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### THROUGH THEIR FLESH: THE BODY AND COLONIALITY IN SALVADOR PLASCENCIA'S *THE PEOPLE OF PAPER*

In his chapter on the visual effects of *The People of Paper*, Fabio Chee introduces the argument that Salvador Plascencia and his characters are all trying to save themselves from the omniscient narrator, Saturn, though Chee does not go into detail as to how this happens (118). One of the foundational modes Plascencia uses to write bodies is grotesque realism, which, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, is a means to subvert authority. For Plascencia, this subversion challenges the violence of coloniality depicted in the text. In order to illustrate this, Plascencia's characters violate their own bodies in order to resist different forms of a colonial presence. At the source of all sadness in the story, we find bodily transgressions as a response to the intersection of love and coloniality, such as Federico de la Fe, who burns himself in response to his wife, who abandoned her family for a White missionary. To justify this alignment, we may look no further than Maria Lugones and Gloria Anzaldúa, who emphasize the importance of love as a site of relief from the tensions rooted deep in the histories of coloniality. Plascencia represents in his characters the very essence of Anzaldúa's argument for love: "because change, positive and negative, is always a source of tension, because it has no sense of closure,

of completion, we resist it. We must be motivated by love in order to undertake change” (xxxviii). Anzaldúa sees coloniality through the absence of love, understanding that without it, the conditions for hegemony are supported. Plascencia writes the absence of love around the characters of his debut novel, and insodoing, the characters are motivated by the need to replenish this absence to resist the colonial presence permeating their lives. And it is Saturn, the omniscient narrator in planetary disguise, who not only acts as an oppressor, but also illustrates how the “human and the universe are in a symbiotic relationship, [and] that we live in a state of deep interconnectedness” (Anzaldúa xxxvii). Saturn represents this universe, but he is also represents the interconnected narrative he shares with his characters, all of which are motivated by love.

Saturn is traced in grotesque realism by the very characters he attempts to oppress. At the moment when he is revealed to be the author himself, he is not brought down to sphere of earth. Instead, he is visited by Smiley, who tears open a hole in the papier-mâché sky and pulls himself in (103). What was only understood by the people of El Monte as the planet Saturn extending his gaze onto Federico de la Fe and his people, Smiley reveals that Saturn is not only the narrator of their story in planetary disguise, but, too, a naked, vulnerable man entrenched in sadness after his love, Liz, left him for a white man, whose name is scribbled out in every page mentioned in the text. In this explicit subversion of authority, Saturn becomes material and real, and by not recognizing Smiley, is scraped of his omniscient power. This scene emphasizes a focus on the body at the moment when authority is subverted. Importantly, Saturn’s body is not transgressed, a distinction necessarily contingent upon who holds power. Transgressions, therefore, only occur with characters that resist authority at moments of longing for love, not for those who are shed of power. This essay considers bodily transgressions as a simultaneous response to a longing for love and a resistance to coloniality. These transgressions

are not made through natural physiological orifices (mouth, nose, ears, anus, genitalia), typical of grotesque realism; but rather, Plascencia writes bodily transgressions in violent ways—burns and cuts—creating new orifices, which reference a resistance to coloniality and its inherent violence addressed in the text.

In one of the foundational texts on carnivalesque theory, *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin contends that the grotesque image, the form of carnivalesque theory, is an active subversion of authority, grounded and superimposed onto the material body: “The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (19-20). Though the grotesque image is not an inversion in its intent to subvert authority, inversions do exist as manifestations of the grotesque. These inversions are often represented through bodily orifices (nose, ears, anus, breasts, and genitalia). In his application of Bakhtin, Wayne Rebhorn reduces carnivalesque into three features: 1) there is reduction of elitism, 2) the players are socially marginalized people, and 3) the grotesque features become the identifiable characteristics of those people (98).

Plascencia’s reference to the concept of coloniality signifies the importance of transgressing carnivalesque bodies as a form of resistance. I use the term, “coloniality,” in the same way Lugones modifies its meaning from Anibal Quijano. In “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” Lugones defines it as “the process of active reduction of people, the dehumanization that fits them for the classification, the process of subjectification, the attempt to turn the colonized into less than human beings” (745). This definition is set within the context of gender, racialization and capitalist exploitation, inseparable factors in the process of coloniality. It, nevertheless, signifies how race and capitalist exploitation have (and still) functioned in the relations between the colonized and colonizers,

especially in the context of American colonialism. Plascencia does several things to indicate his reference to coloniality. Less obvious is his inversion of marked racial categories, a reading I borrow from the lens of Sally Robinson, who discusses how the black-white racial binary is skewed because “‘white’ is a normative category and ‘black’ a racial one” (29). Plascencia inverts Robinson’s claim so that the only stated racial category in the novel is “white,” which resists the active process of race-making by inverting what would normally be an unmarked, normative, racial category.

Playing the oppressor role, Plascencia also indicates the capitalist agenda behind the novel: everything in the novel becomes a commodity—even “the commodification of sadness” (218). The reduction of people into commodities and women more so as hyper-sexualized bodies, then, signifies the process of dehumanization within coloniality. Saturn is performing the role of the colonizer, who, in order to write his story—his history—reduces the people of El Monte into subjects, which they, in turn, resist. More explicitly, Plascencia’s depiction of highly sexualized women, who abandon their El Montian lovers for white men, are simultaneously aligned with love and coloniality. Of these white men, Plascencia writes, “they colonize everything: the Americas, our stories, our novels, our memories” (117). Saturn’s comment, which stems from his heartbreak from Liz, equates white males with colonialism, and in doing so, he draws upon what he thinks Liz wants in a man. At the same time, he is establishing the relationship between love and coloniality, whereby love is always accompanied within the context of coloniality. In doing so, responses to heartbreak become, in turn, responses to cultural hegemonic structures of oppression.

Further, coloniality, which directly references historical moments of violence against marginalized peoples, is also a reference to a documented history being colonized—a story untold by the marginalized. The war

between EMF and Saturn is a characterization of this untold history. EMF’s fight is one “against a story, against the history that is being written by Saturn” (209); it is a resistance to the oppressor’s one-sided historical account. Just before Saturn starts the novel over in Part 3 without Liz, she interjects:

I was going to stay quiet, let you write your story, let your history as you see it stand . . . In a neat pile of paper you have offered up your hometown, EMF, and Federico de la Fe, but also me, your grandparents and generations beyond them . . . and for what? For fourteen dollars and the vanity of your name on the book cover. (137-8)

Liz’s interjection reveals how “Sal” exploited and commodified his people to tell his version of history. Liz’s concern is not only that Sal leaves her out of the novel, but, too, that he has left out the voices of his own people. They have been silenced to the margins of the page, and upon realizing this, their strategy to overthrow the author changes. Instead of killing the omniscient author, they silence him to the margins of the page, just as he had done to them.

EMF’s strategy provides them the opportunity to write their own history; it gives them space on the page. As a result, Saturn’s body of text is inverted from oppressor to marginalized in EMF’s subversion of authority. We can consider the basis for EMF going to war as a result of an unreliable author/narrator. That is to say, if Saturn gave his characters a voice, a body of text, war would likely not be on the table. In fact, Saturn’s unreliability is even confirmed by Ralph and Elisa Landin, the millionaires funding him, who state, “if we had learned anything from this story it was to be cautious of paper—to be mindful of its fragile construction and sharp edges, but mostly to be cautious of what is written on it” (219). This statement reinforces EMF’s effort to write their own history, which ties back to untold histories of violence during

colonialism.

EMF's realization that the war over a voiced history cannot be fought by encasing their homes with metal shells and staying silent, and it points to their new strategy for war. Froggy El Veterano, the veteran member of EMF, expresses this new perspective: "We believed that silence was our best weapon against the intrusion of Saturn, that our silence would in turn silence Saturn. . . history cannot be fought with sealed lips, that the only way to stop Saturn is through our own voice" (209). The emphasis on silence points to what may be the crux of Plascencia's novel: Plascencia is masquerading as an oppressor to probe the coalition-building among peoples whose histories have been silenced—in this case, EMF—in order to give them a voice. If we equate silence with an increased presence of coloniality, an interesting pattern emerges, where the digression of bodily transgressions corresponds to the progression of voice for EMF. By this, I mean that as EMF gains a presence in Part Three of the novel and forces Saturn to margins, scenes of bodily transgressions, especially for Federico de la Fe, go unmentioned in the text.

Yet, the self-inflicted violence against bodies in response to the duality of love and coloniality signifies the underlying commentary Plascencia writes about history, which can be placed alongside grotesque images of the body, as they function similarly: "the grotesque images with their relation to changing time and their ambivalence become the means for the artistic and ideological expression of a mighty awareness of history and historic change" (Bakhtin 25). This reading places grotesque bodies within a conceptual framework of history, so in the attempt to subvert authority, the grotesque image references resistances to historical forms of hegemonic power. Federico de la Fe, the father and veteran of EMF, who immigrated to El Monte with his daughter, Little Merced, uncontrollably urinates during his sleep and burns himself while awake in response to losing his wife:

The night [he] dreamed of his wife, Merced, he awoke to a soaked mattress and the faint smell of wood rot. A puddle of urine gathered underneath his bed and stained the planks. When awake, Federico de la Fe could dull the sadness and memory of his wife with fire, but he could not control the alignment of planets or the heavy weight of Saturn while he slept. (52)

In an attempt to correct these bodily responses to love, Federico de la Fe would fight sleep, "resort[ing] to a self-imposed insomnia" and drank highly-caffeinated Maté tea, "letting the heat scald his tongue" (ibid). These self-mutilations continue in Part Two of the novel: he "sits at the kitchen table singeing flesh and sadness" while Little Merced slept (85), and a page later he "passed the flame over his stomach, singeing his straggling hairs into knobs and blistering his flesh" (86). In many ways, these mutilations are exaggerations of the body's tolerance for injury, as Federico de la Fe never seems to be seriously injured, despite the continuous physical damage he inflicts upon himself. With the same breath, an interesting paradox is represented in how the boundaries of the body are transgressed at the moment when Federico de la Fe is creating a metal boundary to obstruct Saturn's gaze. As opposed to an image of the body being closed off from the outside world, Plascencia inverts this image by transgressing Federico de la Fe's body with burns and creates a new boundary in order to reduce the authority of Saturn.

Federico de la Fe's bodily transgressions are complicated by a distinction between public and private. His responses to missing his wife, which are inherently linked to her new white lover, are violent acts made upon himself in private spaces of his body—his stomach and tongue—unseen by others. However, the death of his daughter, Little Merced, interrupts this privacy. Transgressions to his body "violated even his own rules of decorum, bringing fire to his neck and to the back of hands where everyone could see the burns" (196). Considering this not

in its binary sense—public-private—but rather as a progression in the intensity of self-mutilations, we find that Little Merced's death marks the climax of Federico de la Fe's conflict. Up until this point, he has engaged in a war over an oppressive author and lost his wife to a white man. Federico de la Fe's bodily transgressions reflect how he confronts these sources of violence that are attributed to coloniality. On the second day following Little Merced's death, he writes his wife a letter in hopes that she will come back, which, unknown to him, means stealing her back from Jonathan Mead, a Protestant missionary from England, whom she has chosen as her new lover. In this sense, Federico de la Fe's grotesque bodily transgressions become more pronounced as he comes closer to facing and thus resisting sources coloniality. He responds to the absence of his wife, inherently linked to the coloniality associated with white male characters in the novel, with inconspicuous inflictions to his body. Though the reader is aware of Merced's new lover, that Federico de la Fe assumes she has simply abandoned her family lends insight into the degree of his inflictions; they are kept private. So when Little Merced's death signifies an explicit act of coloniality by Saturn, who is playing the role of the "colonizer," the leader of EMF's war stops hiding his resistance, so much so that characters writing their history alongside him witness these transgressions.

Though the war against Saturn is one against an oppressive author, it does not factor in the parallel lives of Saturn and Federico de la Fe, who are both responding to a lost love, which are attributed to coloniality. In fact, Smiley's visit to Saturn's home reveals that he is actually "Salvador Plascencia de Gonzales" (102) experiencing the very same heartbreak, and whom Smiley extends his sympathy and spares his life: "While it is said that everything is fair in love and war, the dictum is nullified when both love and war occur simultaneously . . . there is an undeniable sympathy that must be extended when a woman leaves a man" (105).

Smiley's revelation introduces the duality of Saturn's identity: he is both Saturn and Salvador. For Salvador, the non-planetary flesh form of the author, the body, too, becomes a site on which to respond to coloniality. To an extent, Plascencia's body is fully transgressed to the point where he completely decomposes:

This is what happens, the natural physics of the world. You fuck a white boy and my shingles loosen, the calcium in my bones depletes, my clothes begin to unstitch. Everything weakens. I lose control. The story goes astray. The trajectory of the novel altered because of him. They colonize everything: the Americas, our stories, our novels, our memories. (117)

Salvador's body not only breaks down in response to Liz's new lover, its decay is superimposed onto the town of El Derramadero, a city characterized by its decomposition as a result of white colonization. Kevin Cooney discusses this scene as a "postcolonial model of coming to terms with his nostalgia and sadness" (211). Cooney argues that Plascencia aligns his body with El Derramedero to illustrate the process of coloniality, itself. In addition to the body being broken down, Plascencia also aligns his resistance to colonization with Federico de la Fe; however, "in this version, instead of leaving him for his inveterate bed-wetting, [Liz] leaves him because she is seduced by a white man, Jonathan Smith" (Cooney 211). While Cooney does not acknowledge that these white colonizers share the same first name, Jonathan, it does reinforce this mirroring of two characters. That is to say, Plascencia writes the same story of heartbreak onto Federico de la Fe and Saturn, reserving roles for both the colonized and the colonizer.

Returning to Bakhtin's discussion of the grotesque image, we find that "one of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one . . . from one body a new body always emerges in some form or another" (26). Bakhtin posits this

body-doubling to a representation of old and new or birth and death. The body, therefore, is superimposed onto another to characterize this shift. Understanding this doubling is contingent on a strict definition of Plascencia's forms. In essence, Plascencia has three forms: Sal (the author as a fictional character), Saturn (Sal in planetary disguise, playing the role of the oppressor), and Plascencia (the author of the text). When Sal and Federico de la Fe are superimposed onto one another, Sal is in his literal human form, not his pseudo planetary form.

This distinction draws attention to the body as flesh, and thus, the lowering of all that is high—the subversion of authority (Bakhtin 20). To an extent, Plascencia is aligning himself (Sal) in sameness to Federico de la Fe. He is, therefore, no longer a symbol of coloniality, but instead resisting it. In her discussion on the symbolism of bodies in the process of nation building, Maria Zamora argues, “the body is not only symbol, but materiality situated within the contingencies of history” (138). Her argument places the body within the conceptual framework of history and imperialism, a framework Ramón Saldívar attributes to *The People of Paper*, which he calls “postrace.” For Saldívar, “post” is a conceptual prefix to refer “to the logic of something having been ‘shaped as a consequence of’ imperialism and racism” (575). Zamora and Saldívar’s frameworks speak to one another, as one conceptualizes the body into history while the other posits race (and racialized bodies) within the context of racism and imperialism. These frameworks inform a reading of Plascencia’s superimposed body as *in experience with* Federico de la Fe, for both bodies are transgressed as a result of love’s association to coloniality. Importantly, it is not the author’s body, but the character’s body that is doubled, so that in this overlay of unity through heartache between the two characters, there is an element of death or deconstruction for the author, who is no longer in control of these fictionalized material bodies.

Within the context of coloniality, female bodies are presented in

stark contrast to their male counterparts. And we learn early on in the prologue the conditions around which to consider bodies. Visualized in three stages, Merced de Papel is constructed by the first origami surgeon using the index pages of medical journals, leaves cut out of Austin, Cervantes, Leviticus and Judges, and *The Book of Incandescent Light* (14-5). The operating table on which Merced de Papel is created symbolically alludes to the operations on which Plascencia writes bodies and, conversely, implicates how bodies are to be read. Our first image of the paper woman is not one of completeness, but instead, one whose body is influenced and defined by an authoritative outside world (canonized texts) and its relationship to text. Yet, even upon her completeness, walking out of the factory and into a storm, a new image is created: “the print of her arms smeared; her soaked feet tattered as they scrapped against wet pavement and turned her toes to pulp” (15). Not only are the histories that make up her body distorted, but, too, she begins to decompose in a way similar to El Derramadero. Plascencia writes images of construction and decomposition through Merced de Papel’s body as an underlying feature of bodies throughout the text.

To add to her carnivalesque quality, authority is immediately subverted when Antonio, Merced de Papel’s maker, is written as an allusion to God. Grzegorz Maziarczyk’s reading of *The People of Paper* argues that the line between fiction and reality is blurred, allowing the characters to come to life. He discusses the scene of Antonio lying on the floor and considers two perspectives: “On the level of the presented world, it can indicate that Antonio is being punished for usurping God’s prerogative [and] on the symbolic level, it can be construed as literalization of another critical metaphor . . . that of the death of the author” (63). Either of Maziarczyk’s readings give birth to an uncontrolled life of Merced de Papel. His reference to Barthes’ “death of the author” permits Merced de Papel to be uncontrolled in the same way EMF lights to be

uncontrolled to write their history, and likewise how Plascencia's material body as "Sal" supersedes any authorial figure (the author himself) that would resist an alignment with the very people he oppresses. These examples illustrate the diminishing and repositioning of power of the author by the characters that are marginalized, which bring into question the power of the author.

Plascencia writes Merced de Papel in a similar light to Liz and Merced, both of whom are "colonized" by white men. Aside from being constructed by paper, a strong emphasis is placed on Merced de Papel's sexual experiences with other men. She is literally known for how she is sexually penetrated. In this sense, like Liz and Merced, her hypersexuality represents her body as a commodity, despite all its humanness. Plascencia's depiction of Merced de Papel places her body at important intersection between coloniality and violence. She represents the many conflicts Plascencia addresses in the novel: she is paradoxically made of paper but undocumented (198), a woman with no concern for nostalgic love histories (168), and she is a superimposition of Liz and Merced and thus a representation of coloniality's presence. Though Merced de Papel is made of paper, we can assume that minimally she represents women of color. That she is sexually available for her many lovers may be Plascencia's commentary for woman of color as victims of coloniality. Importantly, and though she is sexually available to *many* men, Plascencia reverses this victimization by reappropriating her identity and inverting it, which ultimately leaves her male lovers as victims of heartbreak.

The "folding" of Plascencia's narrative into Merced de Papel's body is identified by Maziarczyk who posits, "[her] overwritten body is a paradoxically literalized symbol of the genesis of characters and plotlines" (70). As the oppressive author of the story, Plascencia uses Merced de Papel's body to symbolize the transgression of female bodies by colonizers. We see this intersection in Saturn's identification as a white

colonizer: "Four years of war to prove that I too am a colonizer, I too am powerful in those ways. I can stand on my tippy toes, I can curl my tongue and talk that perfect untainted English, I can wipe out whole cultures, whole towns of imaginary flower people. I can do that too" (238). Saturn, justifying his colonialist alter ego to Liz, aligns himself with the very center of coloniality. So when we learn that Merced de Papel once "had to strip the whole of her back where someone had written the name Liz a thousand times over in blue ink" (165) the image of her female body being sexually colonized and superimposed onto Liz's body becomes a pronounced image of female bodies more generally. That is to say, for female characters sharing an intimacy with Plascencia, their body becomes the center of heightened sexual transgression. Thus, Liz, Merced, Merced de Papel, and Cameroon, do not get loved by their lovers, but rather fucked.

Unlike Liz and Merced, Cameroon, Saturn's "cold-weather fuck" (226), resists his sexual violences by numbing herself with beestings. This is not to say that Saturn rapes Cameroon, but like all characters who fall on the receiving end of coloniality's violence, Plascencia writes their bodies in ways that resist oppression. So for Cameroon, beestings become her source for bodily transgression: "she sat alone in her upstate New York apartment holding a jar of honeybees, pressing stingers into her forearms. At night when the poison brought the fever, she peeled off her shirt and pulled down her panties, stretching, her feet pushing Saturn from the bed onto the floor" (121). We might consider these beestings as a drug to numb Cameroon of coloniality. Saturn represents the reduction of people into commodities—dehumanization—so by numbing herself of him, Cameroon is articulating a resistance to the violence he represents. Beestings become equal sources of resistance to the commodification of a sexualized female body. At one point in the novel, even Saturn partakes in the ritual of numbing himself from the



colonialist persona that embodies him:

He watched as the bee threaded its way through Cameroon's hair, emerging on her stomach. He lifted the bee by its wings and pressed it into his arm. When the poison entered his body, suddenly swellings his veins and slowing the blood, all these things disappeared from Saturn's mind: 1) The war with Federico de la Fe, 2) Cameroon, 3) Liz. (130)

The image of beestings as a drug to drown out the process of coloniality overtaking Plascencia's character takes place at the scene of intimacy and love between the two characters, yet, at the same time, it signifies the intersection of violence against the body at the moment of resisting this very process of coloniality. For Cameroon, beestings are a more effective source of resistance than sexualizing her body: "she said that when one is sad there is only insects or sex. 'Honeybees or fucking,' she said" (128). In choosing beestings, Cameroon chooses to violently transgress her own body, which, in Bakhtinian terms, subverts Saturn's authority. The juxtaposition of beestings and sexuality are important measurements of bodily transgression. By this, I mean that Plascencia's representations of resistance seem to be dictated by a character's distance to sources of oppression—the closer one is, the more forced and violent these bodily transgressions are.

So for Liz and Merced, who are only depicted by Plascencia as traders for giving in to White colonizers, they become commodities of coloniality. Conversely, Cameroon's body becomes a commodity to Plascencia—who has identified himself with White colonizers—and, too, a site of violent bodily transgressions where new protuberances and orifices are created. Her resistance is dictated by her body's placement within the history being told. In other words, Saturn's manipulation of history, which is also being challenged by EMF, is another factor to which Cameroon responds: "Fuck Saturn," she said. "He's not telling the

whole story.' And this was why she left him, because he was a liar" (135). By also challenging the credibility of the author, Cameroon's role in the story is, in turn, compromised. And so Saturn kills her off in an almost casual way:

Cameroon opened the novel and discovered she had been eaten by sharks . . . This was the fate of women who know too much, women who can upset the pride of Saturn. Because ultimately Saturn was a tyrant, commanding the story where he wants it to go. That is why they [EMF] fight against him, why they hide under lead and try to push him to the margins. But Cameroon was just one, not a gang or an army—easily flicked from an African cliff. (227-8)

This death of Cameroon is, like many deaths in the story, a plot device written by Saturn. That is, it functions to feed Saturn's power, which grants him the authority to continue manipulating the story; however, Cameroon would be unable to open the already published novel and learn of her death, which may be metafiction at work here.

In much the same way, Merced de Papel's death can be read as a Saturn vs. Plascencia dichotomy. It may be Plascencia becoming more accepting of his lost love, Liz, who we learn permanently moves on and whom we see playing with her grandchildren generations later (245). As a representation of Liz, Merced de Papel still lives on despite her body being splattered on the shattered windshield (198). Plascencia reminds the reader that "her history was on the lips of her lovers, the scars that parted their mouths. . . that was the history of Merced de Papel the lover . . . the history of the pain in touching her . . . the legacy she left in scar tissue" (ibid). In this sense, Merced de Papel represents the women in the novel, who, through their intimacies with men associated with coloniality, cannot die. She is a paper manifestation of these female bodies. At the end, when Saturn focuses on Liz's paper finger pointed at

the ringed planet in the book she reads to her granddaughter (245), we can read this as the superimposition of Merced de Papel onto Liz.

If deaths are anything but real in the novel, Little Merced's death is quite possibly the epitome of fiction; Plascencia literally resurrects her body. And if anything is to be equated in her death, it is its cause: "citric poisoning" (195). Little Merced's resistance to Saturn comes in two forms. Plascencia writes grotesque realism on her body by burning her tongue with the acid of limes. Her vice of eating limes is a reflection of Merced, her mother who also had the dangerous habit, and to whom Federico de la Fe is also responding with his body. Her sadness for her long lost mother is represented through physical pain to her tongue. Her burns become a response to Jonathan, the White colonist, taking Merced from her family. Outside of this bodily transgression, she resists Saturn's coloniality by learning to black out sections of text from baby Nostradamus, which is perhaps the reason for her death: she, like Cameroon, disrupts the omniscience of the author through her subversive blacked out shapes. By hiding her text, she is silencing her narrative—symbolized in the burning of her tongue with limes—from Saturn's view and simultaneously supersedes his power.

Returning to where we started, the evidence to Chee's claim can be found in the characters' longing for love—they are all trying to save themselves from this sadness. Anzaldúa characterizes Plascencia's characters and their struggle to deal with heartbreak, whether from a missing wife or mother, a long lost girlfriend, or being in the presence of an oppressor. Change comes in the form of each characters' resistance to coloniality, which Plascencia writes onto their bodies. When Anzaldúa states, "change, positive and negative, is always a source of tension . . . it has no sense of closure, of completion, [so] we resist it. We must be motivated by love in order to undertake change" (xxxviii), she underscores the very plotlines of the *The People of Paper*. Federico de la Fe and Little

Merced self-medicate by inflicting violence onto their bodies in response to Merced leaving, but in this process, we see the love between the father and daughter, who, in the end, are written with minimal closure. They walk off the page, "leaving no footprints that Saturn could track" (245), and they seem to have learned to accept the absence of Merced, but the isolated blacked-out circle on the very next page seems to suggest that oppression is still a possibility. Perhaps Plascencia's intent is to suggest that despite there being no sense of closure, we should not resist protesting a colonial presence like Saturn if we are motivated by love.

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