DOI: https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-8026.2024.e99262

WHO GAZES AT WHOM: PATRIARCHY'S ABJECTION GAZE AND MARINA'S OPPOSITIONAL GAZE IN *A FANTASTIC WOMAN*

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Time, flowing like a river
Time, beckoning me
Who knows when we shall meet again
If ever
But time, keeps flowing like a river... to the sea

Goodbye my love, Maybe for forever
Goodbye my love, The tide waits for me
Who knows when we shall meet again
If ever
But time, keeps flowing like a river (on and on)
To the sea, to the sea
(The Alan Parsons Project 1980)

Abstract

Alan Parson's song "Time", played in the beginning of the film *A Fantastic Woman* (2017), raises motifs that resonate throughout the film: the inexorable passing of time and the human need/right to say goodbye to those we love(d). After Marina, a working class transwoman, has the unfortunate surprise of losing her beloved Orlando, her mourning is interrupted and her right to say goodbye is threatened by the heteronormative pressure of society. The abjection gaze of the patriarchal family and of the state representatives towards Marina is discussed based on Judith Butler's (2002) *Gender Trouble*. Running against time and the tyranny of heteronormativity, Marina eventually develops an oppositional gaze — discussed through bell hooks's ideas (2015) — to counter the violence of the alienating gaze, not only to be able to say goodbye to Orlando, but also to assert her identity as a woman.

Keywords: A Fantastic Woman; Oppositional Gaze; Queer Theory.

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Introduction

According to the *Human Rights Annual Report: Gender and Sexual Diversity in Chile*[1] (2017), 2017 was the "year of fury", since "homophobic and transphobic groups exacerbated their hatred against any anti-discrimination discourse, action or organization in a systematic way throughout the country" (9). As a result, there was a 45% rise in reports of discrimination and violence against LGBTQIA+ people, including two murders, fifty six instances of attack on the streets and other types of abuses at work, at school or in the family. Although such rise in Chile is certainly worrying, data suggest that violence and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people are even worse—much worse, actually—in Brazil. According to the *Trans Murder Monitoring Annual Report 2016*, which analyzed the number of murders of LGBTQIA+ people between 2008 and 2016[2], Brazil is "the country with the highest absolute number of reported murders every year, currently accounting for almost 40% of all reported murders of trans and gender-diverse people worldwide" (8).

Released in such violent context, the 2017 Chilean movie *A Fantastic Woman* (2017) was well acclaimed and awarded internationally. It was awarded the Silver Bear for best screenplay and the Teddy Award at the 2017 Berlin Festival, an Oscar for best foreign language film of the year 2018, and a Goya for best Iberoamerican film of the year 2018, among other awards. Directed by Sebastián Lelio, it stars Daniela Vega—a transwoman actress and opera singer—as Marina.

In the movie, the protagonist Marina has the unfortunate surprise of losing her beloved Orlando during the night of her birthday. After taking him to the hospital and receiving the terrible news, her mourning is interrupted and the possibility of saying goodbye is delayed. The heteronormative pressure over Marina, a working class transwoman, originating from society—symbolized by medical personnel, police officers and a police detective from the Sex Crimes Unit—and from the patriarchal family—Sonia, Bruno and Gabriel[3]—is so strong that she almost gives up her basic human right of saying goodbye to her beloved Orlando. Constantly reminded of her disturbing presence and of the man Orlando had been—the factory owner, the father of a bourgeois family—she almost forgets who Orlando was to her: a man who came out of the closet, who left his patriarchal family and invited her to live with him. But in the end, as Marina remembers the Orlando she met, she finds strength to prevail over the patriarchal family regarding her right to say goodbye.

Since it is a story about the negation of the right of mourning and also about resistance, there is thematic similarity between *A Fantastic Woman* and *Antigone* (Sófocles 1990). We can say that there is intertextuality between the movie and the play since "frequently, the intertext is not explicit but it is, more precisely, the references to previous knowledge that are assumed to be known" (Stam 2006, 11). Hence, I am not arguing *A Fantastic Woman* is an adaptation of *Antigone*, but rather that there is resonance between them.

Like Antigone, Marina's right to mourn the loss of a beloved one has been denied by the status quo. In the film, the impossibility of mourning is what causes haunting: Marina is haunted by Orlando's ghost, which appears throughout the film. And like Antigone, Marina challenges the status quo to pay her respects to her beloved. But unlike Antigone, who is punished by death *after* her act of defiance, Marina suffers different forms of violence *prior* to her act of defiance. It seems that, for Orlando's patriarchal family, Marina's mere existence as a trans woman is already a threat to what they believe to be societal norms. The patriarchal family wants to deprive Marina of everything—Orlando's car, the apartment she shared with Orlando, and even the dog Orlando gave her.

Ironically, the patriarchal family's violence builds up to the point of challenging Marina's own identity and her memory of Orlando, which will end up causing her opposition. Although diplomatic at first, Marina eventually has to develop an oppositional gaze to confront the patriarchal family's abjection gaze towards her. After gradually losing everything—Orlando, the car, the apartment and the dog—Marina challenges the patriarchal family for the first time by erupting into the church where the wake is taking place. After being expelled, Marina is abducted, insulted and her face is deformed by Bruno—Orlando's son—and his friends. The assault sends Marina into a feeling of depression over the negation of both her right to mourn and her right to cultivate a private memory of Orlando. Almost reaching the point of yielding, Marina decides to challenge the patriarchal family again, prompted instead by *something* she discovers in the sauna Orlando used to go to,. Hence, finally, she is able to say goodbye to her beloved.

Obviously, since 2017, there have been some studies analyzing the film. For instance, Rabelo and Conserva (2020) analyze the psychological impacts of transphobia in trans people through the discussion of the film *A Fantastic Woman*. For example, they say that "such transphobia is usually expressed through prejudicial questions and looks, being sometimes followed by physical and even sexual violence" (5). And although the aforementioned paper discusses the transphobic gaze and points out many instances of transphobia represented in the film, it does not further elaborate on the abjection of such gazes.

In addition, Waal and Armstrong (2020) analyze *A Fantastic Woman* as part of what they call trans/national necronarratives. They even point out that "the numerous shot-countershot sequences and abundant mirrors establish the problematic act of looking at and reacting to trans expression as the film's primary concern" (58). However, they do not elaborate on the gaze that Marina develops in reaction to transphobia.

Similarly, Juli Kroll (2022) also discusses what she calls the transgender gaze which "allows the audience to look with Marina as Orlando gazes fondly upon her" so that "the film allows for dual affective flow between the audience/Marina toward the ghost" (223). However, Kroll also argues that "ultimately, the film demands the viewer's assent/ascent to the reversibility of the gaze, and it struggles against its own framing mechanisms" (226). By framing mechanisms, Kroll means that the film "ultimately communicates a mainstream fantasy about

the trans woman's transnormative hopes and desires . . . still framed by middle-class, urban values that are informed by normative time and sense of place" (227). Despite Kroll's discussion of transphobia in the film and of possible ways of conceptualizing the gaze, I think her text misses the point by focusing on the possibility of the audience's identification instead of how gazing expresses the power struggle that permeates the right to identify oneself.

Therefore, in this article, I analyze elements of mise en scène[4] and cinematography in *A Fantastic Woman* regarding the patriarchal abject gaze that segregates Marina and the oppositional gaze that she develops, based on Julia Kristeva's (1982) conceptualization of the abject, Judith Butler's (*Gender Trouble*, 2002) discussion of gender as performative and bell hook's (2015) oppositional gaze.

Analysis

Alan Parson's song "Time" (1980)—cited in the epigraph, played when the couple Marina and Orlando dances during the celebration of her birthday—raises motifs that resonate throughout the film *A Fantastic Woman* (2017), such as the inexorable passing of time and the human need/right to say goodbye to those we love(d). Fittingly, in the song, the inexorability of time passing is construed through the simile of a river flowing to the sea, besides foreshadowing Orlando's death, also refers to Marina and Orlando's soon-to-be frustrated plan of visiting the Paraná River and the Iguazu Falls.

But before the separation of the couple takes place, and even before the initial sequence introducing Orlando and Marina as a happy couple, the film actually opens with Orlando in the sauna, and follows him throughout his day until he casually strolls in a hotel restaurant. At this point, we as audience are not sure about the identity of the protagonist. A band is playing, a woman is singing and the man we are following so far is looking at her while sipping his drink. They exchange looks and smiles (Picture 1) as she sings "You were of no use to me, daddy, and I threw you in the bin (*A Fantastic* , my trans.)."[5]

Picture 1 — "Complicity" gaze (*A Fantastic*)


Picture 2 — Haunting gaze (*A Fantastic*).

The song is called *Periódico de Ayer*, by Hector Lavoe, and it is about a man who refuses to "read" yesterday's news, meaning to have sex with the same woman twice. The song is a good example of how machismo is stimulated in popular culture by representing male sexual affairs as healthy or funny behavior.

However, Marina doubly subverts the song by, firstly, being a transwoman singing the song and, secondly, by changing "*mami*" for "*papi*". Interestingly, "*papi*" is also the tender way Marina calls Orlando.

The look they share when she sings that particular line is what I call "complicity gaze" (Picture 1). What I mean by complicity here is the sharing of private meanings without resorting to words, a form of comradeship or companionship. Such gaze can only be achieved with intimacy and with profound knowledge of the other person. However, the term also carries a negative connotation since dictionaries define it as cooperation to do something illicit, to commit a crime. Precisely because there is obviously nothing wrong in loving a (trans)person, I would like to take advantage of this linguistic issue and claim the word, marking it in quotation marks to indicate that I am using it with a different meaning from those of the dictionaries, playing on purpose with the sense of what is considered taboo by society and bringing that connotation to the fore.

Picture 3 — Haunting gaze (A Fantastic).

Picture 4 — Haunting gaze (A Fantastic).

Picture 5 — Haunting gaze followed by spectral kiss (*A Fantastic*).

Picture 6 — Dirty area (*A Fantastic*).

Besides the "complicity" gaze, there is also the haunting gaze. After Orlando dies, there are four instances of his spectral appearance to Marina. First, when Marina is returning home the day he died, we see his image reflected on her sunglasses as if he were standing in front of the garage gate (Picture 2). The second time, Marina sees his image reflected on the rearview mirror (Picture 3), as if he were seated in the backseat of the car. The third time, towards the end of the film, is when Marina seeks refuge in a LGBTQIA+ nightclub (Picture 4) after having been abducted by Bruno and his friends. Notice the shadow of Orlando's face in the middle of the frame. The fourth and last time is in the cemetery, when Marina is trying to find her way to the crematory. Orlando's ghost leads the way and even kisses her goodbye (Picture 5) before disappearing for good. In all the mentioned appearances, Orlando's ghost is gazing at Marina, who gazes back

despite being afraid. We can interpret Orlando's haunting gaze as an extrapolation of the previous "complicity" gaze, but now it is a look across the life/death border. In other words, the ghost resonates the motif of saying goodbye, introduced by Parson's song, and also indicates the passing of time in the narrative.

Although the deadline (pun intended) is not clearly indicated, we as audience imagine Marina has a couple of days from Orlando's death until his cremation. Indeed, tension in the film is created by the inexorable passing of time, on one hand, and the patriarchy's negation of Marina's right to mourn. In other words, the impossibility of mourning and of cultivating her own memory of Orlando is what causes haunting. Patriarchy forces—the hospital staff, the police, the forensic medical center, and the patriarchal family—bring forth different forms of violence towards Marina, usually initiated by what I call abjection gaze.

It is a peculiar look of estrangement, as if the characters were trying to fit Marina in their own gender binary conceptual boxes, and failing to do so, they manifest a gaze that tries to alienate her. The very first examples take place in the hospital. Immediately after rushing Orlando to the emergency room, Marina is pushed outside of the room by the staff. While she waits, next to a sign that reads "dirty area" (my trans.)[6] (Picture 6), a female nurse approaches her. The nurse looks Marina from head to toe and questions her if she is part of *the family*. Taken by surprise, Marina replies that she is a friend. Afterwards, a male doctor looks Marina from head to toe when approaching her in order to communicate Orlando's death. The doctor also asks if she is a family member of Orlando. But, this time, Marina is able to answer that they are a couple.

After calling Gabriel, Orlando's brother, who tells Marina that she does not have to worry about anything and that it is for the best if she leaves, she walks away from the hospital only to be stopped by the police. Taken back to the hospital, she realizes that the doctor had called the police on her, probably suspecting that she might have killed Orlando. The doctor is talking with the police Sergeant and both men manifest an abjection gaze towards Marina (Picture 7). The Sergeant questions her in the hospital reception about her identification and insists in calling her Daniel, the name assigned to her at birth, instead of the name she has chosen, Marina.

Later the same day, a female police detective from the sex crimes unit shows up at Marina's workplace looking for her. Initially, she seems amicable and says she is sorry for Marina's loss. But that friendly tone is only a facade to cover her suspicions that Marina was either a sex worker who killed Orlando for money or that she might have killed him in self defense, as we find out based on her questions. For instance, she says:

> look, I have been working for twenty three years on the streets, fourteen years in the sex crimes unit, I have a master degree about this topic, I know what happens with people like you. I'm sorry, with women like you because I have seen it all. All. I want you to know that I understand and support you. Did you have to defend yourself from him? (A Fantastic).

Picture 7 — abjection gaze (*A Fantastic*).

Picture 8 — abjection gaze (*A Fantastic*).

Picture 9 — abjection gaze (*A Fantastic*).

As we can see in the citation above, for the patriarchal forces, a transwoman rushing a respected factory owner to the hospital with bruises on his body must be a case of murder. Marina's version of the events—that they were in bed, he started feeling ill, that he fell on the staircase as she was getting the car keys to take him to the hospital—is completely disregarded. In fact, one wonders if the hospital staff and the police would have the same suspicions and approach if Marina were a cisgender woman married to Orlando. Worse, they seem to forget that she was Orlando's partner, who just died, and that she needs to mourn.

The detective's suspicion and harassment of Marina is so extreme that she demands a physical checkup at the forensic medical center. Marina refuses at first, but the detective threatens to take the case to court if she does not comply. And so we have another example of the abjection gaze: the police detective is positioned at the top of the staircase gazing downward at Marina (Picture 8), while on the back we see a suggestive painting of horses being broken. Like the horses in the painting, Marina is in an inferior position and is subdued by the rider, the police detective.

The physical examination sequence is particularly *troubling*. While Marina is removing her clothes and putting a gown on, she overhears the male forensic doctor asking the police detective if he should address Marina as a man or as a woman. After that, the doctor tries to reassure Marina and asks the police officer to leave them alone, but the detective refuses. At this point, we are not sure if the police officer decides to remain in the room because she wants to protect Marina, if she wants to see for herself Marina that does not have any bruises, or if she is actually perversely curious about Marina's body. Regardless, to have two state officials gazing at a transwoman's nude body (Picture 9), one of them a male doctor taking photos and instructing Marina to make different "poses", reminds me of Laura Mulvey's discussion of the male gaze in Classic Hollywood cinema.

For Mulvey (1999), Classic Hollywood films rely on the identification between the gaze of the male audience and the gaze of the male protagonist, both of which gaze at the women on screen. Mulvey also discusses the act of posing by female stars and how that delays action, which is moved forward in the narrative by the male protagonist. However important her analysis, Mulvey is dealing with Classic Hollywood cinema, not Chilean contemporary films. Furthermore, Mulvey bases her analysis in the gender binary, that is, she is interested in analyzing the oppression of cisgender women by cisgender men through cinema. Nevertheless, in the aforementioned sequence of *A Fantastic Woman*, we have a cisgender man and a cisgender woman oppressing a transgender woman.

Since we are discussing the borders between life and death and between genders, and since we are also talking about segregation and violence, a more suitable concept is Julia Kristeva's abject. According to Kristeva, the abject is caused by "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). In comparison, the deject is "necessarily dichotomous, somewhat Manichaean" since he is "a deviser of territories, languages, works, [that] never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines—for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject—constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh" (8).

As we can see, although it tries to exclude the abject, the deject actually derives its identity and position in relation to a border from the abject. One of the many examples offered by Kristeva is that of religion since

> abjection persists as exclusion or taboo in monotheistic religions, Judaism in particular, but drifts over to more 'secondary' forms such as transgression (of the Law) within the same monotheistic economy. It finally encounters, with Christian sin, a dialectic elaboration, as it becomes integrated in the Christian Word as a threatening otherness (17).

Returning to the film, the patriarchal forces—the hospital staff, the police, the forensic medic, the patriarchal family—manifest an abjection gaze towards Marina as a way of rejecting her as a threatening otherness, and, in doing so, they reaffirm and reassure themselves of their own privileged positions regarding the gender border, while, at the same time, naturalizing gender and attempting to erase the possibility of resistance. In other words, "those bodily figures who do not fit into either gender fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject against which the human itself is constituted" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 142).

Picture 10 — Sonia's abjection gaze (*A Fantastic*).

Picture 11 — Bruno's abjection gaze (*A Fantastic*).

The dehumanization of who transgresses the binary gender becomes critical in the conversation between Marina and Sonia, Orlando's ex-wife (Picture 10). When Marina tries to express some solidarity towards Sonia's suffering, the latter qualifies Marina's relationship with Orlando as *perversion* and Marina herself as a chimera:

> when I married Orlando, I was thirty eight. We were quite *normal*. We had a *normal* life. So when he explained to me, I thought that, I'm sorry if I sound a bit rude and direct, but I can only see it as *pure perversion*. I'm sorry, but when I look at you, I do not know what I see. A chimera, that's it (*A Fantastic*, *my emphasis*).

It is ironical that Sonia juxtaposes "pure" and "perversion", although the character seems not aware of such oxymoron. Regardless, based on our previous discussion of the abject, we can see that Sonia is actually positioning herself strategically within heteronormativity by segregating Marina and Orlando's relationship as perversion and Marina herself as a chimera, a hybrid monster of Greek mythology. Marina, however, is aware of that and we perceive it as she comments ironically, after Sonia says that she is sorry for calling her a chimera, that "no, there is nothing to forgive. You are normal. You are fine" (*A Fantastic*). Sonia does not get Marina's irony. Instead, Sonia thinks Marina is agreeing with her, which causes Marina to lose patience. When Sonia mentions her daughter of seven years as an excuse for Marina not to attend the wake, Marina claims her right to say goodbye to Orlando. Sonia disowns Marina's claim and offers to bribe her instead. Sonia even calls Marina by the name assigned to her at birth, Daniel. As we can see, for Sonia, Marina cannot be accepted as part of the family because Marina's mere presence challenges the notions of normality she and the rest of the family members believe to be true. Worse, Sonia evokes motherhood to separate herself as a ciswoman from Marina, a transwoman. In fact, the film touches sensitive issues of marriage and of the right of adopting children by LGBTQIA+ people in Chile around 2017, which were finally guaranteed by law in 2021 (Ley 2022).

Another and more extreme example of abjection gaze is that of Bruno and his friends (Picture 11). If Sonia and Gabriel to some extent disguise their prejudice regarding Marina, Bruno is overtly transphobic from the start. The first time he meets Marina, arriving unannounced into her apartment, he asks

if she has had sex reassignment surgery, threatens to expel her from the flat and literally holds her against the wall—and here we can see a certain ambiguity of the abject discussed by Kristeva, since Bruno seems to be somewhat attracted to Marina. The second time is much worse. Bruno and friends abduct Marina after she tried to participate in the wake, immobilize her, insult her with homophobic and transphobic expressions and deform her face with tape.

Sonia's violence may seem to be more rhetorical when compared with Bruno's, who deforms Marina's face and make her look like a monster, but all the patriarchal family is actually interested in depriving Marina of the car, the apartment, the dog and of her right to say goodbye. Overall, the violence of the patriarchal forces in the film make us—audience— wonder why is Marina being the target of so much hatred if she has not done anything wrong. Or, to rephrase it better, we wonder *why* is patriarchy targeting Marina.

Marina, as a transwoman, destabilizes gender binary—the belief that there are only two stable genders and that they correspond to the sex the child was born with—and heteronormativity—the attempt of establishing heterosexuality as a norm for all society. To better understand the why, we need Butler's conceptualization of gender as performative. According to Butler,

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. . . That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (*Gender Trouble* 179-180).

The thing is that heteronormative individuals believe that gender is not only clear cut, but also that it is a stable and essential construct when, in fact, it is not. Instead, it is fluid, based on repetition of acts, related to both identity and expression. Gender, as other power relations such as class and race, depends on a repetition of acts and discourses that aim to reaffirm/reproduce its hierarchy. But, paradoxically, each repetition brings within itself the possibility of resistance, of challenging the hierarchy. That is why dominant discourses tend to naturalize and essentialize social constructs, to veil its own traces.

Since gender as performative refers at the same time to the psyche, identity and behavior of a person, patriarchal violence in A Fantastic Woman challenges not only Marina's expression of the gender she *identifies* with, but also her own *identity*. In other words, the different forms of violence in the film challenge her own identity as a (trans)person. That is why Marina develops an oppositional

gaze: to be able to continue to survive as a transwoman in a still heteronormative and transphobic society. That is to say, "where one might understand violation as a trauma that can only induce a destructive repetition compulsion . . . it seems equally possible to acknowledge the force of repetition as the very condition of an affirmative response to violation" (Butler, "Gender is burning" 1997, 383).

Butler's ("Gender is Burning") conceptualization of a non-Cartesian subjectivity, based on Gloria Anzaldúa, is crucial to understand the epistemological nuances of an oppositional gaze. Instead of a preexistent subject, such as Decartes's, or a subject formed only by violence and authority, we have a subject that is interstitial, that inhabits borderlands. In other words, although the borders exert influence over the subject, the individual is not limited to a repetition of dominant discourses but, instead, he or she or they can also re-signify them.

Regarding the possibility for an oppositional gaze, bell hooks discusses how black women developed an oppositional gaze as resistance to the dominance of the white male gaze and the absence of black women in Classical Hollywoodian Cinema. According to hooks,

> we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The "gaze" has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally. Subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that "looks" to document, one that is oppositional. In resistance struggle, the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating "awareness" politicizes "looking" relations—one learns to look a certain "way" in order to resist (116).

We can see hooks's perspective is compatible with Butler's regarding the possibility of resistance. Moreover, even though hooks is discussing the oppositional gaze as black women's cinematic reception strategy in the U.S., her conceptualization leaves enough room to accommodate the discussion of the protagonist's oppositional gaze in *A Fantastic Woman*. Even though the context and the issues may differ, in hooks and in the film we have the gaze as possibility of resistance and epistemic disobedience by someone who is oppressed.

In the film, Marina gradually rehearses her oppositional gaze. Initially, it starts as a way of blowing off steam, of channeling her frustration and pain through the act of punching. Near the restaurant where she works, there is a punching machine (Picture 12) which Marina uses once to try to feel better. Afterwards, at home, Marina is shadow boxing. On the wall behind her, there is a poster of a sea torrent and a wave crashing over the coast (Picture 13). Hence, the composition of the shot creates the effect of Marina channeling the energy of the torrent.

Indeed, the motif of the torrent, or the torrential violence, resonates in the montage in which Marina is walking against the blowing wind. After the already mentioned physical examination Marina was obliged to undergo, she seeks refuge with her musical teacher and mentor. After talking, he starts playing the

piano while Marina sings "Sposa son disprezzata", an aria witten by Geminiano Giacomelli about a scorned wife: "I am a scorned wife, / faithful, yet insulted. / Heavens, what did I do? / And yet he is my heart, / my husband, my love, / my hope" (A Fantastic, my trans.)[7]. While she sings the aria, the camera cuts to a dolly shot[8] as it follows Marina walking head on towards a storm. As she leans on and faces the incoming storm, we continue to hear her singing the aria in voice-over. As she walks, the wind picks up to the point that she leans against it, unable to move on, in a sort of stalemate (Picture 14). Interestingly, in the original song, the faithful wife is scorned by her unfaithful husband. But, in the context of the film, Marina is scorned by the patriarchal forces which are symbolized by the storm she bravely faces.

Picture 12 — Rehearsing oppositional gaze (*A Fantastic*).

Picture 13 — Rehearsing oppositional gaze (*A Fantastic*).

Picture 14 — Facing the storm (*A Fantastic*).

Picture 15 — Performing at the end (A Fantastic).

In addition, the storm motif also resonates in the final sequence. After manifesting her oppositional gaze against the patriarchal family in her struggle for the right to mourn her beloved Orlando, Marina beautifully sings George Handel's aria "Ombra mai Fu" in a concert: "Never was a shade / of any plant / dearer and more lovely, / or more sweet" (*A Fantastic*, my trans.)[9]. The aria, in the context of the film, signifies both the resolution of the conflict and can also be understood as a metaphor for Orlando's love. Interestingly, although not sung in the sequence, the following lines of the aria talk about storms and winds: "May thunder, lightning, and storms / never disturb your dear peace, / nor may you by blowing winds be profaned" (Burns 2018). Hence, for those that are familiar with this aria, the sequence in which it is sung by Marina not only resonates the motif of the storm, but also subtly closes the search for saying goodbye introduced by Parson's song "Time" in the beginning of the film.

Returning to the issue of the oppositional gaze, it is only after Marina learns Bruno has taken the dog from her, that she enacts an oppositional gaze towards the patriarchal family for the first time. Marina enters the church and, defiantly, stands watching the members of the patriarchal family (Picture 16). This sequence is very symbolic since most Christian churches do not welcome transpeople. Moreover, as previously discussed, religion associates the abject with the border purity/impurity. Hence, by performing an oppositional gaze in the church Marina is not only protesting against the negation of her right to mourn, she is also making her body overtly political to challenge the dominant discourse of heteronormativity.

But the best example of oppositional gaze is at the end of the film. After being abducted and deformed, Marina is depressed to the point of almost letting go of both her right of saying goodbye to Orlando and of her own memories of him. There are, however, two events that help her make her mind. The first is the reading of Orlando's obituary, probably paid by the patriarchal family and by the company, eulogizing Orlando's virtues as husband, brother, father, and employer[10]. The reading of the obituary troubles Marina because this is the version of Orlando that the patriarchy wants society to remember. The Orlando she knew as her lover and her private memories of him are denied public status by a heteronormative and transphobic society.

Picture 16 — Oppositional gaze (*A Fantastic*).

Picture 17 — Oppositional gaze (*A Fantastic*).

The second decisive event is finding out what is inside Orlando's locker in the sauna. It is important to remember that the film actually opens with Orlando in the sauna and that Marina finds Orlando's locker key early in the movie, when the ghost makes its first appearance, and that she is troubled by what that key may represent and/or unveil. After finding out with a customer in the restaurant that such type of key is for lockers in a sauna called Finland[11], Marina goes there to finally find out what is inside the locker.

Before she can access the lockers, however, she must cross the female and the male areas. First, Marina has to remove her clothes. With only the towel covering her torso and her hair loose, she watches the door that separates the female and the male area while other women hang out (Picture 18). Before entering the male area, Marina adjusts her towel to the waist and ties her hair. She cautiously makes her way through a number of men, as they continue to relax (Picture 19). The performance of gender in this sequence is a good example of how "gender is an

identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 179-180).

The fragility or lack of stability of gender identity is also symbolized by the liminal representation of the sauna itself. Divided only by a door, the female area has a light blue color and seems to be well lit. There is also a mirror on the wall (Picture 18). On the other side of the door, the male area is dingy and has a purplish light (Picture 19). Despite the apparent differences between them, the fact that they are adjacently connected through a door and that Marina is able to perform her way through both of the areas symbolizes how tenuous gender identity is.

Picture 18 — Female side of sauna (*A Fantastic*).

Picture 19 — Male side of sauna (*A Fantastic*).

Picture 20 — Coming out (*A Fantastic*).

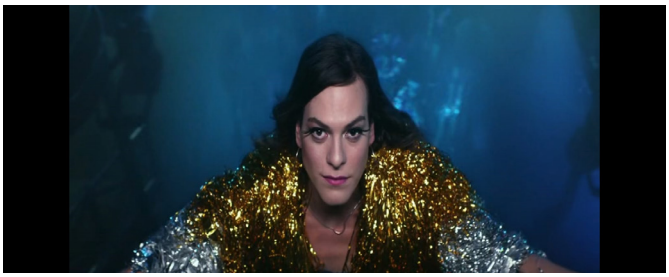
Picture 21 — Confidentiality gaze (*A Fantastic*).

Finally, Marina is able to reach the lockers. When she opens Orlando's locker, we find out it is actually empty (Picture 20). Marina leaves the locker door open as the camera slowly dollies closer. Although there is *nothing* inside the locker, there is *something* significant about this open locker that convinced her to confront the patriarchal family later on.

The significance of the locker is that there is nothing Orlando wished to hide from her. There are no secrets between Marina and the Orlando she knew. Furthermore, the open locker is a metaphor for coming out. In other words, it is possible to infer that the open closet reminded Marina of the Orlando she knew—a cisgender bourgeois man with a patriarchal family that decided to come out, someone who loved her and who did not have anything to hide from her. In other words, the locker reassured Marina of her own memory of Orlando.

After those two events, Marina challenges the patriarchal family in the cemetery. She finds Gabriel, Bruno and Sonia inside their car and she climbs over it, demanding her dog back (Picture 17)! If we remember the picture at the forensic medical center, the one with the horses being broken, in this sequence we have an inversion of that hierarchy. Marina, who was below, now is at the top, challenging the patriarchal family, who now is at the bottom.

Also at the end of the film, there is a beautiful sequence at Marina's place. She is lying on her bed, naked, looking down on a mirror which is placed over her body (Picture 21). The mirror allows Marina to symbolically look at both her body and at her gender identity. This sequence suggests the resolution of Marina's inner conflict regarding her identity since, as we previously discussed, the patriarchal violence against Marina threatened not only her memory of Orlando, but also her identity as a transwoman. In addition, we can see that Marina is looking at the camera/audience through the mirror. In fact, this is one of only two instances in the film when Marina breaks the fourth wall.



Picture 22— Confidentiality gaze (*A Fantastic*).

Throughout the film, there are several moments in which it seems as if Marina is looking directly towards the camera. However, on closer examination, we can actually notice that she is looking slightly up, down, left or right at other people or objects on or off-screen. Indeed, there are only two sequences in which she gazes directly at the camera: the already mentioned gazing at the camera through a mirror placed over her body, and another one in the sequence in a LGBTQIA+ nightclub, where Marina takes refuge after being attacked by Orlando's son and his friends.

After making out and having sex with a man in the nightclub, and after seeing Orlando's ghost in the middle of the dance floor, there is a beautiful montage of Marina performing a dance routine with several dancers. Based on their shiny costumes, makeup and pom-poms, this montage pays homage to drag shows, as pointed out by Kroll (220). As Marina is hoisted up in the air, she comes closer to the camera as she looks straight at it (Picture 22). Like in the mirror-over-body sequence, here she is unmistakably looking at the camera/audience.

Furthermore, there is a sense of intimacy in both sequences that is reinforced by gazing at the audience. In the nightclub sequence, we can see Marina take refuge in a LGBTQIA+ space and interact with queer people. In fact, besides the sequences of Marina and Orlando as a couple, the nightclub sequence is the only one in which we come into contact with this freer side of her self. And, obviously, the sequence in which Marina is naked, gazing at the mirror placed over her body is very intimate. And, even so, she looks at us through the mirror not in a disgusted, ironic or hostile way as she does with the patriarchal characters. Both gazes reveal both acknowledgment and confidentiality at the same time. In other words, the audience is neither a voyeur—because Marina sees us—, nor a deject—since we are placed outside the abject-oppostional gazes. The confidentiality gaze,

hence, not only expresses that she knows we are there, but also signals that we have a certain degreee of responsibility towards being entrusted with her story.

Finally, a word about composition. Although it would require perhaps another paper only to investigate composition in this film, I noticed that Marina is often facing or gazing at a threat to the left of the screen (Pictures 12, 13 and 14). Also, in several shots, the patriarchal forces are positioned to the same side, the left of the screen (Pictures 9, 10 and 15). Besides that, people that have a positive effect over Marina are usually on the right side of the screen: her friends that take her in are positioned to the right side of the screen when the obituary is read; when Marina hugs her mentor, he is positioned at the right side of the screen; when the ghost of Orlando appears at the cemetery, he occupies the right side of the screen. I am not claiming that all shots fall into this classification, but rather I am implying that it would be interesting for future research to investigate composition in *A Fantastic Woman*.

Final remarks

Although there are numerous possibilities to analyze in *A Fantastic Woman*, I focused on the issue of the different gazes we have in the film, such as the "complicity" gaze, the haunting gaze, the confidentiality gaze, the abject gaze and Marina's oppositional gaze, especially the last two. The abject gaze is practiced in the film by patriarchal forces, including state officials and Orlando's patriarchal family, in order to affirm its dominant position by segregating Marina as Other, as monster. Since gender is performative, as we have discussed, Marina's existence and physical presence as a transwoman in a heteronormative and transphobic society tends to destabilize the gender binary and the dominant discourse. In other words, Marina's body is political.

In comparison, the violence exerted by the patriarchal forces threatens Marina's own identity as a transwoman, which, in turn, causes her to develop a form of epistemic disobedience by means of resignifying the gaze as a power instrument. As a result, Marina develops an oppositional gaze. Enacting an oppositional gaze, Marina is able to reaffirm her identity as a transwoman and reassure herself of her own memory of Orlando. In other words, besides her body, the memory is also political. It is curious that patriarchy attempts to eliminate all the chiasms a person may have in order to circulate a public memory that celebrates dominant views of class, race and gender. It is political, hence, to challenge the public memory and dispute it, including what has been left out, what disrupts uniform and dominant views.

Notes

1. Informe Anual de Derechos Humanos: Diversidad Sexual y de Género en Chile.
2. Unfortunately, as of 2023, Brazil is the country with more trans people deaths for fourteen years consecutively (Cristaldo 2023). In contrast, in Chile, "there was a decrease of 6,1% in discrimination reports [in 2022], the second consecutive

reduction that comes as a result of legal changes and the recognition by courts of law of the non-binary gender, as well as other measures against trans/homophobic discourse" (Informe Anual 2022, 11). All of the sources originally published in Spanish or Portuguese and cited in this paper were translated by me.

3. Respectively, Orlando's ex-wife, his son and his brother.
4. Mise en scène consists of setting, lighting, costume, acting and the director's staging of such elements (Bordwell and Thompson 2008, 112).
5. "Tu no serviste pa' nada papi, y al zafacón yo te eché" (A Fantastic).
6. "Area sucia" (A Fantastic).
7. "Sposa son disprezzata, / fida son oltraggiata, / cieli che feci mai? / E pur egl'è il mio cor / il mio sposo, il mio amor, / la mia speranza" (A Fantastic).
8. "In the tracking or dolly shot, the camera as a whole does change position, traveling in any direction along the ground-forward, backward, circularly, diagonally, or from side to side" (Bordwell; Thompson, 2008, p.195).
9. "Ombra mai fu / di vegetabile, / cara ed amabile, / soave più" (A Fantastic).
10. Orlando is the owner of a textile factory.
11. The name of the sauna itself, Finland, ironically refers to the country where saunas are very popular and many of them are actually mixed-gender.

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Submission date: 27/03/2024
Acceptance date: 24/09/2024