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Oscuridad Unraveled

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OSCURIDAD UNRAVELED

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing:
Poetry

by
Orlinda Pacheco
June 2015

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Approved by:

Juan Delgado, First Reader

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ABSTRACT

Oscuridad Unraveled is a compilation of many stylistic poems. There are narrative poems interspersed with somewhat surreal poems that tell a story about the Oscuridad as a child and adult. As Oscuridad's childhood story is unfolding so is her adult story causing a cyclical motion within reader and writer, or maybe a rollercoaster with many loops and turns. Nonetheless, it begins with poems that shaped a small innocent girl and leads to the creation of the adult woman who cannot have children, who embraces the passion of being "the other" and luxury of sex without consequence. This is a story about love, loss, where the sacred meets the profane, where a nun and hooker are all in one body, this is where the role of many selves comes to light and dark. Through memory I aim for myself and other women to grab onto their womb as hard as they would grab onto their heart, with all intensity and emotion, especially if your womb is as fruitless as hers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ama, Apa, Sisters, Padrastro, I dedicate this to you. You have seen me through each season. You have had to abandon me at some point to let me find my way back to myself. Those moments we fought, where we lost contact, where nothing was right and the world was on fire were the best lessons in life you could have given me. It is through our imperfectness that we have learned to love each other unconditionally. Ama, gracias por aceptar mi sueño de ser escritora. Apa, gracias por enseñarme que las palabras de poeta corren en la sangre. Arturo, gracias por ser bueno con mi madre y por ser el segundo padre que necesitábamos. Sisters know that we have been through so much together, but know we stand tall.

Thank you, to all the MFA students who have helped me shape my poetry. Professors Julie Sophia Paegle, Juan Delgado, and Chad Sweeney, thank you. You three pushed me further into the vast field of words and created a poet who demands to be heard.

Thank you, to everyone and everything that has made me spark with life, has dimmed my inner light, made the rage in me flow out, and lent me a wishing well where my tears find a home. Thank you, for those lovers that can never be defined by a few simple words or that made me grow from a fractured state.

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:
OSCURIDAD UNRAVELED

1. Child Morphed

Moans, mingled words, a body thumps and thumps on the other side of the wall. A four year old child tries to step away from the door. That four year old child now has an idea of what sex is, of what a quarrel between two lovers is, how something so violent can be so passionate, intoxicating, and lastly how all these contradictions awaken a part of the body that perhaps should not have awoken until much later in her life. What does it say when this four year old child begins to want to know what sex is when it is presented behind closed doors or by her own mother? Should it not disgust her, should it not make her feel ashamed, or should she not run to her father's arms and tell him her mother is sleeping with one of the neighbors?

Perhaps. But the art of poetry has taught me about the power of patience, observation, and possibility, all which help me understand Oscuridad's mixed feelings at this time. Poetry to me is supposed to heighten all the senses within and outside the body, it is suppose to sing to the body and make it react in ways that one did not think possible or never thought would feel such intensity by words. Poetry is meant to capture the deepest details of a scene, a monologue, a conversation between two people or generally of life and watch as they unfold

through words that seem beautiful, that carry a cadence of love and sensuality or pain, but that it should relive these moments with a lens of questioning, of leaving doubt or a need to search beyond the depths of the body and delve deep into the mind in order to understand why things are the way they are.

Let me give you a poem about this child and her early experiences with what she thought was love. Let us call this four year old child, Oscuridad. Oscuridad Unraveled, “Diosito and Apa Don’t Know I Know,” is one of the first poems that delve into the world of a child whose world has been turned upside down by the actions that her mother carries out due to her inability to cope with the loneliness her husband has presented her mentally and bodily:

Ama's back pins her petals

on the bedroom door, Apa you're not

home. The tacks stick out— I curious

four years old press my front

hard against the prick, oh

my little moan escapes, their

guttural heightened, their

climax bleeds my little blood out, my

own petals shot to the sky,

where He is not behind the door,

I draw a home in red where

my heart sits on a mantle.

My eyes awake a moth flutter,

I will walk with my womb in my hand.

In that opening scene which I first gave you in prose, we have the story but not the intensity of feeling that I feel and hope my verse conveys. Oscuridad has been presented with one of the ugliest actions of love at a young age, cheating. This four year child is home; her mother thought she was asleep and that she could solve the problem her lover and her were having behind closed doors, literally ten feet away from where her children were napping on the floor, thinking the scene would go unnoticed. But the child feels the “hard...prick”; she hears her moan. Oscuridad’s mother does not realize how her daughter pressed her ear to the door and heard them shouting about taking back the objects of affection they had given each other, she does not know that the her daughter has heard her mother’s head and body bang on the door when the lover refuses to let her go without one last moment of love between them. What the mother definitely does not realize is that Oscuridad is behind this door feeling like her heart has been taken out of her chest and placed on a mantle out of her reach, or that somewhere deep below her thighs something begins to throb and pulse with the

need to know what is making her mother moan, writhe, and speak words that should only be said to her father.

The other beauty of remembering *Oscuridad* in poetry is that verse renders her immediate, forever captured in the present moment. So, *Oscuridad* wonders how the world can function in this way, split a mother with two lovers. The pain should clarify clearly when the child inflicts pain on herself by pressing her body tight against the tacks that stick out the door, and also when the heart is placed on the mantle, and the womb is in her hand. These moments are supposed to cause a cringing within the reader, are supposed to make people realize that a four year old can come across such a scene and emerge fully scathed yet functional. It is important that this poem grasp the pain and conflict within the child. This child has as have so many of us, has been raised with the Catholic cross tattooed over her heart, with morals running through her blood. These influences whisper that what transpires behind her parent's bedroom door is a "sin," against the vows in front of god. *Oscuridad* wants this poem to fully seize and to show the pain in the moment the child realizes her father is nowhere to be found, even though he lives in the same home. She yearns for him to appear in order for her to tell him what she has been through, hoping that he can somehow make it all go away with a kiss to her wounded heart, just like her mother does when she gets hurt.

This poem also depicts the basic structure of what this child's life will turn out to be. Oscuridad is now tainted by the idea that the world functions on the need to feed the loneliness with something that might make one feel whole again. She has an idea of what it means to be a woman in this world. Her eyes "moth flutter" is supposed to represent a part of the mind awakening and taking control, just as the REM cycle does in our sleep. She the child learns all about cycles now: the cycle in which her father bails on every moment he could and should have spent with his daughters; the cycle in which a second man is there to fill in his shoes, first for the mother and later, for the partly abandoned daughters. Again, as when the eyes rapidly move in sleep during REM cycle; which the body's muscles shut down and the only fast movement within the body are the eyes. Oscuridad's eyes take in a lot around her, but it is her body as a whole that "fails," according to the loyalty she still feels for her first father, to do the right thing. In her mind, the heart no longer has precedence over the womb, it becomes a dead muscle; the womb is now in control over every action that unfolds after the scene between her mother and her lover behind her parent's bedroom door. It is the reason why she allows her father to go unaware of what she has witnessed. If something so wrong can seem so good to her mother, why betray her mother by disclosing it to her father? She allows this other man to shower her in pretty words and presents. In another poem, "Child Play Real World," Oscuridad is again caught in a realm beyond her understanding, but tries to understand.

What is it to be made of this custom:
when rivers braid umbilical cords
between lovers when one is
married and with kids? Child play,
go on eat dirt. It tastes like
dry pecan pie, it'll scrape out
any voice you ever had. How
do we explain some mothers
run like wolves with a pack
of men behind their tail?
Child don't worry they won't
bite you, each wolf will
lick your ear wrap gold around
your wrist in hopes you'll breathe
acceptance into their ear
after your father has left since
his braided cord is cut and
hummingbird whispers in
the wind are his only way to
say hello and goodbye. Child,
go on play mommy and see
how easy it is to entertain other
golden ringed pollen bees. (Inlandia, Volume 5)

In this poem, Oscuridad has cycled another aspect of love and life: the roles one must take on or understand in order to perceive and understand the way the world works. She prefers to stick to silence, to eat the dry pecan pie and let her voice be taken away before telling anyone, especially her father, what is going on while she is at home. She knows her older sister knows, but they both decide to pretend that they do not know and they both decide to keep this from their father. The reason why this poem is so centered on Oscuridad is because her sister never bothered to ease her mind and help her understand what has been happening and why she too chooses to keep this terrible secret from their father.

Their silences speak volumes: of the loneliness that Oscuridad is going through; of the colossal pain it is causing within knowing that she cannot talk to anyone about it. "Child Play Real World," attempts to be Oscuridad's older self's monologue telling her to try to understand the difficulties of what it means to be a mother who is surrounded by men who give her the attention her husband will not.

This poem shows the questioning in full force of what it means to be or play the role of "mother". She has gathered all the information she has seen through her mother and her father and put it in metaphors in which she can understand why her world is the way it is. She has accepted that her mother seems to have a pack of wolves, men who are clearly sexually available to be involved with her or pretend they are her friends even though they know she is married, behind her tail. The mother is the one who takes on this role of being a leader and being persuaded by her body's needs. The mother also understands that her father is not around and that all she hears from him are his goodbyes when he goes to work or is basically just absent in Oscuridad's world. This poem represents the fear that plagues a child when the mother brings around men and the moment she accepts the presents from some of the men who want to stick around and be a part of her family. The child feels doubly complicit; first, because she keeps and to some extent, thus accepts her mother's secret; second because she accepts gifts from, and thus keeps "safe" her mothers' affairs. At the

end the narrator, her older self, is telling or asking Oscuridad to see how difficult it is for a woman to play the role of the mother.

The most important feature of the poem is the world that is created; a surreal world where Oscuridad can escape within this poem. Escaping seems like the solution and believe me does Oscuridad ever know how to escape from the traumatizing moments with one specific book written by Clive Barker, *Thief of Always*. Barker came out with this book, a fable, during 1992. Oscuridad does not run into this fable until she is in second grade. Her teacher, Mrs. Nafus, sees something in Oscuridad, maybe Oscuridad fall apart a little after her mother tried having her lover take them to church on Sunday while their father was nowhere to be seen. Maybe she sees Oscuridad's confusion and lets her know that she would find comfort in this particular book. Oscuridad does find comfort and does escape in *Thief of Always*. Part of Oscuridad wishes she can be like Harvey, Clive Barker's main character, and sit on the window and have some magical human being drag her out of her cold gray story full of fear, entrapment, and pain. She wishes she could be sent to a world where everything appears magical and perfect, where she can still phone home and still get both parents' permission to live free, without adultery's taint of the beauty and joy of an innocent life. Nonetheless, this is a fable, "A short story devised to convey some useful lesson; esp. one in which animals or inanimate things are the speakers or actors; an apologue. Now the most prominent sense" ("fable"). It is an apologue, a moral fable, in which Oscuridad would learn how to survive.

Clive Barker has taught Oscuridad that even these worlds of fantasy and escapism are not what they seem to be. The novel muses, “However this miraculous place worked, it seemed real enough. The sun was hot, the soda was cold, the sky was blue, the grass was green. What more did he need to know?” to question the world is the hardest thing a child can do (Barker 43-44). To question the realms of family at a young age and the idea of a perfect, a perfect world, a perfect family, well, she comes to the conclusion that they do not exist. It is like the world she uses to escape to when she reads Clive Barker’s fable, it is a made world where the magic of it disappears and Harvey is left understanding that the world does not need to be science fictional, that he is the one that needs to take every second and make it the best and fill it with “love enough for a thousand Christmases” (Barker 225). Oscuridad ultimately does this, she grabs onto hope and love in order to spread them through her waking moments, only to release and to unravel all the beauty and ugliness through her writing. For Oscuridad, poetry bears witness; poetry does not judge; poetry can at times absolve the child who loses her innocence all too soon.

Barker is also one of the reasons why she creates these nature and animal realms that describe a moment of life that she cannot deal with. While her parents fight she turns to the pages of many books, but specifically comes back to Barker. Barker gave Harvey a chance to escape into a magical world from the world he was tired of and where he thought he was the most miserable boy in the world. It is a fable that teaches Oscuridad that she can create her own magical

worlds and express her emotions through them. Part of her believes that Mrs. Nafus sees this too because she pushes Oscuridad to keep reading all these books of magical creatures, or myth like stories. It is because of Mrs. Nafus that Oscuridad is able to publish her first short story during second grade called "The Friendly Snowman". This story has a magical element and small incident that reveal a lot about the world Oscuridad grows up in. She has created a snowman who becomes her friend, who spends a day with her, full of fun and then tragically ends with the snowman dying, he melts after eating a chicken soup, and has her mother show up at the end of the story only to tell her to clean up the icy remnants of her snowy friend. So, in a sense, Barker created a child who created worlds where she could tell what was going on within her childhood and her heart.

Somehow, at the age of twelve Oscuridad comes to the conclusion that her life would be a mixture of written genres that would help shape her as an adult and not until recently did she notice they had been a huge influence in her poetry. But most of all, it was her form of running away from problems, from not acknowledging the role(s) she had to take upon myself again, the cycle of escape and denial. She begins to create an indestructible being within, shelters herself with petals of sheet metal. She became like a water lily with a hard outer wall and only opening up to the damn sun when it sometimes shined its light on her. A mystery she was to the eyes of the world, at least the people in her world. All her pieces had been laid out for them to understand and puzzle together

through her choices of books and their genres. Through her parents' actions she became strong, and she had a voice that she would have heard. This is where she began to write about her world in cryptic ways in order to be able to write about her parents without them finding out she was writing about them.

Oscuridad became a cathartic poet as a child; now as an adult I attempt to channel that cathartic poet-child, Oscuridad.

Self-defining objects are what make a person, no? Look around at the space that belongs to the self and see the volumes it speaks. There is always a constant struggle to define oneself and to fit into one category, but what if the person is not just that one thing? Sandra M. Gilbert's, "My Name is Darkness The Poetry of Self-Definition," from 1977 touches on the topic of woman defining herself. At one point in the essay she states:

For as she [the poet] struggles to define herself, to reconcile male myths about her with her own sense of herself, to find some connection between the name the world has given her and the secret name she has given herself, the woman poet inevitably postulates that perhaps she has not one but two (or more) selves, making her task of self-definition bewilderingly complex. (Hall 125)

Self-definition begins at a young and small age for all too many girls. But to take on more than one role is not really typical. Yes, some little girls will play at mommy with their sisters and sometimes it will be done in light and laughter, but

what about those who actually have to play the role and actually become the mommy of their sister? Oscuridad begins to have more than two selves at a young age and these roles define her, make her who she is as a poet now. She cooks her father breakfast every morning before he goes to work. Her mother works too, but there is something off about the way she assumes the role of a working mother. Oscuridad feels like the role of the mother is still intact, but the role of wife is beginning to splinter away as their home is beginning to splinter apart. At some point she begins to take more than the role of a daughter and wife. She becomes the son her father never had.

Once her mother began to accept the idea that Oscuridad wanted to become everything and anything for everyone at home, she began to let her work on cars with her dad. Of course having three little girls stopped her father from ever teaching a boy on how to be, use tools, or about car parts. Oscuridad took on that role. Loved the mechanics of what it took to make a car run. She saw the roles of the world as a car. She fixed, substituted or replaced the parts that did not make the car/family world work creating a creature that morphed into many beings. For instance, in my poem, Child Play Real World, "Child,/ go on play mommy and see/ how easy it is to entertain other/ golden ringed pollen bees" (Inlandia Volume 5). The mixture of two roles gets played by the child, Oscuridad who does not understand these roles to its full capacity. This poem has two activities within, the game a child plays-role play; and the role the adults play and mutually define. The tone throughout the piece is also supposed to be that of an

encouraging mother and the brutal voice of the adult child who finally sees how difficult it is to play the role of the mother and wife.

2. Fear Not: Oscuridad Cannot Be All

To take on a role in society would be to self-define. Oscuridad has shown that self-definition goes beyond that of “child,” which in the Oxford English Dictionary means “A young person of either sex, usu. one below the age of puberty; a boy or girl.” This self-defining piece of her is not right. To discover and want sex at age four means she has hit puberty before she was supposed to. Or that she no longer sees the world through beautiful naïve eyes that once saw everything as peaceful and without motive. Now, she sees the world through a filter of whys and reality, there is no pretty picture or scene she does not question to its deepest depth. Yes, she is a “girl”, but girl is defined as “A female child. The counterpart of boy,” she is both female and male to her father, and plays both parts equally for her parents. Lastly, “female,” is defined as, “A person of the sex that can bear offspring; a woman or a girl,” this would mean to be able to mother and what you will discover is that a second Sunday in May does not exist for Oscuridad. This is where Gilbert’s words come to her mind, “To define her suffering would be to define her identity, and such self-definition is her goal, rather than her starting point” (Hall 119). Oscuridad does suffer and it is that pain

that will self-define who she is. It is the reason why she has started to unravel through this manuscript.

Yes, Oscuridad's goal is to make readers see this fruitlessness of a woman who has been repeatedly subjected, first to the nastiness of love; last to the nastiness of not being able to fulfill the prescribed role she was given by her sex to "bear offspring". Oscuridad as motherless, Oscuridad as fruitless, Oscuridad as singular, she tries to capture this unique role she was given as a woman in this world through many scenes. However, it is important to note that in order to understand the depth of this tragedy to its greatest painful pixel one has to see a tiny glimpse of Oscuridad's future in her poem, "Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)".

...

Spill after spill infiltrates me and tries
to puncture a hole into an invisible egg.
I laugh and utter what can I say mi vientre

is bullet proof. He tries to smile as I try
not to cry. Your window will only get
smaller. The chords are strung. Silence
see my face contort in heart contraction
que dolor. Rain drops fall around my face

as we stand by a long mirror looking at our
reflection. I want to say, stop feeding my illusions.
Your hips would take another shape. He stares
at the empty space between us as we face each other.
Does he see a blue balloon tummy, or a baby

grasping my finger in my arms as he grabs
my purse and believes it to be a diaper bag?

Each month I drink the same and light
another smoke to my lips like a birthday
cake. What if you are? What if I am? Seasons

have passed and I would like to agree with
maybe there's a better plan for you from him.

...

This poem is Oscuridad in adulthood with a lover. She and her lover have been trying to conceive for more than nine months. All the doctors can do is give her percentages, time opening and closing, of her being able to get pregnant. This was the last time her lover and her discussed the percentages the doctor had given her, at the time of this memory, of her telling him goodbye, she was given a twenty percent change of being able to get pregnant. In this poem, Oscuridad tried to capture the smallest sound of a piano and make it loud. She grabbed onto Frédéric Chopin's haunting piano indents and place her lover and her lightly dancing on those keys heading towards the last notes where she is left with no song to cure her goodbye at motherhood or having a lover that could be accepting of this flaw. This is Oscuridad giving up, where she realizes her womb "is bullet proof," lets this dream of becoming a mother disappear when she wakes; this is her trying to grab at the reality her lover has been telling her that she might be destined for something different, "a better plan for you". It is her realizing her dreams of motherhood will never happen, "Each month I drink the same and light/ another smoke to my lips like a birthday/ cake," through another intake of alcohol and cigarette to the lips. All she wants now is to find that tune

that will cure her goodbye, which means she is forever searching for something to hold on to in order for her to feel healed or feel like some part of her has been given back, but in all reality it is not possible because her womb is bulletproof and there is nothing that can kill that dream of being a mother.

So this has become my method, my poetic process: hear some Chopin, read some Oscuridad, mix them and grasp the pain in all her poetry. A lot, but not all, of her poetry comes out of these musical notes that try to somehow soothe the ache within her to a bearable notch. Listen to “The Violet Hour,” by The Civil Wars as you read “White Winter Garden”. Try to find some instrumental melody that you think will accompany the poem well and see how much deeper it strings inside the soul. At least, that is what Oscuridad and when I am fully with her, what I too believe. After she hears a melody over and over something might pour out of her hand, or hearing it just once might spark a word to spill from her lips, or even hearing instruments and hymns together might cause an outpour of many poems. They are in part the reason why Oscuridad is able to touch and feel those memories that need to be written about. She is often thankful to these tunes that she is capable of exposing her skeleton and why she can bear the thought of pushing the “send” button when she sends her poetic skeleton out to the world. Those keys or strings are what move her fingers to believe that her skeleton wants to be seen or that her story wants to be heard.

Oscuridad's idea of laying herself bare, of taking her skeleton out, comes from some of my early encounter with Audre Lorde. Audre Lorde's "Poems Are Not Luxuries", mentions, "Poetry is not only dream or vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives" (Hall 283). Poetry can be dreams or visions, but it can also be the building blocks, the blocks that hold the body upright, they become the art we Oscuridad, Orlanda, all of us need in order to hold ourselves together. Poetry for Oscuridad as a child and as an adult is cathartic. Poems outline her life. She believes they are our form of making ourselves vulnerable to the reader. Our skeleton is as naked as you can get through poetry and it is also the most vulnerable form of art that transports people into the souls of others. At first, it felt wrong to write about Oscuridad's world and share it with the world, but the poetry here has become her skeleton. It was frightening to think about passing her skeleton across to strangers who knew nothing about her, to know that people were going to criticize her and the character she represents. It is probably the same reason why the first pages of her manuscript have "White Winder Garden," it lightly and significantly touches almost every topic there is within her manuscript.

Apricot trees extend their arms
 towards my two sisters
twirling in the rain of white pink blossoms
in the backyard.
 I watch through our bedroom windows.

Roses line the fence to prickle me
 asleep from moans and wall
 crashes that come

from the hallway bathroom. I fear to cross from my room
to the front door
because they will know
I know they're kissing
behind dad's eyes—again.

Startled—early key
jingle dad crooked the flowers a violet despair
through my eleven year old eyes.
How do you stall a cyclone a few feet away?

Apa, you're home early.

...

Anger, tries to hush their moans for his daughter. [Knock knock
KNOCK] Dad is wilting before me
as he knows that I've known

...

The animals hibernate in hopes that no one has heard.

Silence, winter is coming.
Its frost arms promise to lay a sheet of wax ice
on raw petals.
Nothing will survive in this garden, except the animals.

This poem is a great example of what music, pain, and despair do to me as a poet. The enjambments are the cause of each heightened pain I feel throughout the writing of this poem, it is also a shift in scene and in the direction in which this metaphorical camera lens should be focused on a specific character. Do you see how the beautiful is marred by the ugly in this poem? Here is a home rose fenced and the prick of an object comes again. It is self inflicted, again. Oscuridad wants to be outside with her sisters where the garden they have built is blooming and causing joy within her sister's hearts. They do not see the garden like her eyes

see it, she sees it as “roses line the fence to prickle me/ asleep,” she watches from inside knowing what those trees mean; they have been grown and shaped by two men. Her father and her mother’s lover both literally take care of the garden because the lover lives in their home too, “dad is wilting before me/ as he knows that I’ve known,” is supposed to be some sort of dark pun of the whole gardening situation between these two men. These men have shaped the house with nature, something meant to give home and nurture to all different kinds of beings, that is the one thing Oscuridad loves about it, but it is also something she cannot enjoy to the fullest knowing it was not gardened by one man, but two, a deception that life or household could grow by the hands of one man. This leads to other complex poems of Oscuridad and her belief of a god that created the world on his own. All this ran through her mind as she heard her mother and her lover. She never wanted to be asleep so badly in her life until then. She wanted her eyes to be closed, to be cursed to sleep and only to be awakened by true love, which if she awoke would mean no one was playing or fooling others at being in love. The mother and the lover are not playing, “nothing will survive in this garden, except the animals,” they are the animals that have found true love at the cost of everyone else’s happiness or at a true shot of a perfect family nurtured and shaped by two parents, two adults that should have done their best for their children.

Unfortunately, as the poem goes on it does not go that way for her. Her body is immobile, again, like it was in “Diosito and Apa Don’t Know I Know,” it

does not know how to respond because no matter which way she walked someone would know that she knew what was going on behind closed doors. No matter which way the scene unfolded she knew her father would have found out she knew about the affair the whole time. What Oscuridad, the poet, makes sure she includes in this poem is what most will be shocked about; Oscuridad's father knew about the affair, but the fact that the father has discovered that the daughter has known about it as long as him breaks a whole new level of pain and deceit of the "perfect" family role that has been cycling throughout the whole house. Hopefully, some will see how the ones who are ruined by the father's discovery is nature, the daughters, the father; they are the nature that is being destroyed by the coldness of the mother's actions. The only ones who have acclimated to the coldness are the mother and the lover, the animals that survive in the end.

To lay this one skeleton bone, this poem, in front of a ravenous dog and ask it not to place it in its mouth or to cause it any pain, well that is unlikely. It is that one bone's job to make sure the hungry dog gets fed and that some form of nourishment comes out of it. So, yes, poetry is that to Oscuridad, "It is a vital necessity of [her] existence," and it definitely was never a luxury for her soul to be able to expel any words from her mind to her lips or hands (Hall 283). Lorde is the woman who made Oscuridad place her palm down on the table when they accuse poets of doing insignificant change in the world, "If what we need to dream, to move our spirits most deeply and directly toward and through promise,

is luxury, then we have given up the core—the fountain—of our power, our womanness: we have given up the future of our worlds,” if it were as easy as luxury people would not be stunned by the worlds poets present and the form in which they can express themselves to the point they can wedge some splinters within their audience’s souls (Hall 285). It is infuriating when people see poets or any career in the creative writing track as a simple task; it takes power to yield your skeleton into poetry. Not only is it not a luxury it is an art that tries to acknowledge and expand the world to some greater height.

The “greater height” in this case would be to understand the height of misfortune that Oscuridad had to leap into, without her choice. Maybe it was punishment for the sins she kept from her father, maybe it was because at four her sex ruled her actions, she did not know what she had done to be served one of the saddest roles a “female” can be given, infertile female. So, let us make this clear, she can go from child to girl about as fast as a water lily shuts itself in when it is dark, she can turn into a boy as fast a hawk can swoop a rabbit from the ground, but no matter what she cannot bloom that apricot flower that her bark was intended to grow. She cannot—let us face it—be a mother to fruit.

Hence, her greatest goal is to self-define; to recognize the woman who is doomed to be an empty vessel, an empty shell that other’s and herself expect her to grow out of or somehow have a miracle happen upon her womb, she must define that “female” who does not fit the part. Her goal is to make people

understand what woman has been created from one tragedy from another and another and another to what she has become. Constantly flowing from one tragedy, mistakes repeated or cycled. So, understand her if her poetry goes from the tragedy of a broken home to the tragedy of a broken body, which can be seen through this poem:

Fruitful

REM cycle, Nine month span
of love in four hours:
Your sculpture alters,
no longer a figurine, a vessel,
round and weeks circulating,
pictures upon pictures of months,
gifts given waiting for life,
then a river spills between your legs.
I awake with a twinge, breasts feed
pain, hands cradle tear streams endlessly,
there will be no bump or kicking thump, no
two heart beats within one, no
feeling of love growing inside by weeks.
Choice in name? Only name is mine.
No lights above, no beeping sound, no
white walls, no one to let you squeeze their hand.
No scissors to cut a thread of life.
An empty room, walls never destined for decoration.
Cradle on display. Lullaby stuck in my throat.
Riddle rattle rattles my mind, my
mind screams a cry of life.
Milk spilt into a bowl, no bottle.
Bare. Broken. I am damaged.
Does a second Sunday exist in May?
Unfruitful tree why do you exist? (Pacific Review 39)

I can no longer hold this front; this poem is my breakage; this is where Oscuridad no longer lives, but where both of us unravel. For many years I have lived with the fact that I cannot be a mother, that the only way I can experience the feeling

of carrying a child is through dream. In “Fruitful,” I had the most vivid dream of being a mother, a dream where months piled up, where I had a baby shower, and then my water broke and in the moment my water broke, I woke up only to be faced by reality. It was the most soul wrenching moment I could have ever experienced in my life. It traumatized me for weeks; I kept touching my belly feeling some ache that would not disappear. This feeling did not disappear until I wrote this poem, until we wrote this poem, about what it means to never become a mother. Oscuridad has let me use her as a shield for those of you reading. She is the reason why my life is put into these pages and metaphorically sized into a small pill you all can swallow.

3. Know I (We) Exist Because of Helene Cixous

Yes, I write about myself. Oscuridad is me or I am Oscuridad or we share the same body, except one lends to the other or one overshadows the other. I arrived to this acceptance of writing about myself after reading Helene Cixous *The Laugh of the Medusa*. It is a constant issue having to worry about what others think and how much they will roll their eyes because they know one is writing about oneself. I hate it. I hate that most of this is all about me and not enough about what everyone wants. Nevertheless, I saw it through because of Cixous and many women I encountered at public event readings who thanked me for writing about a topic that they felt close to, understood, or that they never

knew could be written about. Two women really pushed me to believe I was doing something amazing, something worth feeling. One told me how she never could have children; another told me that she cried because she realized what her daughter was going through. I realized I was not alone in feeling these emotions, I was alone in writing it. Helen Cixous is one of the few theorists who urges to “Write your self. Your body must be heard” (Cixous 8). Throughout *Oscuridad Unraveled*, I have written for my body to be heard, for, above all, its maternal pains to be heard. It may be easy to assume that the similarities between women’s bodies outweigh their differences, but I am not sure this is the case. All women do not get their period at the same time in their lives, and some women never do. My own body is unique and different, and I hope these poems show this difference in all its complexity.

Furthermore, I hope to become that one writer that Cixous identifies in her essay. She writes about women as a “we” and I want to join my voice to others:

We [who] wont advance backward anymore; we’re not going to repress something so simple as the desire for life. Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive – all these drives are our strengths, and among them is the gestation drive –just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood. We are not going to refuse, if it should happen to strike our fancy, the unsurpassed pleasures of

pregnancy which have actually been always exaggerated or conjured away – or cursed away – in the classic texts... This says a lot about the power she seems invested with at the time, because it has always been suspected, that, when pregnant, the woman not only doubles her market value, but – what’s more important – takes on intrinsic value as a woman in her own yes and undeniably, acquires body and sex. (Cixous 20)

This passage has shown me that all my drives need to find expression, and that I should not shy away recognizing and expressing them. I learned that I am no less or greater a woman than Adrienne Rich, Sandra Cisneros, Gwendolyn Brooks, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Julie Sophia Paegle, or any woman. I also greatly desire to be a mother, to fulfill my role as mother. I also want to engage; challenge, and question patriarchy. Intriguingly, some of my male colleagues have, over the duration of my graduate studies, variously questioned why I write as I do, and to what purpose. My response is: my poems matter to those who are ultimately open to and accepting of the female body and mind. I become the “she” Cixous ends with:

She doesn’t “know” what she’s giving, she doesn’t measure it; she gives, though, neither a counterfeit impression nor something she hasn’t got. She gives more, with no assurance that she’ll get back even some unexpected profit from what she puts out. She gives that there may be life, thought, transformation...At the end of a more or less conscious

computation, she finds not her sum but her differences. I am for you what you want me to be at the moment you look at me in a way you've never seen me before: at every instant. When I write, it is everything that we don't know we can be that is written out of me, without exclusions, without stipulation, and everything we will be calls us to the unflagging, intoxicating, unappeasable search for love. In one another we will never be lacking. (Cixous 22)

In the end, I will try to be all, to give all that is unique to me. The poetry that comes out of me will show the worlds that are amongst all of us, the differences there are between women, the emotions that can come out of the body when reading my own poetry. My poetry will only transmute with me, and my poetry can only transcribe the realness of what it means to be me or what I have witnessed firsthand.

Writing about Oscuridad and about Orlinda has allowed me to see that life demands to be heard. There are things in life that some will never understand if they never bother to decipher or collar memory by the neck, to torture it in a world beyond visibility or credulity. Oscuridad and Orlinda embrace the child we were, embrace the woman we have become. I want to embrace every perfect line through fractured glass and place it into words, place it into an art that exceeds anyone's expectation, whether I am "woman" or "mother." I want everyone to know that for some people the world spins at high speed through the

freedom of their sexual appetite. Know that the drives yearned within can cause chaos, but that as a human being the consequences must be embraced.

Oscuridad and Orlinda want to do that, will hopefully express it through words whether it wants to be heard by others or not. We are one being that allows the womb to consume our brain and heart. We exist because of the tension between the woman that is preprogrammed by society and the woman that embraces her flaws and the “unknown” or “other” within. This is where I get to be selfish, through poetry where I intend to let a new woman exist after each episodic breakdown or uprising.

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APPENDIX
OSCURIDAD UNRAVELED