to Benjamin "artistic production begins with ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult,"¹³⁶ were created in order to affix its exhibition value: the first, carried about from her life onwards, was the mechanical reproduction of her image through photography and other forms of visual replication and the second, of course, was on the level of Evita's artistically-crafted embalmed corpse. This portion of the essay is concerned with the exhibition value of this body/work of art.

The narrative of *Santa Evita* rescues the memorial conception of her "forehead bared and a big chignon secured at the nape of her neck with hairpins" (67), the classic "medal-like image" (67) reproduced an infinity of times in order to *matter* the character of Evita in the novel in a perfect resemblance corresponding to the effigy which marked her historical existence. As with every work of art, this image was the creation of an artist, which in this case was Evita's hairdresser, Julio Alcaraz who, according to the novel, advised her to bleach her hair first and then created the famous chignon which later became her trademark. This occurred to such an extent, in fact, that the image "which came into being through the work of chance and haste, lingers stubbornly on in people's

¹³⁵ Walter Benjamin. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken, 1968. (p. 224)

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 224.

memory, as though all other Evitas were false.” (67) The creation of Julio Alcaraz, in other words, materializes Evita’s visual image and, in so doing, formulates its meaning.

Benjamin explains that “in photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line” and that, as a result, “it is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography.”¹³⁷ Evita’s official portrait was the most commonly exhibited work of art which displaced cult value to her body in life, in sickness and in death.

This lineage of cult-value fluctuation is registered several times in the narrative of *Santa Evita: cult-in-life* value through exhibition, in the voice of the character of Julio Alcaraz describing the ubiquity of her image during the 1951 presidential campaign as “(...) Buenos Aires was papered over from top to bottom with her face, and enormous streamers hung even from the Obelisk urging people to vote for PERÓN-EVA PERÓN / THE TICKET FOR THE COUNTRY (...)” (79); *cult-in-sickness* value through exhibition, in the description of the people’s consistency in parading her image as “every humble home had an altar with photographs of Evita, torn out of magazines, were alight with candles and decorated with wildflowers (...) at night, the photos were carried in a procession from place to place so as to give them a moon bath (...)” (27); *cult-in-death*, in what Benjamin refers to “the cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead,”¹³⁸ during the three years that followed Evita’s date of passing, as “(...) funeral chapels erected in provincial capitals and direct townships, where the deceased was represented by photographs ten feet tall.” (12) In all of these instances, the mechanical reproduction of Evita’s medal-like image through photography served to frame the pose that eternity would remember her for, materializing her visuality timelessly and supplanting differing

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 225-6.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 226.

cult values, meanings, along the line. Jointly, the cult and exhibition values of Evita's self-portrait become a work of art and a body that mattered.

The second instance of Evita's body as a work of art with exhibition value is, as I've mentioned, her artistically-embalmed cadaver which was displayed, of course, only during her cult in death, after "Evita died, and her body lay in state for twelve days beneath the towering giraffe dome of the Secretariat of Labor (...) half a million people kissed the coffin." (12) The narrative of *Santa Evita* contains three characters which claim to be the artists responsible for her creation in a Flaubertian reminiscence of an "*Evita, c'est moi*" nature: the first two in the characters of Julio Alcaraz and Juan Perón, ten years later, saying "Evita was my creation. I made her (...)" (71) and the third in the character of Pedro Ara, saying "I am her Michelangelo, her creator, the one responsible for her eternal life. She is now - why not say it? - me." (140) The plan was to exhibit Evita's embalmed body in perpetuity; the character of Perón explained to Ara that "the legislature wants to build a monument to her one hundred fifty feet tall in the Plaza de Mayo, but such grandiose displays don't interest me. I would rather have the people continue to see her looking as alive as she is now." (21) Though the novel does not feature this information, it has been said that Ara suggested to Perón, on one occasion, to display Evita's body in a silver sarcophagus along with the cortege of four (or six, the numbers vary) embalmed bodies of *descamisados*. Perón was believed to have discarded the idea due to its dubious taste.

Nonetheless, though the dead Evita was not exhibited in the never-concluded Monument to Eva Perón as a result of the military coup in 1955, the voice of Colonel Moori Koenig, in a dialogue with Ara, explains that "(...) If it [the cadaver] had rotted away, that would have been the end of that. But by embalming it, you made history change place. You left history inside." (25) The production

of this body of art, for exhibition purposes, is the main angle within the intersection of bodies of the embalmed cadaver of Eva Perón for it is the one which materializes its meaning as “the corpse of the nation.”

THE BODY POLITIC

When the character of Juan Perón in *Santa Evita* states that he is not interested in “such grandiose displays” (21) he is, of course, lying. His option of “rather have the people continue to see her looking as alive as she is now” (21) reflects more than a simple desire to preserve the memory of his wife within the public’s memory: if in life Evita had played a tremendous political function within her husband’s party by acting as the bridge of love between the masses and their leader, Perón had to ensure that she continued to exert that role in some form or another after her death. The narrative of *Santa Evita* explains that after his fall in September of 1955, “Perón (...) was emptied of history” (13) while the memory of his wife, on the other hand, “became incarnate and people unfolded within that body the folds of their own memories.” (13) The body was not exposed, but “although no one could see the corpse, people imagined it lying there, in a private chapel, and came on Sundays to recite the rosary and offer flowers.” (13) As Evita’s embalmed cadaver progressively gained life within the imaginary of those who adored her, she began to exist as an enemy more threatening than her husband:

(...) There he [Moori Koenig] drew up a complicated plan to assassinate the “runaway dictator” and another, even more involved, aimed at surprising him in bed and cutting his tongue out. But Perón no longer worried the triumphant generals. The headache that kept them awake at night was the remains of “that woman.” (14)

Evita's body had become the most powerful political tool in the country. Realizing that the real and symbolic presence of her artistically-embalmed cadaver was a threat to the country's social and political order, the provisional president of the new regime in Argentina ordered Colonel Moori Koenig of the Argentine Intelligence Service to "take care of that woman" (16). Within the same dialogue, the character reveals the necrophiliac nature of Argentinean politics as "every time a corpse enters the picture in this country, history goes mad." (16)

The political *matter* in Evita's cadaver resides in its *materialization* in death, frozen and immobile, to *mean* by gaining life as a powerful antagonist to her enemies, forcing her opponents to engage in a quest to "make her disappear" (16) and "finish her off. Turn her into a dead woman like any other." (16) The Colonel explains to Ara, in his mission to take Evita from him, that the fate of the country *matters* on the body crafted into a work of art:

You know very well what's at stake (...) It's not the corpse of that woman but the destiny of Argentina. Or both things, which to so many people seem to be one. (...) Whoever has the woman has the country in the palm of their hand, do you realize? The government cannot allow a corpse like that to drift about (...) (25)

This incessant drifting about of the cadaver transforms Evita into migratory nomad corpse - a body which is, in this instance, much more political than mythical - as the narrative of *Santa Evita* reveals its whereabouts and the fates of those who came in contact with her. If Eva Perón was a threat to her enemies in life, upon dying, she turned into a phantom and haunted them restlessly. The hidden, stolen, smuggled wandering corpse was replicated in three copies which took revenge upon those who dared to take charge of them. Moori Koenig's widow tells the character of Martínez that "it was Evita's fault" for "everybody who had anything to do with the corpse came to a bad end." (48) But what were, then, the political signifiers which materialize Evita into the body of the nation?

THE BODY OF THE NATION

The author himself has provided this answer, featured in two different Argentinean media publications. In an article for newsmagazine *Noticias*, Tomás Eloy Martínez speaks of necrophilia as a national passion from the very moment Argentina came to being, citing various examples of the bizarre treatment - and reverence - of past political cadavers. According to the journalist, death, to Argentines, does not signify the past; it is only a “frozen” past which doesn’t represent the resurrection of memory, but the veneration of a cadaver. This type of veneration is seen by Martínez as an anchor which keeps Argentina docked to a corpse and that, furthermore, “Argentina is the embalmed body of a woman.”¹³⁹ Martínez states that Evita’s cadaver was the first to disappear in the country’s history, and that numerous others have been missing since the military dictatorship of the 1970’s, but “unlike those bodies which beg to be buried, Evita’s cadaver begs to be offered up for veneration.”¹⁴⁰ For each of the bodies that disappeared during the bloody dictatorship in Argentina there is an Antigone which seeks to grant perpetual repose to the memory they incorporate by giving them a proper burial. The burial, in this instance, signifies a closure - a burial of the remembrances contained therein.

The Antigones of Evita, on the other hand, desire to put her to rest but know that she will never be silenced. Within the different intentions of burial, the divisions of the nation are represented: those who loved her wished to grant her perpetual repose so that her adoration would accompany her in immortality; those who opposed her in life were disturbed by the power she had

¹³⁹ Tomás Eloy Martínez. “Fantasma Sacro,” in *Noticias*. Buenos Aires, July 16, 1995. (p. 80)

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 78.

in death. Granting her a burial would not signify a closure, on the contrary - it would signify the creation of a shrine to Santa Evita.

Argentina's provisional president in 1955 knew that Evita could never be silenced. The cadaver of Evita 'speaks' - it 'speaks' Argentina - and Argentina, of course, has *spoken of* this cadaver for the past forty years: in silence during the latter half of the 1950's when it was forbidden to pronounce her name, verbally during the 1960's as a recurrent theme of discussion regarding the whereabouts of her cadaver and with the apparition of a number of publications regarding the issue, literally during the 1970's when it was returned to Argentina by the government of Isabel Perón.

In a column for the Buenos Aires daily *Página 12*, Martínez explains that Evita only became 'herself' after she died, because her death not only revealed her own history but, in extension, that of Argentina's during the past four decades:

We [Argentina] have been, like this death, a nomad country with no place, no fixed destiny: someone who was dissipated, humiliated, buried in anonymity, submitted, oppressed, denied. The Broadway opera does not show these things, because the funerary side of reality rarely appears in sceneries. We are the ones who have commenced to represent ourselves through this [the cadaver] sealed mirror.¹⁴¹

In short, Evita's embalmed corpse can be seen a national flag, for it incorporates elements of Argentinean identity within it (as Martínez points out, for instance, necrophilia and nomadism). However, it is essential to point out that, as I have mentioned earlier, Evita's cadaver did not become the body of the nation as a result of the adoration or hatred propelled from Argentineans but rather by the discursive constituents comprised by its symbolic effect. In other words and in a return to the Antigones of Evita, if we follow Diana Fuss's shifting of grounds regarding the problem of essence,

¹⁴¹ Tomás Eloy Martínez. "La Argentina in fragranti," in *Página 12*. Buenos Aires: February 11, 1996.

seeking to answer 'who is speaking' by asking 'where am I speaking from' (bearing in mind, however, that the place of the subject is ultimately unlocalizable according to Fuss)¹⁴² within the characters of *Santa Evita*, we will be able to attain a better understanding of the complex set of relations which are not present in the "body of the nation" but take form, rather, in the "body of identity." The following angle within the octagon-body will illustrate why this is so.

THE BODY OF IDENTITY

As *Santa Evita* narrates the desperate quest for the missing embalmed cadaver of Eva Perón, its narrative reveals the 'who is speaking' in two distinct voices: on one side are her worshippers who wish to usurp it and bury her in order to ensure her veneration in immortality; on the other are her opponents who wish to kill her dead body once and for all. But it is only upon shifting the 'who is speaking' to the 'where am I speaking from' that the underpinnings of the social and economic processes which give rise to 'what is said' emerge, revealing in this instance the identity politics that materialize the dead body of Evita into the cadaver of the nation.

More clearly, the 'who is speaking' his/her love towards Eva Perón is doing so through a previously established economic and social positioning which 'speaks through' this adoration. Those who worshipped her were addressed by Evita in life as "my dear *descamisados*, my little greasers," (9) because she had been their savior and "she was distressed by the oligarchs and traitors who were out to crush the shirtless people beneath their boots (that was the way she talked: in her speeches she sounded all the high notes of emphasis) and asked the masses' help in 'flushing traitors

¹⁴² Diana Fuss. "Reading Like a Feminist," in *differences*, 2:1 summer 1989. (p. 84)

from their foul lairs' (...) she was very busy." (10) In other words, her venerators declared this love as a result of the economic and social positioning that had placed their voice in those grounds of speech: they needed to love her in order to materialize themselves, they needed Evita's cadaver to symbolize their savior.

On political grounds, Evita (alive and dead) represented the cause of her husband's party and, by extension, threatened the grounds of Argentina's identity which had been previously established "by specific and dominant meanings and values."¹⁴³ This is represented in

(...) her [Evita's] enemies, who also numbered in the thousands. Argentines who thought of themselves as the depositaries of civilization saw in Evita an obscene resurrection of barbarism. Indians, blacks with no morals, bums, hoodlums, pimps straight out of the Arlt, wild gauchos, consumptive whores smuggled into the country on Polish ships, party girls from the provinces: all of them had now been exterminated or confined to their dark cellars. When European philosophers came on a visit, they discovered a country so ethereal and spiritual that they thought it had evaporated. (58-9)

Therefore, Evita's cadaver continues to materialize the disorder which threatened the immaculate identity of Argentina professed by the politics of hegemony, what (the character of) Martínez had earlier referred to as "what my country was and what it wanted to be but could not be." (54) Evita's enemies are 'speaking from' a distinct political, social and economic positioning which, as in the case of her venerators, places them on those grounds of speech. This is when the "body of the condemned" angle begins to *matter* in the octagon-body.

¹⁴³ I am referring to the definition of 'hegemony' by Raymond Williams in Marxism and Literature, "a concept which at once includes and goes beyond two powerful earlier concepts: that of 'culture' as a 'whole social process,' in which men define and shape their whole lives; and that of 'ideology,' in any of its Marxist senses, in which a system of meanings and values is the expression or projection of a particular class interest." According to Williams, "what is decisive is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values" abided in the critic's redefinition of the term. (p. 108-9)

THE BODY OF THE CONDEMNED

The shifting of grounds from 'who is speaking' to 'where am I speaking from,' in the case of the hegemonic 'we' threatened by the matter in Evita's cadaver, is delineated evidently through the characters of Moori Koenig and Pedro Ara in the following dialogue (from the voice of the former) in *Santa Evita*:

(...) Heaven only knows how the useless dead body of Eva Duarte came to be confused with the country. Not for people like you or me. To the poverty-stricken, to the ignorant, to those who are outside of history. They would let themselves be killed for the corpse. (25)

The 'we' in this case is speaking from, of course, the position of the 'we contained in history,' the subjects who seek to do away with Evita's body because its presence symbolizes, in effect, the materialization (and invasion) of the 'we outside of history.' The 'we inside' is materialized by voicing the menace mattered in the cadaver of Evita and, in opposition, the 'we outside' would let themselves be killed for the corpse precisely because their identity is contained within it.

The desire of the 'we contained in history' to ban Evita's cadaver from Argentina can be directly paralleled to Michel Foucault's study of the isolation of lepers during the Middle Ages in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault's first mode of objectification of the subject through "dividing practices" would turn Evita's body into "a useful force" for "it is both a productive body and a subjected body."¹⁴⁴ In other words, Evita has been subjected by the previously established power relations within the political field which have assigned her body to a culprit status - one which

¹⁴⁴ Michel Foucault. "The Body of the Condemned" from *Discipline and Punishment*, in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow. Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1984. (p. 173)

condemns her soul to be the prison of her body,¹⁴⁵ according to Foucault. Simultaneously, moreover, her body produces its condemnation (from the part of the 'we contained in history') in the same manner which produced the condemnation by the lepers' body during the Middle Ages: the practices of exclusion, rejection and isolation are visible through a community's desire to remain unblemished exerting, at once, the constituent powers which produced this 'knowledge.' If, according to the narrative of *Santa Evita*,

Eva Duarte's sudden entry onstage ruined the pastel portrait of cultivated Argentina. That vulgar chick, that bastard B-girl, that little shit - as she was called at cattle auctions - was the last fart of barbarism. As it wafted by, you had to hold your nose. (59)

then it may be said that the condemnation of her body from the part of the 'we in history' desired to exclude and eliminate her along the same lines - the same intentions - which desired to isolate the lepers of the Middle Ages: a preventive treatment exercised through the power of the 'we who wish' to remain healthy, vigorous, and strong - and attain their position 'in history' by doing so.

In his study of the discourse of evil, Jean Baudrillard declares the very impossibility to speak Evil, for Evil itself has been radically altered to mean something else:

In a society which seeks - by prophylactic measures, by annihilating its own natural referents, by whitewashing violence, by exterminating all germs and all of the accursed share, by performing cosmetic surgery on the negative - to concern itself solely with quantified management and with the discourse of the Good, in a society where it is no longer possible to speak Evil. Evil has metamorphosed into all the viral and terroristic forms that obsess us.¹⁴⁶

How, then, is Evita's body altered accordingly?

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 177.

¹⁴⁶ Jean Baudrillard. The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena. London: Verso, 1993. (p. 81)

THE BODY OF DESIRES

If the character (and dead body of) Evita in *Santa Evita* represents Evil in the Baudrillardian sense of the word, then she “has metamorphosed into all the viral and terroristic forms that obsess us”¹⁴⁷ in a return to the earlier second level of her metamorphosis within the switch of others’ perceptions regarding her self-creating transition from larva to butterfly. I have mentioned that the character of Moori Koenig refers to Evita as “my butterfly” (339) in a term of endearment towards the end of the novel when, at the beginning, “he would avoid all language contaminated by the aura of that woman.” (115)

The larva of Evil-Evita, the body of the condemned which infected the ideal of a perfect Argentina, was metamorphosed into the butterfly of desires in three different instances within the narrative of *Santa Evita* through three characters which represent the ‘we in history’: Colonel Moori Koenig of the Argentina Intelligence Service, his rival Major Arancibia, and the embalmer Pedro Ara.

The first two characters in *Santa Evita* are the perfect demonstration of the Baudrillardian transformation of Evil into a form of obsession. Moori Koenig, who was put in charge of the corpse by the military, was the incarnation of order and meticulousness whose “life flowed on, following the same routine as always.” (118) But Koenig’s obsession for detail, order, uniformity, and precision are in reality a mask of the oppressed obsessions he has within himself and are projected, moreover, towards Evita’s body in his desire to keep her all to himself: a character flaw, of course, for “he had fits of delirium” and was seen “shouting for death to come” (46) shortly before his death.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 81.

A similar tragedy occurs to his rival, Major Arancibia, who murdered his pregnant wife when she discovered he was spending hours alone in his attic with Evita's corpse and, later on in the narrative, intertwines, in confusion, the names of the two deceased, the Evita of Evil and the Elena (his wife) of Order, into "Evena" and "Elita" (252). Cifuentes then tells (the character of) Martínez that "the motionless body had gone on seducing the Madman [Arancibia] day after day." (253)

But the attachment of the embalmer, Pedro Ara, to the cadaver of Eva Perón is consistent throughout the novel for he never exhibits hatred towards it. To this artist of the funerary, the corpse of Evita represents his masterpiece and, by extension, represents himself. Evita is the Other who became his *raison d'être* precisely because he was the author of her pose in immortality in two different instances: first by embalming her body, second by writing *The Eva Perón Case*, "an autobiography of his funerary art" where "Ara reconstructs Evita's body only in order to be able to recount how he has done so." (140) In this process, as expected, Evita became a body of his desire, tempting the embalmer to inscribe her name above her heart along with "the date on which I began my labors: July 26, 1952. I must think about it. My signature would mar her perfection. Or perhaps not: perhaps it would enhance it." (140-141) Ara's dilemma reveals a relationship with his work of art which is more reminiscent of a lover rather than an artist, for he wishes to inscribe in Evita the date on which his labors began, not the date on which they ended.¹⁴⁸ Artists and authors generally mark the dates of conclusion while lovers, on the other hand, mark the dates of beginning. Inscribing the date of conclusion would, for Ara (who wrote his 'autobiography' after the cadaver had been completed), acknowledge a closure of his affair with Evita, the body of his desire.

¹⁴⁸ This information is featured in two subsequent paragraphs as November 23, 1955 under the voice of Pedro Ara, who regards it as the date he "had completed my work" (141) but by no means terminated his relationship with the cadaver.

THE BODY OF FETISHES

The postmodern nature of *Santa Evita* breaks its novelistic narrative flow, in its eighth chapter, into an academic essay on the elements that came together into the myth of Evita entitled, accordingly, "A Woman Reaches Her Eternity." (167) Within his point-by-point illustrations regarding how Evita's eternity was brought about, Martínez cites "fetishism" as the fifth example, explaining that "for many people, touching Evita was like touching the stars." (177) The author includes, moreover, a few samples of the complete list of the "some hundred - at least a hundred - articles used, kissed, or touched by the Lady of Hope that served as objects of worship of her." (177)

The fetishistic nature of those who worshipped her accounts for the projection of their adoration towards an object that Evita has touched (or of an object that regards her in some way) which transforms, in this instance, a body of desires into a body of fetishes. And her embalmed cadaver, "the mummified body of Evita herself" (178) as Martínez puts it is, of course, the main object of the fetishizing of Evita. According to Baudrillard, fetishism does not concern the emotional involvement of the object as such, but rather the place of the object in an independent system of signification.¹⁴⁹ Fetishism is, therefore, the adoration of the code. The 'we outside of history' fetishized her body as well as the other objects she touched, of course, because they coded Evita as Midas. On the other hand, as I have shown through the characters of *Santa Evita*, the 'we inside history' coded her body as Evil (in the Baudrillardian sense) and fetishized it through their own obsession. But how can one code, permanently, the body of Eva Perón?

¹⁴⁹ Jean Baudrillard. For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign. St. Louis: Telos, 1981. (p. 92)

THE MISSING BODY

I will speak, therefore, of a letter.¹⁵⁰

Of the twenty-second letter in the English alphabet, at once the twenty-fourth letter of the Spanish alphabet,¹⁵¹ “if the alphabet, and most of the speculations which have ventured into it, are to be believed.” (3)

I will speak, therefore, of the letter *v*, a letter which locates itself towards the end of both abovementioned alphabets and which visually appears to insinuate, in its graphic/aesthetic form, a gulf containing an empty body of water. The letter appears to accommodate, discernibly, a blank space, a vacant uninhabited void anxiously awaiting to be filled. Simultaneously, on the other hand, the letter appears to function as a (missing) link: but it cannot be taken for a bridge, for its extremities point upwards.

The letter *v*, in *Eva*, resides between two margins: the letter *e* and the letter *a*. The *Eva* that I refer to, in this instance, is a woman who was once called a man¹⁵² and endured virtually every binary opposition imaginable: saint/sinner, immaculate/prostitute, good/bad, giving/selfish, pure/corrupt, adventurer/militant, to name a few. The margins of the middle letter of her name - the letter *e* and the letter *a* - stand for the primary binary opposition which not only surrounds the *v* but

¹⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida. “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982. (p. 3) Parenthetical references within the text from this point onwards pertain solely to this inspiring essay by Derrida. This portion of my essay is a direct play/pun on Derrida’s concept of *différance* and could be called a ‘conclusion’ - though it would be inappropriate (if not pointless) to do so by using the work of this philosopher.

¹⁵¹ The Spanish alphabet contains the letter combination *ll* and the *ñ*, treated as separate letters in the language’s alphabetical order: the *ll* following *l*, the *ñ* following *n*.

¹⁵² From Ezequiel Martínez Estrada’s “in reality he [Juan] was the woman and she [Evita] was the man” in *¿Qué es esto?*.

is furthermore, at once, the very source of the Derridean allegories and turns of speech which have prevaricated Eva, *evading* Eva of its once single and singular meaning: the *e* of enemies, the *a* of adorers. Eva's enemies/adorers. Or the other way around: the *e* of esteemers, the *a* of adversaries. Eva's esteemers/adversaries. The *v* resides as a bridge between those borders, pointing upwards with no beginning and no end, always in the middle. But whether the *e* are enemies/esteemers, or the *a* are adversaries/adorers, the gap interbeing, the *v*, will infinitely place Eva with the conclusive remarks of the character-narrator of *Santa Evita*: "I don't know where in the story I am. In the middle, I believe. I've been in the middle for a long time. Now I must write again."¹⁵³

One must always write again, for there is no closure. The *v* in Eva is in reality an abyss, it is a gap pervaded by a missing body: the body of Eva Perón. We cannot be misled by the closure the letter appears to have at the end, for the junction of those margins, both pointing to an infinity, "vanishes into the night." (5) There is no finale.

The missing body of Eva, the lacuna emptied and filled with other different bodies, was supplied with meaning by another *a* and another *e*: the ones which have filled the *v*, the "movement [considering the requirement formulated by Saussure] according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general, is constituted 'historically' as a weave of differences." (12) In other words, the *a* of deferral which Derrida substituted for the *e* of difference, conceiving, at once, a (non)concept which plays upon the spacing and tracing, occurs as silence passes into utterance and back: *différance*. Differences, thus, are "produced"- deferred - by *différance*. (14) What is written as *différance*, in other words, will be playing a constant movement that "produces" with no closure.

The millions of Evitas, therefore, are those which appear as this utterance is trapped, for a

¹⁵³ Tomás Eloy Martínez. *Santa Evita*, p. 369.

moment, into the v , into the abyss. But the millions do not stay there for too long - nor will they ever remain - for the v , keep in mind, is not a container, nor a filter, nor a prison. It appears and disappears and, in the process, it *derivate*s.

The derivation returns, although it never leaves, in millions. It never leaves because it is trapped momentarily - it is permanently present in the v , the mythological spectrum which I spoke of in the beginning of this essay - as each *différant* Evita is produced: in *différevance*. Like *différance*, *différevance* is produced as it is differed (non-identity) and deferred (delayed). It has no closure, it is permanently in the abyss. And each Evita is produced every time some form appears to be contained within the v which bridges Eva and *différevance*.

Différevance is not an illegitimate child, an actress, a lover, a founder, a benefactress, a wife, a renouncer, a first lady, a martyr, a saint. It is all of the above, none of the above, and whatever resides in between. It depends on what the e of difference and the a of deferral wish to place inside the v of *différevance*: when, why, what, where, by whom, and how. Eva will be determined accordingly, though never permanently. There is no fixity.

The mythology marches on.

CONCLUSION

I don't know where in the story I am. In the middle, I believe. I've been here in the middle for a long time. Now I must write again.

☛ Tomás Eloy Martínez, SANTA EVITA

... memory fragments are often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness.

☛ Walter Benjamin, ILLUMINATIONS

I MUST WRITE AGAIN

The essence of this work and its methodology resides in the very impossibility to 'define,' 'discover,' or 'tell the life' of Eva Perón. In order to be able to grasp and understand the mythological workings of the death and life of Evita, it is vital to conceive of her 'names' and 'bodies' as an infinity of resurrections; moreover, that she 'lives' through them in perpetuity. Upon realizing that I was working with a body which had never 'died' (on the contrary, the body is immortal), Derrida's notion that meaning derives from derivation became the quintessential metaphor (and tool) for the purposes of my analysis: the sole 'dead' element regarding Evita is her once single and singular existence, (which we can call) her source. Eva ceased to be 'herself' and has been, for a long time, her endless *derivations*.

At once, the Baudrillardian concept of simulacra became a very useful strategy to conceive of a woman who did not exist outside of her images and representations. Rather, they grant her meaning(s) in their attempt to 'describe' and 'portray' her; all of which are of extreme importance insofar as the Foucauldian discursive regularities serve to undrape their mythological underpinnings. Consequently, the symbolic effect of Evita's names and bodies substitute the signs of herself for herself in an *evading* of her own reality which no longer is.

Working with the fictitious textuality of Evita, more specifically the Webber/Rice production and the novel by Tomás Eloy Martínez, proved to be the ideal manner to defy the limitations provided by historic discourse in its claim to be an objective reproduction of the past (when it is, in reality, a limited construction of specific - and selected - descriptions). Based on the Žižekian idea that discursive formations must be understood in relation to that which it cannot accommodate within its own discursive or symbolic terms, the Evita-in-myth provided in the fictitious character of a

musical, a play, and a novel extended this possibility. This is so because this type of textuality, fiction, deconstructs a myth through the (re)construction of a fictional character, working with the unexplored domains, the unexplained gaps, and the simplified details that historic discourse leaves behind. Evita is given new perspectives as fiction transcends what is strictly referential, incorporating the Barthesian *what-goes-without-saying* within the text's semiological value manifesting, by extension, the complex set of relations which 'informs' her.

Interestingly enough, although both the 'Evita' of Broadway/Hollywood and the one of Martínez resurrect the classic 'image' of the first lady (i.e. the chignon on the nape), their portrayals of her life (and in the case of Martínez, the peripatetic life of her cadaver in death, in addition) and her (re)presentation in their works of fiction appears in two different polarities: in the former, Evita is (re)captured in the 'universal' thematics of an ambitious woman's rags-to-riches ascent, (re)written as a Latin American Cinderella; in the latter, Evita (represented in her 'living' embalmed corpse) ceases to be just the most valuable political tool for Peronism and becomes, more importantly, the flag of Argentina. Herein we can see the divisions between the two hemispheres of the New World in their 'conception' and 'reception' of Evita: for North America (and the world), Evita is a 'universal' ambitious woman who soared from an acting career to being a first lady; for Argentina, on the other hand, Evita's symbolic effect (in her names and bodies) constitute the divisions of national politics and identities. In both senses, Evita comes to signify the country, for *Evita is Argentina*: along with Carlos Gardel and Che Guevara, Evita is Argentina-for-export. But in comparison to her two compatriots with whom she shares the myth of Argentina, Evita is unique in her condition of woman; Eva Perón is the most celebrated Latin American woman of all times.

As such an infinity of factors come together to 'signify' Evita (in the Barthesian sense) in

Argentina, the *materialization* and *meaning* which *matter* her existence(s) appears as, at first, a chicken-or-the-egg question: do the representations of Evita express national divisions, or do national divisions create the representations of Evita? In the conclusion I have reached so far, both happen simultaneously and are, moreover, a direct result of each other. On one hand, Evita has come to mean by materializing the secret desires of Argentina (its fetishes, compulsions, fantasies, fears and obsessions). On the other, at the same time, Evita is materialized by the two meaning polarities which exist in her country, the *descamisados* she adored and the oligarchs she despised.

But the most important point is that Evita still endures, she *matters*. One cannot ask 'who she was' according to 'who is speaking' but rather, following the reversal proposed by Diana Fuss, 'who was Evita in the grounds of this speaker?' keeping in mind, of course, that the place of the subject is ultimately unlocalizable. Only time will tell how many more Evitas will be ressurected and what they will come to signify. In a conclusion *d'après* Martínez quoting Evita in *La razón de mi vida*, I depart. *Now I must write again.*

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