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# Mistress vs Maid: Race, Class, Nation and Boundaries between Women in Argentine Fiction since the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Inés Dunstan and Rebekah Pite 

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In 2008, Argentine journalist Jessica Fainsod published the book *Se nos fue María y mi vida es un caos* [María Has Left Us and My Life is Chaos]. Part anecdotal, part household manual, the author targeted other middle- and upper-class women who, like her, had regularly employed maids. Much of this self-described 'divertidísimo [super-fun]' book is based on mistress's anecdotes about maids.<sup>1</sup> The anecdotes are presented as humour, and the humour is apparently at the expense of the maids.<sup>2</sup> That such a book could be published in 2008 without incident speaks to a longer trend. Like many writers before her, Fainsod situated maids and mistresses in fixed class and racial positions that negate the possibility of any gender alliance or egalitarian relationship between the two. In *Se nos fue María*, as in previous works of Argentine fiction, the disparate domestic roles women are assigned reveal both the oppositional construction of womanhood (the classy white mistress vs. her inferior non-white maid), as well as the ubiquity of literary tensions surrounding this relationship.

Inspired by the surprising continuities, as well as the less dramatic changes, in the portrayal of the mistress-maid relationship from the mid-nineteenth century through to the present, this article explores representations of this understudied domestic relationship in Argentine fiction. While the figures of the *gaucho* and the immigrant have dominated historical cultural studies, the figures of the *muchacha* (maid) and the *patrona* (mistress, or female boss) have been overlooked. Indeed, no wide-ranging study of the literary representation between these two leading domestic figures exists for Argentina, and, as such, this article begins to redress this neglect. Our analysis builds upon Inés Dunstan's previous work on the literary figure of the 'spying' maid during the Rosas and Perón eras and Rebekah Pite's analysis of the relationship between mistresses and the maids at home and in the mass media during the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Drawing from Dunstan's cultural historical approach to Argentine literary sources with Pite's social historical analysis of these sources, we trace the shifts and continuities in the maid's and mistress's passage through Argentine fiction. Canonical, as well as lesser-known works, are treated as historical and cultural artefacts, and as spaces where mindsets that justify power relations are made visible.<sup>4</sup>

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[Correction added on 31st August, after first online publication: Author name Rebekah Pite is misspelled. it should be Rebekah Pite not Rebekah Pit.]

The theoretical insights of international scholars studying images of maids and mistresses in other contexts provide useful frameworks for interpreting the Argentine case. Scholars such as Cissie Fairchilds, Kristina Straub, Paula Humfrey, Ann Stoler, Susan Yates, Kristen Hill Maher and Silke Saab have noted that the predominance and threat of literary maids has increased during periods in which there were challenges to the systems of slavery and domestic servitude that held the potential for socioeconomic mobility for members of these oppressed groups.<sup>5</sup> In turn, Leonore Davidoff, Peter Flynn and Ann McClintock have advanced the theory that images of maids have reinforced national and/or white bourgeois identity both within England and British colonial settings.<sup>6</sup>

The representations of maids and mistresses in nineteenth-century Argentine canonical literature strongly resemble representations of maids and mistresses in other Western and (post)colonial literatures. That this should be the case is not surprising: the mid- and late-nineteenth-century Argentine liberal leaders and writer-intellectuals who dominated this era wanted to transform their country into a European-style nation. As historian Nicolas Shumway explains, their 'ideological legacy is in some sense a mythology of exclusion rather than a unifying national ideal, a recipe for divisiveness rather than consensual pluralism'.<sup>7</sup> Most famously, in his 1845 book, *Facundo o civilización y barbarie*, future President Domingo F. Sarmiento divided the Argentine Republic into 'civilized' European-style cities and the 'barbaric' rural spaces of the 'interior'.<sup>8</sup> Elites' European-inspired vision played a crucial role in maintaining colonial racial and gender hierarchies, especially during moments in which the socioeconomic hierarchies that benefited them seemed threatened.

As we will demonstrate, literary depictions of maids and mistresses have not only been shaped by specific ideas about these figures at the time, but also reflect and reveal wider preoccupations, historical trends and cultural concerns in the period of their production. Politics have had a particularly pronounced impact. Indeed, many novelists set up their depictions of the maid-mistress relationship as a critique of the extant, or, more often, preceding regime. So too, specific generations of intellectuals and the waves of immigration and migration to urban centres has had a marked impact on Argentine literary production. Socially conscious authors have sometimes turned to the figure of the mistreated maid to highlight oppression, but nevertheless tended to doom her to criminality or death.

As we shall see, the figures of the troubled literary maid and mistress have played enduring roles in constructing the myth of a wealthy, white Argentina as well as the privilege of white men, and, to a lesser, but still quite significant, extent, white women. We argue that literary patterns that dwell on the power struggles in the domestic realm – including the threats of role reversal between the maid and the mistress, sexual encounters across racial boundaries, and sexual harassment and violence against maids by male employers – reveal a larger unease with the place of women, especially subaltern women, in Argentina's national imagination. Further, we propose that the literary representations of maids and mistresses have not only reflected but also shaped domestic power relations within Argentina. In this respect, we argue that the female domestic characters in nineteenth-century canonical works such as José Mármol's *Amalia* (1851) influenced subsequent literary representations, and that they have continued to shape the cultural conceptions and power dynamics of real maids and mistresses in Argentine households up until today.

## Mid-nineteenth-century representations of maids and mistresses in a new nation

In Argentina, the writings of the so-called Generation of 1837, the label for the first post-independence intellectual cohort, are formative in the history of the representation of the maid as inherently different from her mistress. Heir to the old-guard Unitarians, who sought to centralise power in Buenos Aires, the members of this generation espoused a strand of liberalism that critiqued many colonial structures but did *not* reject its racial hierarchies.<sup>9</sup> Nineteenth-century Argentina (like other South American nations) was populated by a diverse range of people with European, indigenous, African and mixed ancestry. Although, in theory, most members of the Generation of 1837 supported the partial abolition of slavery, they did not consider black people (who made up approximately 30 per cent of the population of Buenos Aires in the early nineteenth century) or the indigenous and mixed-race majority to be their equals.<sup>10</sup> This group of intellectuals had an interest in constructing Argentina as a white nation of European culture, and they used their fictions to seek to write this nation into being.<sup>11</sup> Most had been born during the period of the wars of independence (1810–18), and reached adulthood with the rise of Federalist Juan Manuel de Rosas (Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires from 1829–31 and 1835–52), whom they opposed based on his advocacy for provincial rights, Hispanic traditionalism, religiosity and authoritarianism, as well as his courting of the rural and urban poor.<sup>12</sup>

The influential anti-Rosas novel, *Amalia*, by José Mármol was written during the author's exile in Uruguay and initially appeared in 1851 in installments published in Montevideo's newspaper *La Semana*. The complete novel was published in Buenos Aires in 1855, after Rosas had fallen from power and Mármol had returned.<sup>13</sup> Mármol was a member of the Generation of '37, a Unitarian who had trained as a lawyer but worked primarily as a journalist and poet in exile. During the second half of the nineteenth century, *Amalia* became required reading in Argentine schools and was arguably the most important novel of its time (with at least twenty-seven editions to date).<sup>14</sup> Nancy Hanway has noted that Mármol: 'conceived of [*Amalia*] as both a history-making and nation-building enterprise'. The question that haunted the pages of *Amalia* was not 'What is Argentina', but 'Who is Argentinean?'<sup>15</sup> As Doris Summers has argued, the answer was overtly political, and pitted the virtuous Unitarians against the supposedly barbarous Federalists. Mármol's answer was also about gender and race. He personified the nation of Argentina in the character of Amalia, who in his words was: 'a goddess resembling those invented by the mythological poetry of the Greeks'.<sup>16</sup> Mármol further made white womanhood a dominant feature of Argentine national identity by juxtaposing the virtuous Amalia (the desired white nation) with the anonymous black maids, whom he described as evil and treacherous political spies for Rosas and, therefore, threats to the would-be liberal Argentine nation.

General Rosas's courting of the black community, which he solidified by signing a pact with Britain to abolish the slave traffic in 1839, scandalised the Generation of '37. According to Mármol in *Amalia*, Rosas's white sister-in-law, Doña María Josefa de Ezcurra, presided over networks of spying female slaves and servants. Mármol suggested that María Josefa's intense political interests and close relationship with these black women demonstrated that she was an aberration. 'Nature did not predispose Rosas's sister-in-law towards feelings that are the special impressions of women'.<sup>17</sup>

Mármol thus conveyed that the category of 'women' encoded not only whiteness, but also behaviour towards non-white women. This is made clear in a scene where hero-protagonist Daniel sends Amalia's best friend, Florencia, to the house of Rosas's sister-in-law, in order to gather information for their political cause. The reaction of Florencia, who possesses 'lily-white hands', towards a group of black women, is revealing: 'The young lady . . . had to resort to all the strength of her spirit, and to her perfumed handkerchief, to make her way through a multitude of black, mulatto, and half-breed Indian servant girls'.<sup>18</sup> Florencia perceives the non-submissive attitude of the maids as violent. Due to her racial status, Mármol suggests, she was naturally above this darker 'multitude' of women. At the same time, paternalistic authority empowers Florencia, who was not acting of her own volition, but under instructions from her white, male fiancé.<sup>19</sup>

Mármol depicts the majority of the anonymous maids in *Amalia* as supportive of Rosas, and harmful to their mistresses. But this is only one of two competing depictions of maids in the novel. The relationship between Amalia and Luisa, her personal maidservant, demonstrates something different, and Mármol suggests, preferable. At the time of the narrative, Luisa is ten or eleven years old. It can be surmised that she is mixed race or indigenous because, although it remains unstated, she is said to have been brought from the northern province of Tucumán by Amalia.<sup>20</sup> Amalia is described as caring about Luisa as though she were one of the family. Yet the power dynamic between Luisa and Amalia is unequal. Amalia is the centre of Luisa's world, and the object of her devotion. The narrator explicitly states that Luisa finds 'pleasure' in performing tasks for Amalia; she works 'swiftly and silently' and enjoys gazing at the 'sleeping goddess'.<sup>21</sup> Luisa is in awe of her mistress, a 'white lily' whose whiteness is constantly emphasised throughout the novel, and contemplates Amalia 'as though enraptured'.<sup>22</sup> In what would become a standard feature in literary portrayals of maid-mistress relationships, Amalia confides in Luisa and seeks her advice, and Luisa never utters a word about her own life. For Mármol, the fact that Luisa is 'a little companion' evidences Amalia's 'generosity' and Luisa's 'good disposition': servile and literally adoring towards her goddess-like mistress.

While men dominated both politics and publishing in the mid nineteenth century, a small number of female writers including Juana Manuela Gorriti (1818–1892) and Juana Manso (1819–1875) dared to express potent counter narratives.<sup>23</sup> Like Mármol, Gorriti and Manso were forced into exile and possessed a strong anti-Rosas sentiment. However, in contrast to Mármol's depiction of the treacherous black maid, these two female authors wrote narratives that denounced female slaves' mistreatment and acknowledged their humanity, even, if at times, their works still evidenced a level of collusion with dominant ideas of race and gender. Like other nineteenth-century female writers, their works were not canonised during their lifetimes, and only rescued from oblivion in the 1990s by feminist scholars.<sup>24</sup>

'The most important woman writer in nineteenth century Argentina', according to Francine Masiello, Juana Manuela Gorriti called for women of European descent to link their fate to other oppressed peoples, specifically women of indigenous and African descent.<sup>25</sup> Originally from northwestern Argentina, Juana Manuela Gorriti spent much of her life in exile in Bolivia and Peru. She set her first publication, *La quena* [The Flute] (published in Peru in 1851 and Argentina in 1865) in colonial Peru. Unlike in *Amalia*, the female slave Zifa in *La quena* is self-interested and has a family

of her own. Radically, Gorriti characterised Zifa as a woman with a *right* to exert her self-interest, condoning her decision to betray her kind mistress, Rosa, to see her own children from whom she had been separated. Still, as has been noted by scholar Marga Vergara, at times Gorriti appeared to waver: in contrast to 'Rosa's soft, white, adorable face', Zifa was depicted as 'surrounded by darkness', and as having 'burning eyes'.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps Gorriti felt threatened by the character she had created, a character who may have been inspired by the fact that black slaves were walking out on their enslavers in this period of South American emancipation.

Even more directly, contemporary writer Juana Manso condemned both the institution of slavery and the white women who participated in it in her short novel, *La familia del comendador* [The Commander's Family], which appeared in 1854, the year after the Argentine constitution formally abolished slavery.<sup>27</sup> A proud Unitarian born and raised in Buenos Aires, Manso was friendly with Mármol and Sarmiento and critical of Rosas (who forced her into exile in Uruguay), but also of slavery and women's subordination.<sup>28</sup> Manso's anti-racist perspective might have been influenced by her Protestantism, and various Christian anti-slavery discourses. Recently deemed a pioneer of Argentine feminism, her egalitarian themes were considered taboo and the public tended to reject or overlook her work during her lifetime.<sup>29</sup> Like Gorriti, Manso set this short novel outside of Argentina, in her case placing the story in Brazil, which preserved the institution of slavery until the late nineteenth century. *La familia del comendador* critiqued slave-holding families' abuse of their domestic slaves and mocked the discourse that blamed these slaves for not complying with their subjugation. At the same time, Manso endorsed the motif of the worshipping maid introduced by Mármol. Here, Alina, the female slave presented as the young mistress's favourite, sacrifices not only her self-interest but her very life, both so as not to betray her younger mistress and to refuse to be subordinated to the abusive, older mistress.

For her part, Gorriti would return to the theme of the domestic servant's devotion to a deserving mistress in future fiction. Gorriti's *El pozo del Yocci* [The Well of Yocci] (1869), which was quite popular in its time, presented the slave's fidelity and affection for her mistress, who rescued her from an abusive master, to be such that she was ready to kill or die for her.<sup>30</sup> This figure of the devoted maid who would kill to avenge her mistress would be repeated by many writers as it presented a reassuring trope for the employing classes, one that highlighted the allegedly inherent difference between maids (savage, impulsive) and mistresses (restrained).<sup>31</sup> More uniquely, in *Peregrinaciones de un alma triste* [Peregrinations of a Sad Soul] (1876), Gorriti depicted a black female slave who she characterised not only as having agency, but also virtue, in disobeying the master who raped her and later told her that she would be separated from the resulting child. In order to escape, this enslaved woman peeps through the keyhole to make sure that the master is asleep and sees him hiding some gold (which their then grown-up child later retrieves). The act of spying, reviled in canonical works such as *Facundo* and *Amalia*, is presented here as a route to salvation not only for the slave and her son but also for the slave-holding family. When, years later, the wealthy granddaughter of the master-rapist finds out what happened, she uses his inheritance to redeem her grandfather's crime, and frees a female slave and her seven children in Brazil.<sup>32</sup> It seems that for Gorriti, the master's act of rape allows for the enslaved survivor's virtuous revenge and his descendant's repentance.

### Late-nineteenth-century maids and mistresses in a 'modernising' nation

With the intensification of scientific racism and Argentine state-building projects during the late nineteenth century, the relationship between the literary mistress and maid became increasingly fraught. Liberal elites promoted policies that encouraged European immigration with the hope that these white immigrants would come to outnumber and override the 'racial backwardness' of indigenous people, Afro-Argentines, and mixed-race groups. A tragic result of this ideology was the so-called 'Campaña del desierto' [Conquest of the Desert] (1878–85), a campaign of territorial annexation and Indian slaughter, removal and subjugation launched by Julio A. Roca, Minister of War under President Nicolás de Avellaneda. The stated goal was to assimilate Indians into the dominant national culture and eliminate them as a differentiated population.<sup>33</sup>

One year into this conflict, José Hernández published *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* [Return of Martín Fierro] (1879), the second part of the hugely influential poem *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872). *Martín Fierro* (both parts) was a hit among urban and rural readers and listeners.<sup>34</sup> In the first decades of the twentieth century, official support for identifying a national poem launched *Martín Fierro* into its place as a national classic, eventually allowing it to replace *Amalia*. This was part of a broader trend. Whereas in the nineteenth century, thanks to *Amalia*, Argentina could be represented as a white woman, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the nation's literary representative became the male, lower-class, rural, and racially uncertain gaucho.<sup>35</sup> It is telling that this shift did not affect the status of the non-white maid, who was still positioned as the ultimate Other. *Martín Fierro's* impact is such that for many twenty-first-century readers it remains one of two works that define Argentine national identity, along with Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo*.<sup>36</sup>

*La vuelta de Martín Fierro* can be read as referring to Argentina's 'Conquest of the Desert' and its early outcomes, especially in its depiction of Indian women as cruel enslavers of white women. In a particularly memorable and disturbing scene, an Indian woman instigates the murder of her white slave's child.<sup>37</sup> From colonial times, indigenous men raiding European settlements had abducted women, but the plot of an Indian woman enslaving a white woman, and, later, forever separating her from her child, was a particularly repugnant reversal of the contemporary reality in which indigenous women were being separated from their children and forced to work for their conquerors. Indeed, one of the key 'spoils' of the 'Conquest of the Desert' was the establishment of a pipeline of indigenous women and children who were forced to do domestic work for well-off families in Buenos Aires. As historian Enrique Masés explains, some indigenous men and most surviving indigenous women and children were taken to Buenos Aires where the elite philanthropic white women who ran the *Sociedad de Beneficencia* [Society of Beneficence] handed them over to upper-class Buenos Aires families. Liberal newspapers such as *El Nacional* claimed that domestic service was the best possible destiny for such indigenous children, even if this meant separation from their mothers.<sup>38</sup>

Elites had envisioned the Argentine government's march towards civilisation, and specifically its 'Conquest of the Desert', on the grounds that the presence of Indians impeded the settlement of European immigrants in the Pampas and Patagonia regions. However, by the late nineteenth century, most immigrants were settling in the urban centres, filling the ranks of the new Argentine working class. Against the hopes of

the elite, who wished to lure the supposedly whiter and more industrious northern Europeans, the majority of immigrants to Argentina were southern European – most from Italy and Spain. These immigrants were vocal about their desire for upward mobility, and a considerable number found domestic service to be their entry point into the economy of Argentina. Several brought socialist and anarchist traditions with them, and in fact, much of the initiative for labour organisation and protest from the 1870s onwards largely came from immigrants.

*La gran aldea* [The Great Village] (1884) reflected these tensions. Its author, Lucio V. López, was the son of an elite family and a ‘distinguished member’ of the liberal, modernising Generation of 1880.<sup>39</sup> *La gran aldea* was considered a repository of historical truth at the time of its publication and arguably is so even today. This novel is set in Buenos Aires between the 1860s and the 1880s. In his prologue to the 1908 edition (one of seven editions to date), Rafael Alberto Arrieta compared it to *Amalia*, and claimed that *La gran aldea* was its perfect chronological continuation.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, when attention is solely focused on the characters of servants, the French-Basque immigrant maid, Graciana, and her black boyfriend, Alejandro, re-enact the threat of the black maids in *Amalia*. Instead of looking after the mistress’s baby girl, Graciana accepts her boyfriend’s invitation to attend an African ball. Left unattended, the white baby dies in an accident.

Despite being a woman and a maid, Graciana initially occupies a special position in the hierarchical classifications of the novel. She ranks differently from other servants because ‘although plebeian, she was white’.<sup>41</sup> However, Graciana commits a serious boundary transgression when she embarks upon a relationship with a black man. This relationship, and its threat of interracial sexuality, is directly linked to the death of the white baby, who symbolically represents the nation. In this respect, the white Graciana recalls the danger associated with Mármol’s images of unnamed black maids. Graciana attended the African ball dressed in her mistress’s expensive clothes. Such a portrayal can be seen as reflecting anxieties about the potential economic and social mobility of maids of European descent who did not know how to respect ‘their place’ or racial and class boundaries; they threatened not only their mistresses and their charges but also the Argentine nation itself.<sup>42</sup>

### **Early twentieth-century representations of maids and mistresses in the Argentine ‘babel’**

While the quasi-feudal society remained intact in the interior, the number of immigrants in Buenos Aires and the Littoral region, many of whom brought new political and cultural ideologies with them, was growing. Politically, the turn of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of the Radical and Socialist parties. Anarchism, which was introduced by European immigrants and actively developed as a political and cultural force during the first two decades of the twentieth century, also played an important role.<sup>43</sup> In 1916, the first non-aristocrat, Hipólito Yrigoyen, leader of the Unión Cívica Radical, became president of Argentina, a position he held until 1922 and then again from 1928 to 1930. Around the same time, a new generation of more class-conscious writers emerged who highlighted the subjugation of the maid. Nevertheless, these socially conscious writers reflected prior trends with their decisions to assign whiter characters a richer inner life.

During Yrigoyen's first presidency, social Catholic writer Pedro Benjamín Aquino composed the play *Criolla Vieja* [Old Creole] (1922), which contemplated the scenario in which a maid is raped by a male member of the employer's family. Unaware of the rape, the mistress Clemencia initially assumes that Adela is pregnant because she has engaged in promiscuous behaviours: 'All of you have to be held tight. As soon as one overlooks you, you turn the house into a rabbit hutch'.<sup>44</sup> But when she finally realises that her brother is the father of Adela's baby, she tries to orchestrate a solution that preserves her family's honour by pressuring Adela to marry her boyfriend and pressuring her brother to give the lower-class couple some land.<sup>45</sup> Despite her awareness that Adela has been harassed by the men in their family, Clemencia's sister, Máxima, expresses no female solidarity for her; in fact, Máxima believes Adela must be far from chaste, and thus, is to blame for her harassment. This occurs despite the fact that, as Aquino reveals elsewhere, Máxima knows first-hand that being female in Argentina can mean being routinely harassed by men.

In 1929, anarchist writer Arístides Gandolfi Herrero, who wrote under the pen name Alvaro Yunque, published the even more directly critical short novel *Bichofeo: Escenas para la vida de una sirvienta de diez años* [Ugly Bug: Scenes in the Life of a Ten-year-old Servant] (1929). Born to an Argentine mother and Italian immigrant father, during the 1920s Yunque became a popular writer and active social critic who participated in the 'Grupo de Boedo', a collective of artists that focused on representing class struggles and modern problems.<sup>46</sup> Mocking longstanding ideas about the benevolence of mistresses and the ungratefulness of maids, Yunque overtly positioned *Bichofeo* on the side of the maid. The heroine is Rosalinda, a ten-year-old mixed-race girl, who, after losing her Spanish mother, is taken on as a servant by Dorotea, a white woman who appears to be the girl's aunt. Dorotea nicknames Rosalinda 'Bichofeo' (Ugly Bug) and delights in tormenting her. Apparently unaware of this dynamic, family members are in awe of Dorotea's supposed saintliness and critical of Rosalinda's 'ungratefulness'.<sup>47</sup>

Towards the end of this short novel, Dorotea reveals to Rosalinda that she is the daughter of an Indian man and a white woman. According to Dorotea, Rosalinda's father was a 'blood-thirsty criminal' and her mother was 'evil', 'dirty' and a 'lost woman' – mainly because of her sexual relationship with an Indian man.<sup>48</sup> Yunque's story points to the ways indigenous people, their white lovers, and their progeny are dehumanised. Even so, it is striking that Yunque chose to completely 'whiten' his victim-heroine Rosalinda, completely erasing all physical reminders of the maid's indigenous ancestry, and perhaps thereby intending to render her a more sympathetic character to his (presumably white) readers.

Even socially-committed writers had difficulty escaping the influence of stereotypical imagery and ideas about maids. From a Swiss background, Argentine immigrant Alfonsina Storni (1892–1938) established herself as one of the most famous Latin American writers of the twentieth century, best known for her poetry.<sup>49</sup> She grew up poor and worked from a young age to help support her family. After she became pregnant, she moved to Buenos Aires where she worked as a journalist and raised her child as a single mother.<sup>50</sup> While Storni was an avowed socialist and a feminist, in her play *Cimbelina en 1900 y pica* [Cymbeline in 1900 Something] (1932) she nevertheless bowed to two intensely antifeminist images of maids: first, the devoted maid who



worships her mistress with dog-like devotion; and second, the maid who informs on the kind and progressive leftist white mistress.

Critics have tended to characterise the depiction of the mistress-worshipping maid, Ciriaca, as being largely in tune with Storni's professed socialist and feminist beliefs. In her 2004 translation of this play, Evelia Romano, for example, claimed that Storni 'bestows on Ciriaca great dignity and honesty'.<sup>51</sup> However, Ciriaca is eerily reminiscent of the Mammy icon created by Southerners in the United States. She is loyal and nurturing, but, while a surrogate mother, is still treated in terms of traditional servant relationships, something that Storni does not appear to question or denounce. Ciriaca addresses the mistress as 'little miss' and María Elena uses phrases from the days of slavery when addressing Ciriaca ('Let yourself die before telling anyone that you saw me cry').<sup>52</sup> Ciriaca possessed the quality of devotion celebrated by previous writers. Such devotion was dangerously lacking in self-interested maids such as Enriqueta, the other maid in the play who proves intensely damaging to María Elena when she provides information to her mistress's enemies in exchange for material rewards.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, even as Storni incorporated docility and subservience into the relationship between María Elena and Ciriaca, she leaves the reader with no doubt that these women do love each other.

The relationship between the maid and the mistress in the short story *El retrato mal hecho* [The Badly-made Portrait] (1937), by liberal conservative writer Silvina Ocampo, is likewise characterised by affection as well as a clear power differential. Ocampo was a member of the Argentine aristocracy whose sister, writer Victoria Ocampo, would later become a leading anti-Peronist figure. Contemporary critic Elsa Drucaroff has claimed that, unlike Victoria, and her generation of writers in general, Silvina's literature was not explicitly concerned with Argentina's historical, psychological or social problems.<sup>54</sup> And yet, social problems were clearly present in Silvina's writing and subsequent scholars' interpretations of it. For example, scholar Carolina Suárez Hernán highlights Silvina's attention to the marginalisation of women in their capacities as 'homemakers, nannies, seamstresses, hairdressers, laundresses, and, in general, all those who carry out work to live'.<sup>55</sup> Set in 1890, in *El retrato mal hecho*, Ocampo suggested that the mistress Eponina detests her children because she believes they had robbed her of her adolescence. Eponina feels a deep appreciation for Ana, the household's maid, who assumes all the domestic duties associated with motherhood that Eponina despises.<sup>56</sup>

The story initially allows for an interpretation of Ana, the maid, as the saviour of Eponina's abandoned children. Yet, as is soon revealed, Ana is not what she appeared to be, for, in a disturbing scene, she kills Eponina's four-year-old son, 'the one who had most desired to be nursed'.<sup>57</sup> Upon discovering that Ana has murdered her son, Eponina tenderly embraces her. Ocampo does not overtly discuss Ana's motives and the relationship between Ana and Eponina is underdeveloped. However, when read against other Argentine stories that describe devoted maids as capable of murdering others for the sake of their mistresses, it is possible to imagine that Ana murdered the child to please Eponina. Indeed, the embrace between the two women can be seen as highlighting Eponina's gratitude to Ana, as well as indicating an intimate connection that preceded the child's murder. In this sense, this story can be read as a condemnation of the bond between women of different class positions, which leads to the family's destruction.

## Perón and maid hysteria in mid-twentieth-century Argentina

With the advent of Peronism in the mid-1940s, representations of the maid-mistress relationship became extremely prevalent in both Peronist and anti-Peronist works. With considerable working-class support and campaign promises to redistribute wealth and power, nationalist politician Juan Domingo Perón secured the presidency in 1946. The Peronist era encouraged a growing number of migrants to come to Buenos Aires, the industrialising centre of the country. As with previous generations of former slaves and immigrants, many of these internal migrants initially found employment in the capital as maids, and an increasing number went on to become factory workers in a context of developing industrialisation.

In this context, maids experienced a new sense of empowerment.<sup>58</sup> First lady Eva Perón (popularly known as 'Evita') encouraged maids to emulate their 'superiors' in their dress, and, in at least one recorded speech, incited maids to resist their mistresses if, once they had finished their domestic duties, they did not allow them to attend Peronist rallies.<sup>59</sup> The idea that maids would do *anything* for Evita, their leader and ultimate mistress, became a loud rumour in the fifties, as attested by sensationalist books and by the recollections of contemporaries. Philosopher José Pablo Feinmann recalled his mother chastising him when he laughed after Evita's death in 1952 and upset their maid, Rosario. As Feinmann noted, 'the mistress had to give explanations to her maid. That was new in the country'.<sup>60</sup>

While Evita was still alive, anti-Peronist writer Manuel Mujica Láinez (1910–1984), published *La hechizada* [The Bewitched] (1950), which offered a more indirect critique of Peronism's ability to remake the social hierarchy. Mujica Láinez belonged to the cultured upper class and moved in literary circles that included writers such as Alfonsina Storni and Silvina Ocampo.<sup>61</sup> He set his short story safely in the past, specifically 1817, some four years after 'The Free Womb Law' had begun to chip away at the future of slavery in Argentina. In his story, a black female slave romantically seduces a motherless young white girl in order to assume her power and identity, and then kill her. As with *Amalia* and other literature before it, *La hechizada* highlighted the social and racial 'nightmare' that could result in the absence of a white woman to set boundaries and guard the social hierarchy. Reflecting elites' anxieties about Peronist threats to the 'social order', it went even further – by *transforming* the maid into the mistress. Mujica Láinez returned to this threat in the novel *La casa* [The House] (1954), which presented the story of two maids who steal from their naive mistress and gradually assume control over her affairs and her house, with disastrous consequences.<sup>62</sup>

Writer Manuel Gálvez was also from a wealthy background, but unlike Mujica Láinez, he was a nationalist, originally from the north east of Argentina, who endorsed the idea that rural people of mixed Indian and Spanish descent were the 'real Argentines'. Despite his idealisation of this demographic, Gálvez produced ambivalent or directly negative portrayals of maids from immigrant or black backgrounds, and depicted white mistresses as desperately trying to keep the traditional order in place.<sup>63</sup> In his 1955 novel *El uno y la multitud* [The Individual and the Multitude], maids 'naturally sympathised with Coronel Perón' because they had some understanding of the improvements that his government was bringing to workers.<sup>64</sup> His unnamed narrator explained that maids 'worked the least possible, and very badly'.<sup>65</sup> He continued

‘Buenos Aires harmed them. In the big city they were soon filled by ambitions and vanities, they desired luxuries that were not for them, they wanted to imitate the *niñas* [girls] of the upper class’.<sup>66</sup>

The narrator in *El Uno y la Multitud* claimed that the issues of domestic service, and the shortage of maids, was a national dilemma that consumed conversation, even more than politics did. Mistresses protested the shortage of maids and the fact that they constantly changed jobs. As Rebekah Pite has noted elsewhere, starting in the late 1940s, ‘homemakers, accustomed to setting the terms of the relationship, were sometimes forced to compete with the factories to retain their help’.<sup>67</sup> Gálvez suggested that mistresses were not only worried about losing their maids, but also that maids’ behaviour had become more insolent and maids’ expectations had risen. He wrote that maids ‘lost their heads for men and they even had children’.<sup>68</sup> In the context of growing anxieties regarding maids’ alternatives to domestic service, the potential for maids to be economically mobile, sexually active, and/or mothers of their own children, presented serious threats to maid-employing households.

Gálvez portrayed these shifting dynamics in the maid-mistress relationship. For example, he presented the story of a young woman named Juana who hoped to find work as a maid, but, during her interview for the position, was rejected when the mistress perceived her as a potential sexual rival.<sup>69</sup> After securing work in another household, Juana accidentally broke a dish and the mistress threatened her with corporal punishment. Her response highlights the new sense of empowerment experienced under Perón: Juana demanded her payment before walking out and even threatened to go to the secretary of the Department of Labour and Welfare.<sup>70</sup>

Such a possibility was made real in 1956, after *de facto* President Pedro E. Aramburu signed the decree law N 326/56, for all domestic workers in Argentina who had worked regularly for one employer. It conferred the following benefits:

Minimum of nine hours of rest at night (only interrupted by a serious or urgent matter); a daily rest period of three hours between morning and afternoon work; a weekly rest period of either twenty-four continuous hours of time off or two half days weekly; yearly paid vacation period (paid at established rate according to years worked – employer can select dates, giving twenty days’ notice); paid sick leave of up to thirty days a year; minimal conditions for room and board; a healthy and sufficient diet; and one hour a week to attend religious services.<sup>71</sup>

Despite these changes, domestic workers remained excluded from the laws that oversaw work contracts, accidents, family salary, overtime pay and maternity leave.<sup>72</sup> In addition, not all maids came under the decree’s umbrella and, in practice, it was difficult to uphold. Nevertheless, as historian Inés Pérez has demonstrated, some actual maids (like Gálvez’s character, Juana) went to considerable lengths to bring their cases to the Tribunal for Domestic Work in Buenos Aires.<sup>73</sup> Even so, most maids could not exercise the limited rights to which they were legally entitled, and mistresses and maids continued to negotiate the terms of their domestic relationships primarily on a personal rather than a legal basis.<sup>74</sup>

### **Maids, mistresses, and political instability, 1955–73**

From 1955–73, military regimes and pseudo-democratic governments tried to destroy Perón’s legacy, but failed. The proscribed Peronist movement splintered into

left-wing and right-wing factions after the 1955 coup, branding itself the 'Revolución Libertadora' [Liberating Revolution] and forcing Juan Perón into exile in Spain.<sup>75</sup> During this time, many anti-Peronists feared that the former president would return to power, and continue to upend socioeconomic hierarchies. Several works of fiction reflected this fear, in part by employing the trope of the dangerous and powerful maid and her harried mistress.

In the very popular book *El incendio y las vísperas* [The Fire and the Nights Before It] (1964), by anti-Peronist author Beatriz Guido, the relationship between the mistress and the maid is one of open enmity. According to scholar Marcos Zangrandi, '*El incendio y las vísperas* fell within the liberal, anti-nationalist tradition in Argentine literature whose clearest antecedents were *Amalia* by José Mármol (1851) and *El matadero* [The Slaughterhouse] by Esteban Echeverría (1871)', both of which critiqued Rosas and emphasised the threat and inferiority of black and mixed-race women.<sup>76</sup> While scholars have focused on the pro-liberal, anti-nationalist nature of *El incendio y las vísperas*, the domestic continuities are also striking. In Guido's novel, which is set in 1952, Sofía, the white mistress, is forced to endure the constant provocation of Antola, her seemingly mixed-race maid. Sofía and her daughter, Inés, are terrified that Antola might manipulate her knowledge that her mistress is unfaithful to her husband and that Inés has had many lovers, to her own ends. The writer acknowledges that, despite their promiscuity, mistresses are naturally above their maids: 'women of a certain condition have the virtue of always looking virginal, after having been possessed by various lovers'.<sup>77</sup>

A different and even more pronounced threat of maids' sexuality manifests itself in Guido's next novel *Ocupación* [Takeover] (1964) set in the 1960s. In this story, a young rural maid falls pregnant to the white master, whose white wife is in the city. Here, as previously, white families fall apart as non-white maids assume the role of mistresses and their mixed-race children assume control of the house.<sup>78</sup>

Unlike the frightening reversal of the social order that takes place in the absence of an adult white mistress in *Ocupación*, the mistresses in the novel *Aventura en la Patagonia* [Adventure in Patagonia] (1970) by Emma Faura Varela, are female guardians of the social order between women of different races, and crucial figures in the 'civilising' project of settler colonialism. Set in the 1920s, *Aventura* tracks the experiences of an urban, white family who move to Patagonia when the father takes over a rural estate. The daughters, Laura and Virginia, understand that it is their moral duty to educate the indigenous and mestiza girls and women taken on as maids in the Spanish language and the Catholic religion, not incidentally, two of the main ways in which indigenous people have been historically subordinated in Latin America.<sup>79</sup> One of the maids, fifteen-year-old Rosa, is the fantasy of the ideal, worshipping servant originally made famous in the figure of Luisa in *Amalia*. Another young maid, Antú is, to the horror of Virginia and Laura, unwilling to worship or be 'civilised' by them. Like previous literary mistresses, Virginia and Laura believe that it is their duty to supervise the sexual conduct of their maids. The unions they organise demonstrate their desire to keep servants in their place, but also the difficulty of doing so.<sup>80</sup> Virginia's failure to keep the established social distance from her own would-be Indian lover, results in her death at the hands of the jealous indigenous maid, Antú, who, it so happens, was also in love with the same man.

In the 1960s, such literary characterisations of the dangerous, uppity maid (like Antú) were accompanied by more sympathetic accounts that sometimes brought men's

sexual exploitation of maids into the narrative. In 1965, a leftist, feminist author named Marta Lynch drew attention to the maltreatment of maids in her short story 'Justitia parvi hominis' [The Justice of the Little Man].<sup>81</sup> Set in the mid-1960s, Lynch's short story highlights how sex, race and class interact to oppress poor women of colour – long before scholars coined the term 'triple oppression' to explain this phenomenon.<sup>82</sup> Lynch's protagonist and narrator is an unnamed male teenager from a well-to-do anti-Peronist family headed by a father who is a prominent lawyer and an emotionally absent mother. The maid is a particular focus for the teenager's aggression. Denying her a proper name, he refers to her simply as '*la negra*'. Highlighting why maids have been amongst the most oppressed of workers, the teenager comments: 'That black shit . . . She was a woman, poor, and black on top of that; well, not black, but '*una cabeza negra*' [a black head] as we all call them still'.<sup>83</sup> Here, Lynch incorporates a term used by anti-Peronists to demean their dark-haired and dark-skinned, Peronist supporters from the 'interior' provinces.<sup>84</sup>

The danger of sexuality and rape across class lines is something that Lynch also takes on from a critical vantage point in this short story. Although his mother is worried that he would have sex with her, the teenager felt that the woman was not 'worthy' of his sexual aggression, because she was:

. . . ugly as the devil, full of acne, pigeon-toed. Mum selects them on purpose so that I cannot be tempted. Why would I be tempted by such an ugly animal? . . . How could anyone think that I could touch that disgusting black woman? And even if she was not disgusting. She is a black woman, from Corrientes or something similar.<sup>85</sup>

Here and elsewhere, Lynch suggests that this teenager and his peers imagine the maids who work for their families as sexually available to them and less fully human than their white peers, echoing, but also, challenging the discourse of inferiority presented in books like *El matadero*.

Unlike this more directly critical work by Lynch, 'Boquitas pintadas' [Heartbreak Tango] (1968), a popular novel by Manuel Puig, is particularly ambiguous in relation to the maid and the mistress it depicts.<sup>86</sup> Manuel Puig considered himself an independent socialist and an anti-Peronist who expected an agile reader to interpret his novels. He set 'Boquitas pintadas' between the years 1935 and 1947. It is partly the story of Antonia Josefa Ramírez, also called Fanny, a woman from the provinces who works as a maid. Puig detailed Fanny's exhausting daily chores working as a maid at Doctor Nastini's house, and the fact that he constantly looked at her legs, which made Fanny uncomfortable.<sup>87</sup> It is clear that Puig sought to condemn the work and sexual exploitation of maids, but, at the same time, the love triangle between Fanny, Mabel (Fanny's white mistress), and Pancho (a policeman of indigenous ancestry who fathers Fanny's child but falls in love with her mistress) ends in tragedy. Regardless of how readers understood the actions of Fanny, who murdered the unfaithful Pancho, and Mabel, who helped her cover it up to keep quiet her own sexual affair with him, it is noteworthy that Fanny, the non-white maid, is the only clear criminal in this story.

### Representations of maids and mistresses in the shadows of the 'Dirty War'

The upper- and upper-middle-class fear that Perón would return to power materialised in 1973, when he began his third term in office at the age of seventy-eight. During

1973–4 Perón failed to unite and pacify the right and left wings of the Peronist movement. From March 1973 until Perón's death in July 1974, the initial euphoria felt by left-wing Peronists gave way to worry about Perón's apparent support for right-wing groups.<sup>88</sup> Perón died in 1974 and was succeeded by his wife and Vice President, María Estela Martínez de Perón, also known as Isabelita. Under Isabelita, the Triple A, an ultra-right action squad, began a war against the armed (and unarmed) left. In 1976, with popular support, the military overthrew Isabelita. From 1976 to 1983, the Army embarked on a programme to wipe out all real and imaginary enemies. This so-called 'Dirty War' resulted in the disappearance of more than 30,000 people. Workers' movements and human rights were savagely repressed. At the same time, the military dictatorships' censorship curtailed literary production, encouraging the escape to presumably apolitical contemporary topics and works that situated themselves safely in the past and thereby evaded the censors.<sup>89</sup>

In this context, Marta Mercader published *Juana Manuela mucha mujer* (1980), a fictionalised biography of writer Juana Manuela Gorriti's life. Among other story-lines, it openly denounced the disparities in the relationship between Juana Manuela and her slave, Inucha, who is later revealed to be Juana Manuela's half-sister. Mercader's work also highlighted the reciprocal emotional dependence that characterised the longstanding bond between Juana Manuela and Inucha. When Inucha is forbidden entry into a theatre because of her colour, she runs away and is never seen again. Juana Manuela sinks into despair at her loss. The uncertainty as to Inucha's well-being and whereabouts disturbs Juana Manuela: 'Is Inucha alive or dead? Dead people are buried, they are entrusted to the saints . . . it's the least we can do if we want to appear to be civilised'.<sup>90</sup> As has been noted by Mara Favoretto, Mercader not only used the figure of Inucha to denounce nineteenth-century slavery, but also the contemporary human rights atrocities perpetuated by the regime.<sup>91</sup> This book clearly resonated with an Argentine reading public living under a repressive military dictatorship, selling over 100,000 copies.<sup>92</sup>

In 1983, Argentina returned to democracy with the election of Raúl Alfonsín from the UCR Radical Party. When the initial euphoria gave way to hyperinflation and instability, Alfonsín turned the government over to President Elect Carlos Saúl Menem in 1989. With the reinstatement of democracy in the 1980s came a flood of condemnations of the military's actions from human rights activists, film-makers, artists and writers.

Against this background, Luisa Valenzuela published her short novel *Realidad nacional desde la cama* [released in English under the title *Bedside Manners*, but literally translated as 'National Reality from the Bedside'] in 1990.<sup>93</sup> Valenzuela's novel tells the somewhat auto-biographical story of a nameless Argentine leftist woman who fled Argentina during the 1976–83 military dictatorship, and after ten years in New York returns to Argentina in the late 1980s. (So too, Valenzuela, who went into exile in New York City during the dictatorship and returned to Argentina in 1989).<sup>94</sup> Initially, Valenzuela's protagonist is unaware that the country is still immersed in political and economic turmoil and feels overwhelmed by her re-entry into Argentina. Shortly after her arrival, a relatively new friend, Carla, suggests that she should retreat to a country-club outside Buenos Aires. The woman accepts, without knowing that Carla's bungalow borders a cardboard and tin shanty town or that an army regiment is planning a military coup against the democratic government using the country-club premises for

their secret manoeuvres. Carla's maid, María, who is 'tough, astute and bold', serves as the military's henchwoman; in fact, the Major refers to her as 'Corporal'. When the soldiers begin their uprising, the señora receives a threatening phone call. A distorted voice speaks: 'Get out of that bed "cause we are gonna get you" ... Despite the distortion, [the voice] appears to be that of María, the maid'.<sup>95</sup>

Valenzuela is a writer whose politics clearly leaned to the left, though away from the Peronist left. Her representation of a maid as an aid to right-wing forces may have been 'a searing postmodern force', as scholar Diane E. Marting explains, 'that leaves no target – not even Valenzuela herself – unsullied by its travesties ... [and takes] a cold, hard look at the groups most often featured in the discourses of its recent history: the military, the intellectuals, and the poor'.<sup>96</sup> At the same time, Valenzuela's portrayal of María is in keeping with the literary tradition of the treacherous maid who conspires against the innocent mistress.

During the 1990s, several writers continued to represent maids as engaging in actions that were severely harmful to their mistresses, but others provided alternative interpretations for these imaginary actions that stressed maids' exploitation. In 1998, for example, feminist writer Angélica Gorodischer published the short novel *Cómo triunfar en la vida* [How to Succeed in Life]. This work parodied the idealised depiction of the maid-mistress relationship that first appeared in *Amalia*: that of a maid who adores her mistress without questioning her mistress's superiority in the social order. Set in the contemporary moment, a man tells the story of his sister's maid, Natividad Lavallén, who worked for his sister, an old, ruthless woman named Quelita. Natividad was understood by Quelita's family as 'hopelessly dumb, true, but a saint' for patiently serving her mistress.<sup>97</sup> While the story appeared to collude with the theme of the deceiving (and seemingly dim-witted) maid, it ultimately sided with this character. As it turns out, Natividad has feigned subservience to Quelita to achieve her own ends. *Cómo triunfar en la vida* demonstrated that the maid's character and actions could run counter to the assumptions the employing family had about her.

Another recent representation that contends with the anxiety of a maid overtaking the power of the mistress appears in *Los sirvientes* [The Servants] by Gustavo Bossert. This short novel was published in 2001, a year marked by acute political and economic turmoil in Argentina, in which five different presidents held power in a two-week period, and middle- and working-class Argentines lost the bulk of their savings and spending power overnight. Bossert has publicly explained that he wrote the novel to highlight 'the serf-like conditions' endured by live-in maids.<sup>98</sup> In *Los sirvientes*, a maid named Dorotea kidnaps her mistress Isabel and her husband, and forces her former employers to serve her and her relatives, driving Isabel to a point of exhaustion that imperils her life.<sup>99</sup> The reversal of the roles that Dorotea, the maid, imposes on Isabel, the mistress, can be seen as a strategy to raise awareness in readers expected to better relate to the mistress's suffering, and thus see the exploitation of maids in a new light. And yet *Los sirvientes* constructs Dorotea, the maid, as radically different from her aged mistress, Isabel, whom she kidnaps. Dorotea's treatment of Isabel is extremely vicious, and throughout the narrative, readers are reminded that Isabel has treated Dorotea with kindness.<sup>100</sup> Although, at one point Isabel engages in an attempt to critique the way she has treated her maids, these thoughts are not elaborated upon by the author.

Three years after *Los sirvientes*, in the context of the revival of leftist Peronism through the presidency of Néstor Kirchner (2003–07), Lucía Puenzo offered a more

transgressive representation of a relationship between a maid and a mistress in *El niño pez* [The Fish Child] (2004), a novel set in the early 2000s.<sup>101</sup> In this popular novel (later turned into a film in 2009), twenty-year-old Lala is in love with Guayi, a Paraguayan teenager who is her family's live-in maid. Lala's mother, Sasha, believes that the friendship between her daughter and the maid is 'not normal, something has to be done . . . [Lala] cannot be friends with the maid'.<sup>102</sup> The relationship between the maid and the mistress here is radical; at the same time, the sexual and emotional intimacy between the two women is associated with murder.<sup>103</sup> When Lala discovers that her father is sexually abusing Guayi, she poisons him, and after Guayi is detained as a suspect in his murder, Lala risks her own freedom by returning to Buenos Aires to save Guayi.<sup>104</sup> (The two women then escape to Paraguay). This murder could be read as revenge for rape if it were not for the fact that the occurrence of the rape is thrown into doubt. While on the one hand the plot characterises the relationship between Guayi and Lala's father as non-consensual, on the other hand Guayi is also depicted as fascinated by Lala's father.<sup>105</sup> Her attitudes towards him are ambiguous, and it could be inferred that she welcomed his advances, even if, in the context of such a profound imbalance of power, Guayi's consent would always have been relative. Still, *El niño pez* associates the friendship and affair between an Argentine white upper-class girl and a Paraguayan non-white maid with crime. Here, as opposed to previous accounts, the 'white' woman kills for her 'brown' maid. Still, it is interesting to note that, of the two women, it is Guayi, the maid, who has first killed, as at thirteen she drowned her baby in the local lake.

Violence and inequality are also featured in *La Pasajera* [The Passenger] (2008), a short novel by Perla Suez, a leftist writer. In the context of the Kirchner government's condemnation of the crimes committed by the Junta of 1976–83, this book set in the year 1979 revisits the theme of maids who side with oppressive dictatorial rule. Its protagonists are two dark-skinned sisters Tránsito and Lucía, who have spent fifty years caring for an admiral and his wife in an isolated mansion since the death of their own mother when they were seventeen and twelve years of age. The older sister Tránsito has allowed her entire existence to be focused on her mistress's needs but has never felt appreciated or trusted by her mistress. When the Admiral becomes terminally ill, Tránsito, now herself an older woman, is entrusted with his care. She helps facilitate the Admiral's death, complying with his request. On the afternoon of the Admiral's funeral, and exhausted after caring for her master, something snaps inside Tránsito and she murders her mistress, suffocating her with a pillow.<sup>106</sup>

The novel effectively draws a parallel between the abducted victims of the state repression in which the Admiral participated, and the maids in the Admiral's family. However, in contrast to their clear resentment of the mistress, the story intriguingly places both Tránsito and Lucía firmly on the side of the Admiral. Unlike the mistress, the Admiral is described as 'respectful' and 'a generous man'.<sup>107</sup> When he dies, Tránsito feels greatly saddened. Lucía likewise feels grateful towards the Admiral – had it not been for him, she and her sister would have been dismissed long ago due to the racial revulsion that the mistress apparently felt for them. Lucía is furthermore depicted as approving of the Admiral's right-wing ideology and his murderous actions against political opponents. She defends the deceased Admiral against 'those who say things about him', and looks up to him because he 'carried out his duty up until the last minute'.<sup>108</sup> In fact, Lucía's lover and the family's chauffeur, Ortiz, actually participated



in the Admiral's crimes. In representing maids as *oppressed by*, yet also *siding with* right-wing terror and with the patriarch, Perla Suez might have been influenced by the prejudices which populate neo-colonial and liberal literature. These seem to have left an indelible mark on perceptions of maids, even in the literary production of Argentine writers with pronounced leftist political ideologies who challenge other forms of discrimination.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, there are significant continuities in the portrayal of the highly fraught and deeply feminised relationship between the mistress and the maid in Argentine fiction since the mid-nineteenth century. A theme evident in numerous sources and indeed, present in every historical period, is the inherent difference between the maid and the mistress. The literary maid frequently betrays her mistress, sometimes acting in cahoots with repressive political forces (especially under the sway of Rosas, Perón, and the 1976–83 military junta). In contrast, the mistress's, and many writers', ideal maid is meek and fully committed to serving her mistress. Indeed, the devoted maid is so in awe of her mistress that she is capable of sacrificing her own needs and interests (which are rarely discussed by writers) and even, at times, willing to die or kill for her mistress. In turn, the 'good mistress' avoids excessive familiarity with her maid, but might still intrude in her maid's personal life, for instance, by teaching her Spanish or arranging her marriage, because this is imagined to be in the maid's best interest. Narratives about egalitarian or innocent mistresses who embark upon friendships or romances with their maids typically end with a dramatic warning statement, that is, some form of violence or crime. In turn, stories that include men often reference white men's sexual expectations about and violence towards the maid, as well as white women's fraught sexual interest in non-white men. Such boundary transgressions often end in tragedy, and, if not, in a problem that is more often the mistress's than the master's responsibility to work out.

Following over 150 years of literary portrayals of the mistress-maid relationship reveals that most Argentine literature has either upheld such dominant tropes or subverted and then rearticulated these tropes in some ways. That is, the literary mistress-maid relationship has been fraught with domestic proximity and the potential for danger – especially at the hands of the maid – even when she is the master's sexual prey. More 'purely' transgressive representations are harder to come by. And yet, since the late nineteenth century, some authors have challenged hegemonic ideas about the maid-mistress relationship, most often by emphasising the exploitative nature of this relationship or the capacity for the maid to truly love her charges, and much less frequently, by telling the story from the maid's perspective and endorsing her decisions to prioritise her own interests and those of her progeny.

Jessica Fainsod's 2008 book *Se nos fue María y mi vida es un caos* [María Has Left Us and My Life is Chaos], first mentioned in the introduction to this article, displays the contemporary endurance of several tropes surrounding the maid, as narrated to the author primarily by middle- and upper-class Argentine women who have employed maids. The chapter entitled 'Maids Who Pretend to Be Your Friend' puts forward the view that a maid could never be a mistress's friend. 'Those Minus One Jar on The Shelf' discusses maids who are 'stupid' or 'crazy'. 'Who's Spying on Whom?'

deals with maids who spy on mistresses, but also, remarkably, with mistresses who spy on maids. Mistresses, unlike maids, are justified in their spying. 'Inheriting The Maid' discusses the topic of maids who are 'passed on' as property. 'Those Who Speak Too Much' deals with maids who give their opinions, unlike those who do not speak at all. In some parts of the work, the latter are presented as ideal, although, in others, they are denounced as the greatest manipulators. 'My Maid has Fallen Pregnant' deals with the problems and inconveniences that a maid's pregnancy presents for the mistress and contains the acknowledgement that 'the work of a maid does not allow for pregnancy'.<sup>109</sup> 'Suspicious Everyday Betrayals' deals with maids who steal small items, and labels one such maid as a 'bloody bitch'. Maids who sue their mistress after years of payment 'under the table' are maids who were 'treated as queens' and who, from one day to the next, might decide to betray their lifelong benefactress for monetary gain.

Against all expectations, *Se nos fue* also includes one chapter (out of eighty) in which a maid speaks out for herself. Indeed, it stands alone in this regard, as none of the other works considered here have included the actual voice of a maid. In this testimonial narrative, the former maid recalls how in the 1950s, at age seventeen, she fell pregnant by her mistress's son. His mother and grandmother reacted with horror, mainly because of her dark skin. 'Whilst my belly grew, I continued being the domestic, the girl . . . the little black girl . . . They could not forgive my intrusion in the family's genealogical tree . . . For these women, I was almost a prostitute'.<sup>110</sup> The reasons why Fainsod included this testimonial are unclear, but the incident illustrates the triple threat of domestic sexual violence against the maid, sexual relations between the maid and family members, and the importance of 'racial purity' in the 1950s and, arguably, even today.

Images of maids and mistresses in a mid-nineteenth-century classic such as *Amalia* are truly alive and well in the collective Argentine sociocultural imagery. The myths of the past continue to impinge upon the present. The view that maids are 'vivas', that is, deceptive, abetting and unscrupulous women who can be seriously harmful if the mistress is not alert, is present not only in the literature but also in a disturbing number of contemporary maid employers' commentaries. A book like *Se nos fue María* does not provoke an outcry because many of the ideas presented there have been regularly read, articulated and naturalised over the course of Argentine history. It is therefore particularly important to understand how historical factors and literary traditions have led to the general acceptance amongst the upper and middle classes of a gender-specific performance of white national identity that holds the white mistress, and 'her' supposedly inferior and, often, non-white, maid responsible not only for domestic tasks but also for performing distinct and deeply racialised ideals of womanhood in such a way as to not threaten the sanctity of their homes, their families, and, ultimately, the Argentine nation.

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## Notes

1. Jessica Fainsod, *Se nos fue María y mi vida es un caos: manual de primeros auxilios para la supervivencia doméstica* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2008), back cover.
2. In 2015, director Manuel González Gil adapted the book into a play with the same title, in which the humour was more expressly directed at the mistress.
3. Inés Dunstan, 'The Maid as Political Spy in Argentine Literature and Historiography: The Rosas-Perón Nexus (1846–1964)', *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso Hispanic World* 3 (2013), pp. 1–22; Rebekah E. Pite, 'Entertaining Inequalities: Doña Petrona, Juanita Bordoy, and Domestic Work in Mid-Twentieth Century Argentina', *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91 (2011), pp. 97–128; and Rebekah E. Pite, *Creating a Common Table in Twentieth-Century Argentina: Doña Petrona, Women, and Food* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).
4. John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 21.
5. Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1983); Kristina Straub, *Domestic Affairs: Intimacy, Eroticism and Violence between Servants and Masters in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008); Paula Humfrey, 'Female Servants and Women's Criminality in Early Eighteenth Century London', in Greg Thomas Smith, Allyson Nancy May and Simon Devereaux (eds), *Criminal Justice in the Old World and the New: Essays in Honour of J. M. Beattie* (Canada: University of Toronto, 1998); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Susan Yates, *Maid and Mistress: Feminine Solidarity and Class Difference in Five Nineteenth Century French Texts* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991); Kristen Hill Maher and Silke Saab, 'The Dual Discourse about Peruvian Domestic Workers in Santiago de Chile: Class, Race and a Nationalist Project', *Latin American Politics and Society* 48 (2006), pp. 87–116.
6. Leonore Davidoff, 'Class and Gender in Victorian England', *Feminist Studies* 5 (1979), pp. 86–141; Peter Flynn, 'How Bridget was Framed: The Irish Domestic in Early American Cinema, 1895–1917', *Cinema Journal* 50 (2011), pp. 1–20; and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Order* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
7. Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. x.
8. Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Facundo o Civilización y Barbarie* (Santiago: Imprenta del Progreso, 1845).
9. On the ideology of Unitarians (and Federalists), see, among others, Halperín Donghi, *Proyecto y construcción de una nación: Argentina (1846–1880)* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1995); Ariel de la Fuente, *Children of Facundo: Caudillo and Gaucho Insurgency during the Argentine State-Formation Process (La Rioja, 1853–1870)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); and José Gabriel Vazeilles, *La izquierda argentina que no fue: estudios de historia ideológica* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2002), especially p. 17.
10. For statistics on Afro-Argentine presences, see Dina V. Picotti, *La presencia africana en nuestra identidad* (Buenos Aires: Del Sol, 1998), pp. 41–4; on the history of Afro-Argentines, see, for example, George Reid Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800–1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980); and Florencia Guzman, Lea Geler and Alejandro Frigerio, *Cartografías afro latinoamericanas: Perspectivas situadas desde Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2016).
11. For a political analysis of this trend, see Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina*. For a gendered analysis that highlights women writers' agency in this process, see Francine Masiello, *Between Civilization and Barbarism: Women, Nation, and Literary Culture in Modern Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).
12. Ricardo Salvatore, 'Integral Outsiders: Afro-Argentines in the Era of Juan Manuel de Rosas and Beyond', in Darién J. Davis (ed.), *Beyond Slavery: The Multilayered Legacy of Africans in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), pp. 57–80, p. 58.
13. Curia Beatriz, 'Problemas textuales de *Amalia* de José Mármol', Cervantes Virtual, [http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/problemas-textuales-de-amalia-de-jose-marmol/html/f971340e-a0f6-11e1-b1fb-00163ebf5e63\\_3.html](http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/problemas-textuales-de-amalia-de-jose-marmol/html/f971340e-a0f6-11e1-b1fb-00163ebf5e63_3.html)
14. *Goodreads* (<https://www.goodreads.com/>) was the main reference point to tally the number of editions of the books this article discusses. The different editions listed on the website were counted and cross referenced with the copyright page in the hard copies of the novels to which we had access. The number of editions noted in the copyright page was added to the number of editions on *Goodreads* for a final count.

- Translations of the novels were included as well. On the use of *Amalia* in schools and its importance, see Doris Sommer, 'Prologue', *Amalia*, by José Mármol, translated by Helen Lane, edited with Author Notes and Editor's Notes by Doris Sommer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. xi–xxxiv, esp. p. xii.
15. Nancy Hanway, *Embodying Argentina: Body, Space and Nation in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Narrative* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2003), p. 3.
  16. José Mármol, *Amalia*, tr. Helen Lane (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 148.
  17. Mármol, *Amalia*, p. 95.
  18. Mármol, *Amalia*, pp. 361, 93.
  19. Mármol, *Amalia*, pp. 36, 181.
  20. Where is Luisa's family? *Amalia* does not say but from the very early days of the settlement of Buenos Aires, indigenous children had been kidnapped and put to work as domestic slaves for Europeans, a practice that continued under Rosas. Rodolfo González Lebrero, *La pequeña aldea. Sociedad y economía en Buenos Aires (1580–1640)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2002), p. 47.
  21. Mármol, *Amalia*, p. 149.
  22. Mármol, *Amalia*, pp. 466, 626.
  23. On these and other female writers, see Masiello, *Between Civilization and Barbarism*.
  24. María Caballero Wanguemert, 'Género y literatura hispanoamericana', *Feminismos* 1 (2003), pp. 103–16, here p. 108.
  25. Francine Masiello, 'Introduction', in Francine Masiello (ed.), *Dreams and Realities: Selected Fiction of Juana Manuela Gorriti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. xv–lx, here p. xv.
  26. Juana Gorriti, 'La quena', in Masiello (ed.), *Dreams and Realities*, tr. Sergio Waisman, pp. 1–39; cited in Magda T. Vergara, 'In Defense of Motherhood: Juana Manuela Gorriti's Ambivalent Portrayal of a Slave Woman in "La Quena"', *Romance Notes* 36 (1996), pp. 277–82, here p. 280.
  27. Juana Manso, *La familia del comendador* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 2006), p. 103.
  28. Masiello, *Between Civilization and Barbarism*, p. 70.
  29. Susan Meachem, 'Women's Actions, Women's Words. Female Political and Cultural Responses to the Argentine State' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2010), p. 167.
  30. Juana Manuela Gorriti, 'El pozo del Yocci', in ed. Antonio Pagés Larraya, *Relatos Juana Manuela Gorriti* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1962), pp. 67–8.
  31. This theme would reoccur in *Tierra de jaguares* (1926), by right wing Catholic Gustavo Martínez Zuviría (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1977); in the short story 'La máscara sin rostro' (1949), by anti-Peronist Manuel Mujica Láinez, in Manuel Mujica Láinez and Juan Carlos Ghiano (eds), *Cuentos de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Huemul, 1979); and in 'Las esclavas de las criadas' (1970) by upper-class liberal Silvina Ocampo, in Silvina Ocampo, *Cuentos completos*, vol II (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1999).
  32. Juana Manuela Gorriti, *Peregrinaciones de una alma triste* (Buenos Aires: Stockero, 2006).
  33. Mónica Quijada, 'Indígenas: violencia, tierras y ciudadanía', in Mónica Quijada, Carmen Bernard and Arnd Schneider (eds), *Homogeneidad y nación con un estudio de caso: Argentina, siglos XIX y XX* (Madrid: Editorial CSIC, 2000), pp. 57–92, here p. 82.
  34. William Acree, 'Introduction', in Eduardo Gutiérrez, *The Gaucho Juan Moreira*, tr. John Charles Chasteen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014), pp. ix–xxxiv, here p. xiii.
  35. Hanway, *Embodying Argentina*, p. 4.
  36. Paul Borgeson, 'Martín Fierro', in Verity Smith (ed), *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2006), p. 773.
  37. José Hernández, *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* (Barcelona: Red Ediciones S.L, 2016), pp. 52–3.
  38. Enrique Masés, *Estado y cuestión indígena* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2002), p. 72.
  39. Masiello, *Between Civilization and Barbarism*, p. 214, fn 29.
  40. Lucio López, *La gran aldea* (Buenos Aires: Biblioteca de la Nación, 1908), p. 16.
  41. López, *La gran aldea*, p. 143.
  42. Bestselling works such as *Rosas y su Tiempo* (1907) argued that the consequences of interracial sex between Rosist mulatto maids and the sons of upper class families had been detrimental to the racial identity of the upper classes, and to social order. José María Ramos Mejía, *Rosas y su tiempo*, corrected 2nd edn (Buenos Aires: Félix Lajouane y Ca Editores, 1907), p. 439.
  43. Evelia Romano, *A Translation of Alfonsina Storni's Cimbeline en 1900 y pico/Cymbeline in 1900-and-Something and Polixena y la cocinerita/Polyxena and the Little Cook* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), p. 4.
  44. Pedro Benjamín Aquino, *Criolla vieja* (Buenos Aires: Argentores, 1922), p. 23.
  45. Aquino, *Criolla vieja*, p. 61.
  46. 'Biografía,' Alvaro Yunque, <http://www.alvaroyunque.com.ar/alvaro-yunque-biografia.html>.

47. Alvaro Yunque, *Bichofeo: Escenas para la vida de una sirvienta de diez años* (Buenos Aires: Claridad, 1929), p. 55.
48. For 'lost women' see Yunque, *Bichofeo*, p. 27; For the sexual relationship with an Indian man, see Yunque, *Bichofeo*, p. 35.
49. Romano, *A Translation*, p. vii.
50. 'Alfonsina Storni,' Cervantes Virtual (2016), <http://cvc.cervantes.es/actcult/storni/biografia.htm>.
51. Romano, *A Translation*, p. 23.
52. Romano, *A Translation*, p. 95.
53. In *Polixena y la cocinera* (1931), Storni depicted a European immigrant maid as helpless and sexually harassed. As the 1930s progressed, Storni demonstrated sympathy for the women from the interior who came to Buenos Aires to work as maids. Gwen Kirkpatrick, 'The Journalism of Alfonsina Storni: A New Approach to Women's History in Argentina', in Emilie Bergmann (ed.), *Women, Culture and Politics in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 105–29, here p. 125.
54. Elsa Drucaroff, *Los prisioneros de la torre: política, relatos y jóvenes en la postdictadura* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2004), p. 461.
55. Carolina Suárez Hernán, 'El tratamiento subversivo de los estereotipos de género y edad en la obra de Silvina Ocampo', *Anales de la literatura hispanoamericana* 42 (2013), pp. 367–78, here pp. 368–9.
56. The theme of the mistress as bad mother and the maid as good mother is present in other short stories by Silvina Ocampo. See 'La muñeca' and 'Clotilde Ifrán'. Silvina Ocampo, *Los días de la noche* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1970).
57. Silvina Ocampo, 'El Retrato Mal Hecho', in *Cuentos completos*, vol. I, (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1999), p. 16.
58. Nancy Caro Hollander, 'Women: The Forgotten Half of Argentine History', in Ann Pescatello (ed.), *Female and Male in Latin America. Essays* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), pp.141–58, here p. 151.
59. Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, *Eva Perón, la biografía* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1995), p. 227.
60. José Pablo Feinmann, *Peronismo: filosofía política de una persistencia argentina* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2010), p. 59.
61. They collaborated together with other writers on the magazine, *Sur*. See 'Manuel Mujica Láinez', *Biografías y Vida*, <http://www.biografiasyvidas.com/biografia/m/mujica.htm>.
62. Manuel Mujica Láinez, *La casa* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1956), p. 73.
63. See, for example, Mercedes, the maid of Galician background, in Manuel Gálvez, *Hombres en soledad* (1938); Cleofé, the black slave, in Manuel Gálvez, *Bajo la garra anglofrancesa* (1952); and Hilda, the German maid in Manuel Gálvez, *El uno y la multitud*, (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Alpe, 1955).
64. Gálvez, *El uno*, p. 200.
65. Gálvez, *El uno*, p. 200.
66. Gálvez, *El uno*, p. 200.
67. Pite, 'Entertaining Inequalities', p. 121.
68. Gálvez, *El uno*, p. 290.
69. Gálvez, *El uno*, p. 13.
70. Gálvez, *El uno*, p. 144.
71. Boletín Oficial de la República Argentina, Decree Law N 326/56, 20 January 1956, <http://www.boletinoficial.gov.ar/Inicio/Index.castle>. The decree remained the legal framework that regulated the working conditions of some domestic workers until April 2013.
72. Mónica Gogna, 'Domestic Workers in Buenos Aires', in Elsa Chaney and Mary García Castro (eds), *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), pp. 83–104, here p. 87.
73. Inés Pérez, 'Género y derechos laborales: servicio doméstico y trabajo doméstico no remunerado en la Justicia laboral en Argentina (1956–1974)', *páginas 12* (revista digital de Rosario, 2014), pp. 67–82.
74. Pite, 'Entertaining Inequalities', p. 122.
75. David K. Lewis, *The History of Argentina* (Santa Barbara California: Greenwood, 2014), p. 135.
76. Marcos Zangrandi, 'Polémica en tres tiempos. Debates alrededor de la saga nacional de Beatriz Guido', *Literatura y lingüística* 33 (2015), pp. 197–216.
77. Beatriz Guido, *El incendio y las vísperas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1967), p. 64.
78. Beatriz Guido, 'Takeover', in H. E. Lewald (ed. and tr.), *The Web, Stories by Argentine Women* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1983), pp. 75–83.
79. Emma Faura Varela, *Aventura en la Patagonia* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinte, 1970), p. 146.
80. Faura Varela, *Aventura*, p. 78.

81. Marta Lynch, 'Justitia parvi hominis', in J. Constenla (ed.), *Crónicas de la burguesía* (Buenos Aires: Jorge Álvarez Editor, 1965), pp. 15–41. By the mid-1960s Lynch had come to sympathise with the Montoneros, a guerrilla group formed from the extreme left wing of the Peronist movement. On Lynch's political views, see Birgitta Vance, 'Marta Lynch (1925–1985)', in Diane Marting (ed.), *Spanish American Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 300.
82. On 'triple oppression', see, for example, Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organisations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 43.
83. Lynch, 'Justitia', p. 32.
84. Natalia Milanesio, 'Peronists and Cabecitas: Stereotypes and Anxieties at the Peak of Social Change', in *The New Cultural History of Peronism: Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth Century Argentina* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 53–84.
85. Lynch, 'Justitia', p. 23.
86. Manuel Puig, *Heartbreak Tango, a Serial*, tr. Suzanne Jill Levine (London: Arrow Books Limited, 1987).
87. Puig, *Heartbreak Tango*, p. 71.
88. Karin Grammatico, 'Populist Continuities in Revolutionary Peronism?', in Karen Kampwirth (ed.), *Gender and Populism in Latin America: Passionate Politics* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), pp. 122–39, here p. 125.
89. For an analysis of this trend, see, for example, Rebekah E. Pite, '¿Sólo se trata de cocinar?: Responsando las tareas domésticas de las mujeres argentinas con Doña Petrona, 1970–1983', in Andrea Andujar, Déborah d'Antonio, Fernanda Gil Lozano, Karin Grammatico and María Laura Rosa (eds), *De minifaldas, militancias y revoluciones: Exploraciones sobre los 70 en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Luxemburg, 2009), pp. 187–205.
90. Marta Mercader, *Juanamauela, mucha mujer* (Buenos Aires: Geoplaneta, 1983), p. 275.
91. Mara Favoretto, 'Alegoría e ironía bajo censura en la Argentina del proceso' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Melbourne, 2009), p. 103.
92. María Luján Picabea, 'Murió Martha Mercader: una vida entre las letras y la política', Clarín, <http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2010/02/19/sociedad/s-02143171.htm>.
93. Luisa Valenzuela, *Beside Manners*, tr. Margaret Lull Costa (New York: Serpent's Tail, 1995).
94. 'Luisa Valenzuela', Escritores, <https://www.escritores.org/biografias/3089-valenzuela-luisa>.
95. Valenzuela, *Beside*, p. 68, 69, 100.
96. Diane E. Marting, 'Luisa Valenzuela and New Realities: Realidad nacional desde la cama', *Letras Femeninas* 22 (1996), pp. 107–20, here p. 108.
97. Angélica Goródscher, *Cómo triunfar en la vida* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1998), p. 84.
98. Gustavo Bossert in Dolores Graña, 'Los sirvientes, al cine', *La Nación*, 15 May 2004, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/601214-los-sirvientes-al-cine>.
99. Gustavo Bossert, *Los sirvientes* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 2001), pp. 52, 66, 133–5.
100. Bossert, *Los sirvientes*, pp. 12, 44.
101. Lucía Puenzo, *El niño pez* (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2004).
102. Puenzo, *El niño*, p. 18.
103. The novel *Las Viudas de los Jueves* also features a lesbian relationship between an upper-class woman and her Paraguayan maid. Claudia Piñeiro, *Las Viudas de los Jueves* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2005). Another earlier cross-class romantic relationship between a maid and a mistress is present in the novel *The Impenetrable Madam X* (1991), by Griselda Gambaro, which mocks phallogocentric sexuality and upper-class ideas on maids. Griselda Gambaro, *The Impenetrable Madame X*, tr. Evelyn Picon Garfield (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991).
104. Puenzo, *El niño*, pp. 138–40.
105. Puenzo, *El niño*, p. 23.
106. The theme of the maid who wishes to murder her racist mistress also appears in Alejandro Urdapilleta's *La Hija de la Mucama* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2000), p. 21.
107. Perla Suez, *La pasajera* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2008), pp. 68, 98.
108. Suez, *La pasajera*, p. 67.
109. Fainsod, *Se nos fue*, p. 165.
110. Fainsod, *Se nos fue*, p. 212.