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2012
ISSN 2161-0010

Plaza: Dialogues in Language and Literature

Rajkumar, Nidhi. "From Reality to Legend: Baroque Representation as a Means of Transcendence." *Plaza: Dialogues in Language and Literature* 3.1 (Fall 2013): 24-45. PDF.

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From Reality to Legend

Baroque Representation as a Means of Transcendence

The concept of human suffering is not alien to an Indian, and I am no exception. The extent and magnitude of the condition of the masses is so overwhelming that the only way to hang on to sanity is to develop an emotional and psychological numbness to the debilitating and degrading effect that suffering has on human beings. Yet, on the other hand there is *Mahatma* Gandhi, who willingly embraced suffering in a way that allowed him to single-handedly influence the course of history. What happened? How was the suffering of the *Mahatma* different from the suffering of the teeming masses? What is it that gave him such a hold on popular imagination that his self-inflicted suffering became his most lethal weapon?

It seems to me that one possible answer to the transcendent power of his suffering lay not in the suffering per se, but in the representation of it. The power lay in the representation of the *Mahatma* as the savior and Father of the (Indian) nation. This is what gave *Mahatma* Gandhi the ability to use his personal suffering as a means to transcend from man to icon, from reality to legend, and to unite an entire nation in a common cause. This is a testimony to the power of representation, a representation that can raise a man to the stature of a revered saint. There is obviously some kind of powerful machinery at work here, but what is it? More curiously, how can one man's suffering be transformed into something so much more through representation? What was it about the mechanism of representation that can make a man a "saint"?

A similar phenomenon (though on a different scale and context) is present in the representations of Frida Kahlo and Sierva Maria. They are both icons in their own unique ways, legends that transcend their realities. A comparison between them will address some of these questions on the mechanics of representation. The images of Frida Kahlo and Sierva Maria conform to the Baroque tradition of how saints are represented, and herein lie clues on ways of representing that can give the subject of the representation a magical hold on the beholder. In this paper I will use

the representations of Frida and Maria to present this Baroque tradition as a technique and phenomenon that has been and can be used to create and reinforce powerful representations.

Before getting into the tradition of Baroque representation, it is important to establish at the start that Frida Kahlo was of flesh and blood, while Sierva Maria is a fictional character. Frida created her own image, while it was Gabriel Garcia Marquez who gave form to Sierva Maria in *Of Love and Other Demons*. Maria is, in all likelihood,[1] a creature of Garcia Marquez's imagination. So when I compare Frida and Maria, I shall be comparing their representations and not the people, real or otherwise. The real life events that befell Frida the artist will only serve as markers and explanations of the person represented on the canvas. These real-life reflections will fulfill the similar function that Garcia Marquez's descriptions have for Sierva Maria in terms of giving context, reference, and background to the representations being examined. In the Preface to her biography on Frida Kahlo, Hayden Herrera talks about the magnetic pull of Frida's paintings, "The art – the *legend* Frida herself had created – won out in the end …" (my emphasis)(xii) This "legend" is the collection of Frida's paintings, which are also her autobiography. As Herrera quotes Frida, "I paint my own reality … because I need to …" (xi) It is this representation of Frida that we shall consider in this paper.

Since it is in the light of the Baroque tradition that I will examine these figures, it is imperative to analyze the place that the artists Frida Kahlo and Garcia Marquez occupy in Baroque criticism before moving onto dissecting the Baroque tradition per se. Lois Zamora notes in *The Inordinate Eye* that both Frida Kahlo and Gabriel Garcia Marquez have rarely, if ever, been talked about in relation to the Baroque in their art. This oversight with reference to Frida Kahlo's art is puzzling to Zamora:

> The indigenous references in her work have been amply noted, but the Baroque iconography that meshes seamlessly with those references has not, for Kahlo engages Baroque *and* indigenous iconographies, metropolitan and popular forms, in ways that we have seen is typical of the New World Baroque. (168)

Similarly this exclusion of Garcia Marquez's work from discussions in the context of the Baroque is, as Zamora writes:

> … more surprising because his luxuriant syntax and intricate narrative structures are Baroque in the common sense of the word: hyperbolic, exuberant, sinuous, sometimes self-reflective. Furthermore, he has regularly reminded us of his relation to the Spanish Baroque tradition. (207)

[1] At the start of *Of Love and Other Demons*, Garcia Marquez claims that this novel was inspired by the discovery of the crypt where the remains of girl named Sierva Maria where found. There is no way for me to conclusively ascertain if this is part of the fiction of the novel or is the real life background to the conception and birth of *Of Love and Other Demons*.

The Baroque is a mode of "Latin American … self-representation," whether it be to "*intensify*" this interiority or "*ironize*" it, "construct" it or "deconstruct" it,[2] and a means to "… dramatize modern female subjectivity" (168).

Representation as a vehicle of transcendence is best exemplified in the Baroque representation of the saints. John Rupert Marin cites "… the representation of the mystical experience…" as a "recurrent theme" in the Baroque (100). He goes on to add that "[o]ne of the most typical forms of … this period is the altarpiece depicting, in intensely emotional fashion, a saint in a state of trance…" (100) In the Baroque tradition, this suffering has a very important function. As Martin points out,

> The Baroque sensualization of experience had its subjective as well as its objective side. The portrayal of the inner life, which had not been a matter of much concern for the Mannerists, suddenly came to the fore … What chiefly distinguishes the Baroque attitude from that of the Renaissance is the urge to expand the range of sensual experience and to deepen and intensify the interpretation of feelings. (73)

Displaying the "innermost recesses of the human psyche" (Martin 79) is therefore what the Baroque seemed to be most about. This "innermost" landscape of the human psyche is defined by a powerful guiding emotion and/or situation; devotion, ecstasy, penance, love and patriotism (which is also a form of love) are some examples. In the case of these two lives, it is the powerful and often destructive consequences of love that define this inner landscape. Martin best sums up the Baroque quality:

> The power of love resounds throughout Baroque art. Whether in erotic subjects from classical mythology … or in genre scenes purporting to be from actual life, the relations between the sexes and the effects of carnal passion are represented with candor and insight.
>
> Telltale looks and gestures are not the only means by which feelings may be communicated; very often it is the utterly motionless, expressionless figure that lays bare the working of the soul. (80)

Martin immediately goes on to cite the example of the image of a repentant Mary Magdalene in George de La Tour's painting (see fig. 1) to illustrate the inner workings of her soul. The quiet contemplation belies the furious workings of her mind as the surrounding darkness only serves to heighten the resolve and clarity of her spirit, which has finally seen the light. It is not surprising that Martin should choose to talk about Mary Magdalene, as she was a favorite amongst the Baroque artists for her wonderful combination of sensuousness of the flesh with the otherworldly spirituality of a saint. Zamora also uses Mary Magdalene as an example of the Baroque artist's "desire to communicate the ineffable in visible form … the transcendental naturalism of Baroque

[2] In *The Inordinate Eye* Lois Zamora uses these terms to describe what she considers as one of the critical differences between Garcia Marquez and Frida's treatment of the self in their respective art forms.

portraiture" (173). As Zamora writes, "… the Magdalene epitomizes the Baroque combination of eroticism and other-worldliness" (173). Given this significance, it is interesting how Frida and Garcia Marquez use the classic iconographic attributes of St. Mary Magdalene to create representations that become saintly by virtue of their association with an actual saint. Another interesting element in the representations of Frida and Maria is the Baroque technique of presenting the sanctified suffering, death, and martyrdom of the saints. This Baroque element of combining the physical reality of the flesh in all its pain and glory with the intangible aspects of spirituality and psychology are perfectly reflected in both of their representations as well. Like with the Baroque saints, the representations of Frida and Maria are intensely emotional, devotional and psychological.

Fig 1. George de La Tour, St. Mary Magdalene with the Smoking Lamp. 1640,

Los Angeles Country Museum of Art.

There is no doubt about this "otherworldly" quality of Sierva Maria. Gabriel Garcia Marquez invokes the saintly power of physical resurrection, in this case of hair, at the beginning of *Of Love and Other Demons*. In what appears to be a first person account of the moment Garcia Marquez conceived *Of Love and Other Demons,* he describes the body of a young girl found in the convent of the Clarissa nuns. She, Garcia Marquez believes, is the twelve-year-old marquise his grandmother told him about who had "… hair that trailed behind her like a bridal train, who died of rabies caused by a dog bite and was venerated in the towns along the Caribbean coast for

the many miracles she performed" (Garcia Marquez 5). All that remains in the crypt of "SIERVA MARIA DE TODOS LOS ANGELES" is a pile of scattered bones and dust. The fact that the body is of a young girl is significant because it alludes to an unnatural passing, akin to martyrdom. This religious significance is further emphasized by the location of the body, which is the crypt of a convent. These hints at a saintly figure are driven home when Garcia Marquez he tells us of the skull that is found in this crypt. For even though everything else has turned to dust, the skull still has attached to it "a stream of living hair the intense color of copper" that apparently never stopped growing (4). It is at this moment that Garcia Marquez establishes a direct connection with the Magdalene of the Baroque tradition. According to the biblical stories, there was a woman who washed the feet of Christ with oil and dried it with her long tresses. This lady, though nowhere named as such, has been popularly identified as Mary Magdalene, who in the Baroque tradition is recognized by many attributes, including her long hair. The color of the hair is of no consequence, as the paintings by Rossetti, Sandys, Fetti, and Vecelli show (see figs. 2-5). There are blonde and brunette depictions of the saint, but what marks them all, and others like them, as paintings of Mary Magdalene are the long hair, the mood of penitence, pearls, the vessel of oil and/or the presence of the human skull.

Fig. 2. Dante Gabriel Rosetti. Mary Magdalene. 1877, Delaware Art Museum.

Fig. 3. Anthony Frederick Augustus Sandys, Mary Magdalene, 1860, Delaware Art Museum

Fig. 4. Domenico Fetti. The Repentant St. Mary Magdalene, n.d., private collection.

Fig. 5. Tiziano Vecelli, St. Mary Magdalene, 1535, Galleria Palatina, Florence.

Garcia Marquez makes this very direct link between Maria, her saintliness, and her hair from the moment of her birth in *Of Love and Other Demons*.

> That was when Dominga de Adviento promised her saints that if they granted the girl grace of life, her hair would not be cut until her wedding night. No sooner had she made the promise than the girl began to cry. Dominga de Adviento cried out in jubilation: "She will be a saint!" (42)

It is as early as this that Maria's hair becomes a symbol of saint-like "powers." In the bloom of life as a child of five, Maria has a "torrent of hair" that is like a "rosebush" (43). Eventually her hair and life are cut short by her captors, yet her hair, like her saintliness, defies death and "gushed like bubbles" from her shaven, dead head (147).

Maria and Frida's suffering was physical, emotional, and psychological, and it resembled the physical torture endured by the saints. In *Of Love and Other Demons,* Garcia Marquez frequently hints at the saintliness of Maria, and even though Frida Kahlo uses her body as a way to express the torment that she suffered within, it is a far stretch to hint that Frida is a saint. Yet it remains that Frida seeks and constructs her identity through numerous self-portraits, and the way she depicts herself and her pain mirrors the Baroque idea of the sanctified suffering of the saints. As in the case of the Baroque saints and of Maria, this suffering becomes a way for Frida to transcend to a higher spiritual level of meaning and symbolism. As Zamora argues,

> Kahlo was not religious, but she routinely engaged the Baroque iconography of sanctified suffering; her work often alludes to martyrdom, and her self-portraits function as ceremonial retellings by means of which both her body and her paintings are imbued with ritual significance. (182)

Andrea Kettenmann refers to the way Kahlo uses her hair as a means of creating a self-identity (her distinctive unibrow and traditional braid) and of expressing turbulent emotions at defining moments in her life. Herrera also makes a similar reference,

> [Frida] started with dramatic material: nearly beautiful, she had slight flaws that increased her magnetism. Her eyebrows formed an unbroken line across her forehead and her sensuous mouth was surmounted by the shadow of a mustache. (x)

Frida uses her hair to record the emotionality of the defining moments in the inner landscape of her psyche, which was defined by her romantic relationship with Diego. An example is *Self-Portrait with Chopped Hair* (see fig. 6). On November 6, 1939, Frida and Diego's phase of estrangement culminated in a divorce. *Self-Portrait with Chopped Hair* is considered an expression of this emotionally painful period in her life. Kettermann sees this separation as something that was crucial to her identity, almost to her womanhood. The words above the painting read: "see, if I loved you, it was for your hair; now you're bald, I don't love you any more."

Fig. 6. Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair, 1940, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Herrera writes that Frida's act of cutting her hair was how she expressed her inner pain. For both Frida and Sierva Maria, the bridal promise, like their hair, is prematurely cut short. Whether by divorce or death, for Frida the end is the same. Herrera writes, "A month after her divorce came through, Frida did what she had done in 1934 in response to Rivera's affair with Cristina: she cropped her hair" (285). Herrera describes *Self-Portrait with Chopped Hair* as an

> … unnerving bite [that] transmits her distress at being separated from Diego. *Self-Portrait with Chopped Hair* shows the artist sitting on a bright yellow Mexican chair in the midst of a large expanse of reddish brown earth that is covered with strands of her shorn black hair. The sky is … airless and oppressive. The chair is gay and folkloric, but the way Frida has made it the only bright object in the painting accentuates the feeling of desolation … The … hair that … entwine themselves like vines or snakes on the rungs of her yellow chair … recall the veins, vines, roots, and ribbons that in other portraits are symbols of Frida's feeling of being (or desire to be) linked with realities beyond herself. (285-6)

Her hair becomes the way to transcend to "realities" that lie "beyond herself" (286). This painting also demonstrates another Baroque technique that Frida frequently employs of including writing in the painting, in the margins and on phylacteries. It is here that she overcomes the relative muteness [3] of painting as a medium, especially when compared to the novel. She represents Diego, her pain at her inability to become a mother and/or her physical torment due to a crippled spinal cord and pelvis through the combined medium of word and image for maximum effect.

Another self-portrait that perfectly exemplifies the way she uses hair as an external representation of her psyche, and which ties in with *Self-Portrait with Chopped Hair* in narrative continuity, is *Self-Portrait with Braid* (see fig. 7). *Self-Portrait with Braid* was painted in 1941, when Frida and Diego reunited. She expresses her mixed feelings about this matrimonial reconciliation through the imagery of her hair.

Herrera writes,

> *Self-Portrait with Braid,* 1941, is one of the first bust-length self-portraits that she produced after her return to Mexico from San Francisco. It can be seen as a comment on her remarriage – as a counterpart to *Self-Portrait with Cropped hair*, from her divorce. One imagines that the hair strewn all over the ground in the earlier self-portrait has been gathered, braided, and shaped into the pretzel on top of Frida's head. Putting back her hair is a reaffirmation of the femininity she had denied, but the affirmation is not joyous. (312)

[3] Here "muteness" is used to convey the dependence of the artist and painting on the knowledge and sensitivity of the viewer and not in the sense of its literal meaning, which is an inability to speak itself. Writing on the other hand is able to convey everything it has to wants to say, thanks to the common link of understood language and words between author and reader.

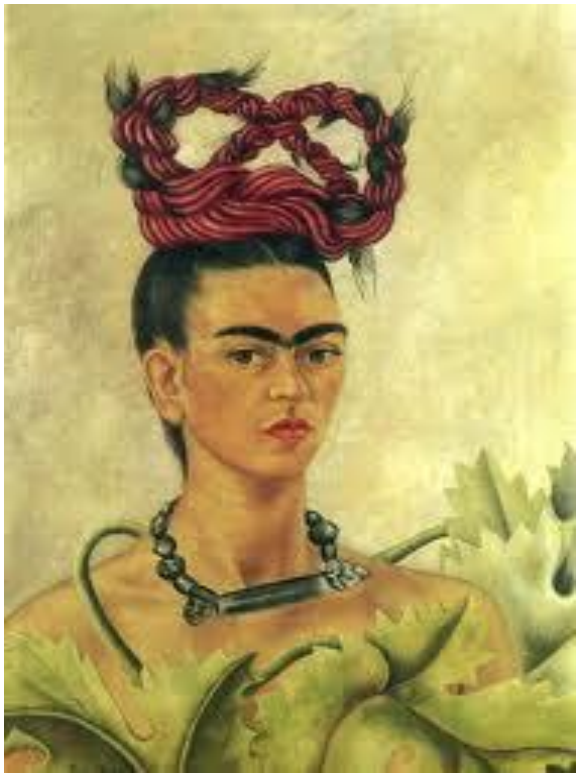

Fig. 7. Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait with Braid, 1941, Jacques & Natasha Gelman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Herrera describes the "unruly strands [that] seem as disconcertingly alive as the hair she had cropped" as "nerve ends of an anxious psyche," and "the huge predatory jungle leaves with sharp serrated edges that hide Frida's nakedness … suggest a turmoil held in check behind her calm features" (312). Like in George de La Tour's Mary Magdalene [Figure 1], Frida's seemingly passive self-portraits reveal an inner turbulence through symbolism. This symbolic imagery is reiterated from one portrait to the next and eventually becomes one of her distinct and primary attributes. Zamora also argues that it is this "ceremonial retelling" that gives her visual imagery and attributes their "ritual significance" (182).

> The second attribute that ties Sierva Maria and Frida to the image of sainthood through association with St. Mary Magdalene are their beads. Zamora writes of the pearls of Mary Magdalene as "emblematic of her worldliness, her conversion, her tears, and her liberation" (225), and she is always depicted with her pearls on her person (see fig. 8) or strewn by her side (see fig. 9), the saint is in the act of tearing them off of herself (see fig. 10) in a moment of passionate resolve. These pearls of Mary Magdalene are reflected in the sixteen strings of the "beads of various gods" (Garcia Marquez 43) that the slave women hang around Sierva Maria's neck. Even the golden grapes of Sierva Maria's dream are shadows of St. Mary Magdalene's beads. Using symbolic imagery, Garcia

Marquez links Maria to her beads so closely that they become inherent to not just her identity, but to life itself.

Fig. 8. Piero di Cosimo, Mary Magdalene, 1490, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome.

Fig. 9. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Mary Magdalene, 1596,

Galleria Doria, Pamphili, Rome.

Fig. 10. Alonso del Arco, Mary Magdalene Removing Her Jewelry, 17th century, Museo de Bellas Artes, Asturias.

Mary Magdalene's pearls are also reflected in Frida's indigenous beaded necklaces, which she wears in some of her self-portraits and which seem to point at Frida's attempt at establishing her Mexican identity. *Self Portrait with Beads* (see fig. 11) is an example.

She painted *Self Portrait with Beads* in 1933, which was a time of terrible emotional and psychological turmoil. These beads are not just a statement of identity, but as was the case with all her art, they were her therapy. Frida's emotional and mental agony was heightened by the fact that like Sierva Maria, Frida found herself trapped in places against her will. Physically, Frida was forced to move to the United States, a country she could never bring herself to consider home. These beads represent the "veins" and "roots" that reconnect her to Mexico. Emotionally, she was in agony because she was recovering from another one of her many miscarriages. Its as if this jade necklace is the only thing that is giving her the emotional strength she needs to appear calm and composed in this situation and in the painting. They are Frida's attempt to "reattach herself to life" and sanity (Herrera 159).

For Sierva Maria also, the beads become a source of comfort and identity. It is only at moments when she is forcefully separated from her necklaces that she looses her saintly composure and lashes out like a demon. Sierva Maria sits quietly and motionlessly in the garden of the convent, and she is forgotten as if she is a painting herself. It is only when "the other novice trie(s) to take her necklaces, [that] Sierva Maria coile(s) like a viper and bit(es) her on the hand" (Garcia Marquez 64). For both Maria and Frida, their beads become not just symbolic within their representations, but like Mary Magdalene's, these beads tell a story of their origin that is completely immersed in their respective identities.

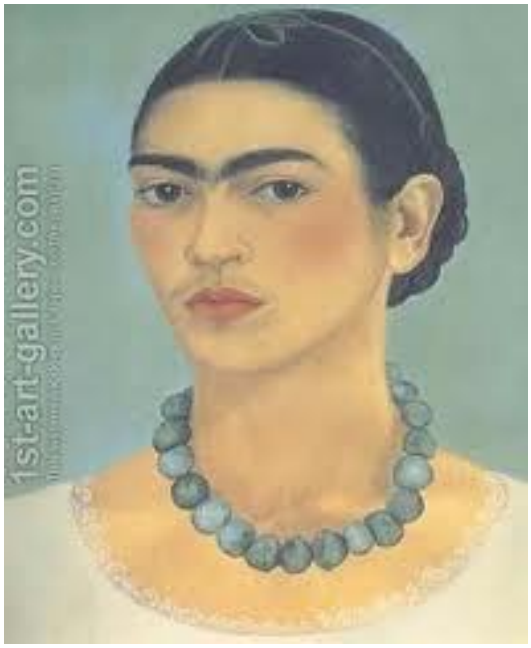

Fig. 11. Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait with Necklace, 1933, Jacques & Natasha Gelman, Mexico City, Mexico.

This association through representation of Frida and Sierva Maria to the saints is not just restricted to St. Mary Magdalene alone. While in Maria's case Garcia Marquez draws a direct, though thinly veiled relationship between Maria and St. Ambrose, Frida borrows the tradition of using animals as saintly attributes to establish her iconic representation. Early on in *Of Love and Other Demons*, Garcia Marquez reinforces a "saint-like" aura around Sierva Maria through association with St. Ambrose[4]. Three pages into the novel, Garcia Marquez tells us that Maria and St. Ambrose share the same birthday on December 7. This association is so deeply intertwined that it is hard to tell if the fiesta, music and fireworks are for Maria or for the saint. Later in the story, St. Ambrose literally walks into the story as Father Tomas de Aquino de Narvaez, who appears in Maria's life as promised salvation. Father Tomas de Aquino de Narvaez has all the attributes of St. Ambrose. He is described as sweet of tongue – sweet enough to even win over the chronically "narrow-minded" Abbess – and like St. Ambrose, Father Tomas de Aquino de Narvaez is also a doctor of the church. Frida, on the other hand, creates and establishes her iconographic animal attributes in her repeated self-depictions with certain animals

[4] St. Ambrose, also called the Bishop of Milan was one of the most influential ecclesiastical figures of the 4th century and was one of the four original doctors of the church. St. Augustine, St. Jerome and Pope Gregory I were the other three. He is most famous for his being able to halt Arianism and his ability to stop Emperor Magnus Maximus from attacking Italy. He is known to be the saint with the honeyed tongue, the one of sweet words. That is also why he is the patron saint of the beekeepers.

that have Mexican association. In most of her portraits, she shows herself along with monkeys, Itzcuintli dogs, deer, and parrots (see figs. 12-14). All of these self-bestowed attributes symbolize the driving forces of her life. The dogs and monkeys serve the purpose of reiterating Frida's Mexican heritage, but most importantly they are a symbol of the greatest agony of her life: the absence of children. Frida longed to have, but could never bear, children.

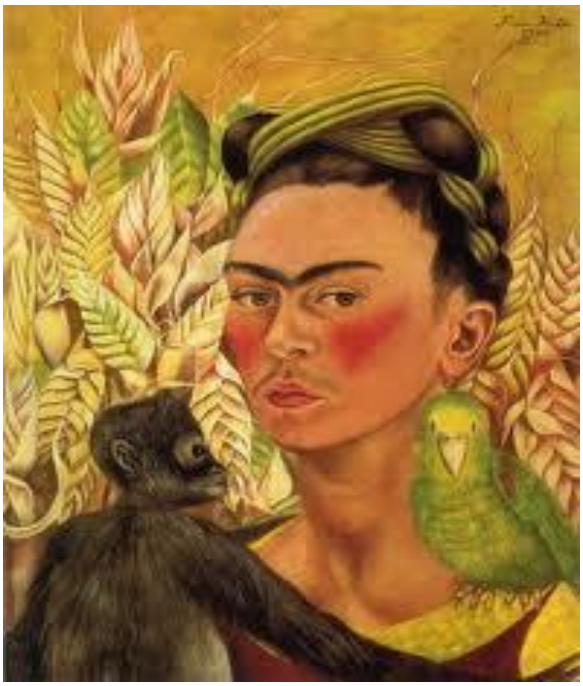

Fig. 12. Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot, 1942, Collection of Constantini, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Fig. 13. Frida Kahlo, Itzcuintli Dog with Me, 1938, Private collection, Dallas, Texas, USA.

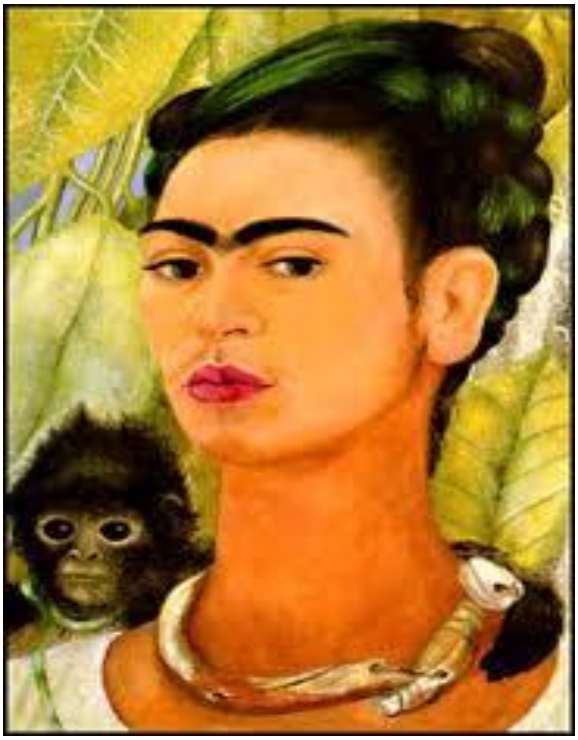

Fig. 14. Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait with Monkey, 1938, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, USA.

The parrot, Kettenmann believes, is a symbol of another one of the demons that haunted her, of love. Kettenmann writes,

> The … parrots are taken from Hindu imagery, where they serve as the bearers of the love god Kama. As erotic symbols, they point to the artists' relationship… (64)

This association with Baroque saints brings us to Frida and Maria's representation of their common experience of sanctified suffering. Suffering, Zamora argues, was "portrayed with an altogether original energy by Baroque artists" (175), and this seems to be very applicable to Frida and Sierva Maria as well. It also serves to enhance the otherworldly appeal of their representations. Their minds, hearts, and bodies are the stages "upon which tragic conflicts could be played out (through) … unremitting scenes of physical cruelty," and like the Baroque saints, "their pain was increasingly depicted as (almost) indistinguishable from ecstasy" (177). Both Sierva Maria and Frida's pain was at a physical, emotional, and mental level. Zamora cites Walter Benjamin, who in *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* "reaffirms this connection between beliefs and bodies" in that the physical torture was more based more on "violent emotion" than "tragic circumstance" (177). We see this exeplified in both Maria and Frida's representations.

In Frida's case, her life long physical suffering was born from a tram accident early on in life, because of which her spine and pelvis were irreparably damaged. She often depicts this pain

symbolically, as in *The Broken Column* (see fig. 15). When it came to depicting this pain, Herrera writes,

> … [Frida] did not need the tutoring of de Sade to depict with a frankness that verged on ferocity the drama of physical suffering. When Frida paints … her own stabbed flesh, it is not an anonymous image of pain … When she splits open her torso to reveal a ruined classical column in place of her spinal column it is not make believe; she is reporting on her own physical condition. (259)

Herrera does not question the fact that Frida did indeed suffer greatly, but Herrera seems to believe that the representation of her suffering was greater than the actual extent of her suffering. Herrera seems to imply that it is almost as if Frida believed that by making her suffering legendary, she would become legendary too. Herrera argues,

> … Frida was obsessed by her suffering… an invalid can be pardoned for hypochondria. In Frida's case, of course, there was an element of narcissism. Indeed, it is possible to argue that invalidism was essential to her self-image, and that if Frida's physical problems had been as grave as she made out, she would never have been able to translate them into art. (346-7)

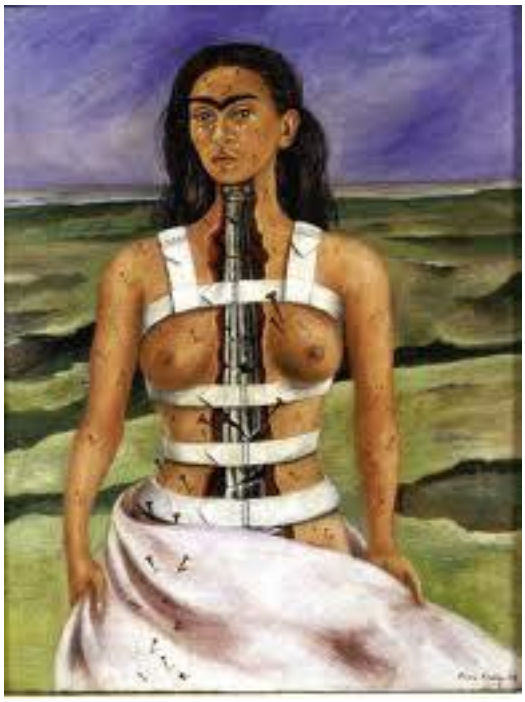

Fig. 15. Frida Kahlo, The Broken Column, 1944, Dolores Olmedo Patino,

Mexico City, Mexico.

This suffering has a physical as well as an emotional side to it, and it is the emotional side that seems to account for the exaggerated representation of Frida's physical suffering. In keeping

with the Baroque tradition of the displaying the "innermost recesses of the human psyche" (Martin 79), it is the representation of the emotional pain that carries the true essence of Frida's work. Besides the years of recovery, immense pain, and repeated surgeries, the greatest and most tragic outcome of this accident was the several miscarriages that Frida had to suffer. It was the psychological impact of these miscarriages coupled with the outcome of the shattered hopes of several failed surgeries that seem to have had a far more debilitating effect on Frida than the pain of the actual accident and its exclusively physical consequences per se. One tends to form this view because of the relative unimportance her other physical affliction had in terms of self-definition. Frida had polio as a child, and as a result one of her legs was deformed. Yet, she overcame that handicap by wearing the traditional Mexican dress that initially served to cover her legs and later became synonymous with her identity. Frida did not make much of this affliction in her self depiction, as it was not something that defined her self in her own eyes. Yet, the tram accident and its consequences do. Sierva Maria also suffers physically, but from a bite from rabid dog. As in Frida's case, this bite happens early on in her life, on the day of her twelfth birthday. By itself, the bite is really of no concern to either Maria or her caretakers, which in itself is puzzling and adds to her otherworldly mystique. All that remains is an "almost invisible wound" on Sierva Maria's ankle (Garcia Marquez 8). Whether this immunity is the result of a saintly miracle or of the magic of the slaves is left a mystery. What does become Maria's source of physical torment is the interventions of the doctors who reopen the wound only to leave it infected, septic, and eventually fatal. This is like the physical suffering the saints suffered at the hands of organized institutions. This physical suffering also mirrors the inner turmoil that they were put through because of external forces. Sierva Maria's wound is perfectly dried and almost forgotten. Yet because of a slight fever, which is in all probability not even connected to the bite, her wound is reopened and subjected to all kinds of absurd treatments. Interestingly, the physician responsible for reopening her wounds is from Salamanca, just as Delaura is. So while one causes her physical suffering, the other causes her emotional and mental torture; together they are responsible for her death.

> A young physician from Salamanca opened Sierva Maria's closed wound … to draw out the rank humors. Another attempted to achieve the same end with leeches on her back. A barber-surgeon bathed her wound in her own urine, and another had her drink it. At the end of two weeks she had been … brought to the brink of death with potions of natural antimony and other fatal concoctions. (Garcia Marquez 50)

Frida felt the same as Sierva Maria. She always believed that it was the doctors and the innumerable surgeries that made her condition worse.

Kettenmann writes that Frida painted *Tree of Hope, Remain Strong* (see fig. 16) after one of her innumerable surgeries, and described the scars that were left as those "which those surgeon sons of bitches landed me with"(71). This is a perfect example of the scars of physical torture, both for itself and as symbolic of the inner pain she is going through. While she is obviously referring to the actual physical scars on her body, the right side of the painting, with all its typically Fridaesque Mexican imagery, along with the rather ironic title of the painting seems to point to the emotional scars of lost hope. Frida's scars and Sierva Maria's infected wounds seem to be in

keeping with the idea of the Baroque tradition that acknowledges all these "deformities" and "glorifies the body in all its visceral aberrations … [The saint's] physical vicissitudes were considered to be vehicles of spiritual transcendence" (Zamora 177).

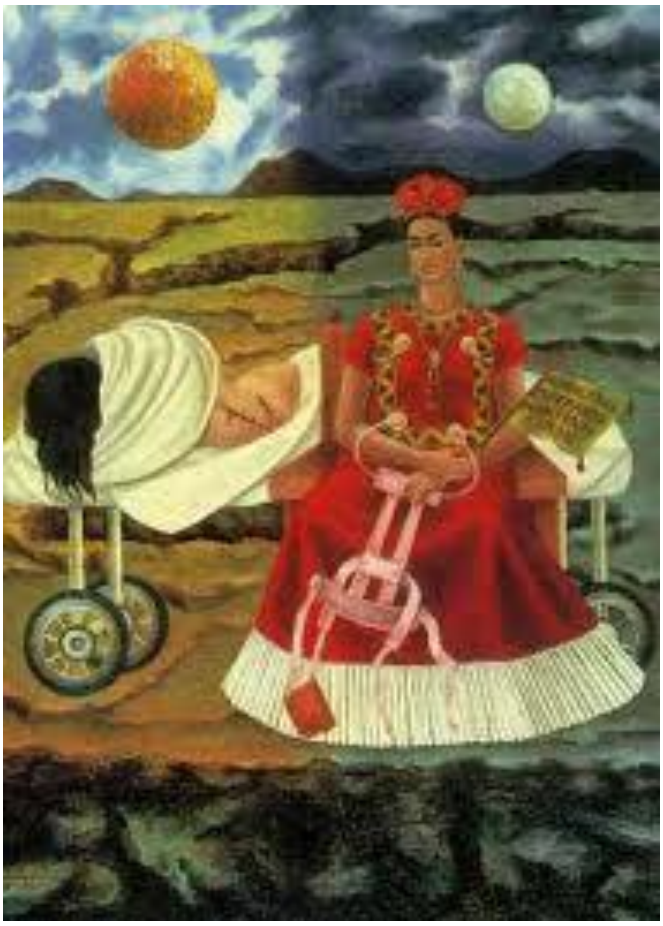

Fig. 16. Frida Kahlo, Tree of Hope, Remain Strong, 1946, Daniel Filipacchi, Paris, France.

As we have seen already, the Baroque was an expression of the spirit through the body, so the suffering of the body was an externalization of the turmoil of the soul. In both Frida and Sierva Maria, this agony is born from love, and in both, this love is not for God or the Church but is focused on mortal men. Frida had an obsessive relationship with Diego, while Sierva Maria's love for Delaura, though born later, seems to far surpass Delaura's intensity of emotion. Frida and Maria's physical agony coupled with their emotional distress is a perfect example of the Baroque duality which is the combination of "solid sensuousness and transported spirit" (Zamora 178). Again, while Sierva Maria has to suffer the additional torment of the exorcisms, Frida has to suffer her own "exorcisms" with every miscarriage.

Iconographic nun imagery was another element of Baroque tradition that both Garcia Marquez and Frida borrow to create representations that are larger than life. In the Baroque, this proliferation of portraits of nuns was because of a practice that was commonly resorted to. Zamora writes,

> Well –to-do families commemorated their daughters' taking of vows with a portrait that showed them with a crown of flowers …(these) conventions are echoed in Kahlo's self-portrait(s) (192)

These images of nuns in moments of transformation are found in both Maria and Frida – but with a twist. Sierva Maria, the little involuntary nun, is "painted" by Garcia Marquez like a bride, while Frida the bride presents herself like a nun. The day Sierva Maria is to be left at the convent, her father dresses her up like a little bride in velvet slippers, a ball gown, a hat with colored ribbons, and a small little valise with little essentials and treasures, much like a bridal trousseau. Frida the bride, on the other hand, commemorates her symbolic entry – and re-entry – into the institution of marriage through several of her self-portraits that seem to be modeled on the Baroque portraits of nuns. Zamora uses the example of her *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Dr. Eloesser* (see fig. 17) to illustrate this.

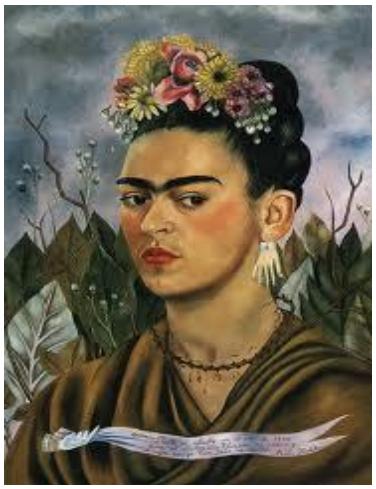

Fig. 17. Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait Dedicated to Dr. Eloesser, 1940, Private Collection.

Another example is *Self-Portrait as a Tehuana*[5] (see fig. 18). In this self-portrait, Frida depicts herself in a Tehuana costume that serves to fulfill multiple functions.

Fig. 18. Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait as a Tehuana, 1943, Jacques & Natasha Gelman, Mexico City, Mexico.

First, it addresses all the Baroque conventions: the "crown of flowers," the sacred image (which in this case is Diego), the "medallion" like that of Sor Juana, and even the white "halo" of the frill which is like the halo that crowns the head of saints in Baroque depictions. *Self-Portrait* (see fig. 19) also displays all the iconographic images seen in the previous painting. This painting includes tears running down her face, seen again in several other images like *the Broken Column* (see fig.15) and *Diego and I* (see fig. 20). These tears are significant because they were the "standard accoutrement of Baroque female saints" (Zamora 189). In *Diego and I*, Frida's hair is like a dark halo, tears run down her face, and the "medallion" she wears on her forehead shows Diego, the source of her torment. Her *Self-Portrait* (see fig. 19) seems to echo almost all of the Baroque conventions used to portray St. Sor Juana (see fig. 21). As in *Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz* by Miguel Cabrera, Frida also wears an actual medallion in lieu of the symbolic one she uses in several other self-portraits showing Diego. This is seen by many as a direct attempt by Frida to link her representation with that of Sor Juana's, because, as Zamora notes, they, or rather the logic behind their representations seemed to have a lot in common.

> Frida Kahlo's sense of her status as a woman is as central to her work as it was to Sor Juana's, and her repeated self-portraits echo Sor Juana's awareness of the ambiguity of all attempts to portray the (female) self. In fact, Sor Juana frequently used portraits as a metaphor for the difficulties of self-representation …. (189)

[5] This self-portrait had alternative titles: *Diego in My Thoughts,* and *Thinking of Diego*

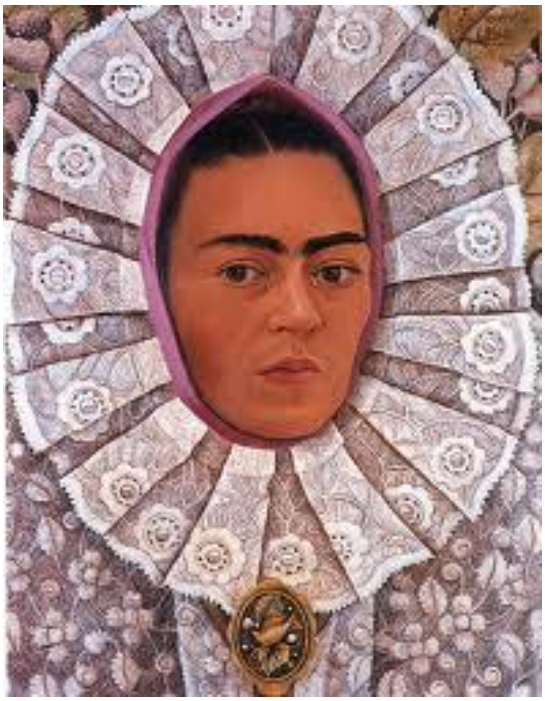

Fig. 19. Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait, 1948, Dr. Samuel Fastlicht, Mexico City, Mexico.

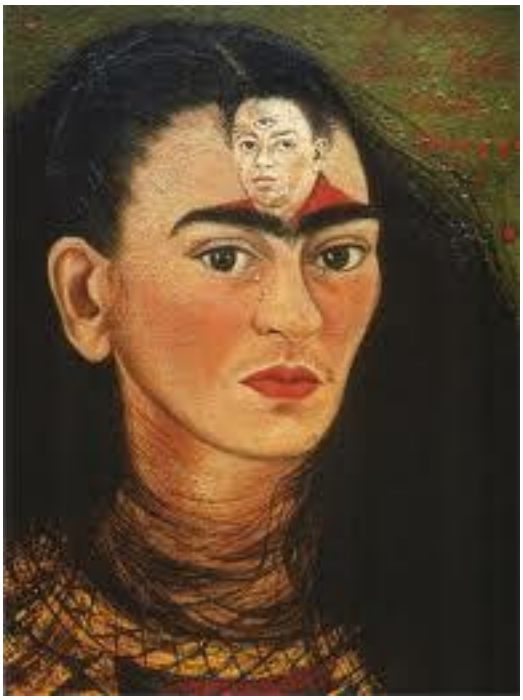

Fig. 20. Frida Kahlo, Diego and I, 1949, Mary Anne Martin Fine Arts, New York.

Zamora goes on to draw more visual parallels between these representations:

> If the medallion at Sor Juana's throat is the sign is the sign of these contradictions, so too are the medallions embedded in Frida's forehead, in such self-portraits as *Thinking about Death* and *Self-Portrait as a Tehuana.* (189)

These images, Zamora argues, demonstrate that Frida was so obsessed with death and Diego that they were

> … two alter egos within herself … Her devotion is her penance; her headdress in *Self-Portrait as a Tehuana* looks strangely like a nun's habit, and her tears are a standard accoutrement of Baroque female saints. (189)

Sierva Maria's emotional turmoil is, on the other hand, not expressed by her, but is represented by Garcia Marquez. However, the effects are not in any way diminished as a result. Hesitant to respond at first, her passion overtakes her to the point that in the end she is "found dead of love in her bed, her eyes radiant and skin like that of a new born baby" (Garcia Marquez 147). It is here, at the moment of her martyrdom, that her legend begins. Her immortal hair personifying her legend continues to live and grow for centuries. She has transcended from human to saint. Frida, too, has transcended from reality to legend. Frida finds her "immortality" in the legacy of self-representation that

she leaves behind, in an art that was inspired and spurred on by her suffering. Like the saints of the Baroque tradition, both Frida Kahlo and Sierva Maria achieve a higher plane of being through the Baroque tradition of representing the saints in all the glory of their sanctified suffering.

Fig. 21. Miguel Cabrera, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, 18th century, National Museum of History, Chapultepec Castle, Mexico City.

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