

Polyphony and Heteroglossia in Narratives with Ulterior Motives in Rosario Ferré's *Sweet Diamond Dust*

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The polyphonic narratives¹ in which the characters of Rosario Ferré's novella *Sweet Diamond Dust*² tell the story in a prismatic manner are not merely a reflection of the fragmentation so in vogue in Latin American literature since the Boom. In this polyphonic novella, the narrator of each passage has an independent perspective and an ulterior motive for narrating specific events from a particular perspective and in an individual language. In fact, what Ferré creates is heteroglossia, a type of discourse, defined by Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Novel*, that incorporates a multiplicity of "languages" and verbal-ideological belief systems,³ each belonging to a different narrator/character. In this essay, I will identify the dramatized narrator⁴ of each of the various passages of the novella, as well as the belief system or class ideology reflected in each narration. Finally, I will propose an ulterior motive for the narrator's recounting of the events.

Before I undertake that task, however, I should clarify that I am not using the term *polyphony* with its nineteenth century literary connotations, whereby polyphonic prose is defined as that "which has the qualities and elements of verse . . . a fusion of meter, alliteration, assonance, free verse, rhyme, and recurrence of significant images" (Beckson

¹ Previously, Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat has used the term *polifonía* to describe the plurality of narrative voices in his article, "La 'loca del desván' y otros intertextos de *Maldito Amor*," *MLN* (1994): 284.

² *Sweet Diamond Dust* is the Spanish version written by Ferré of the original novella, *Maldito amor*.

³ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*,. 1981. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996) 311.

⁴ "In a sense even the most reticent narrator has been dramatized as soon as he refers to himself as 'I,' or, like Flaubert, tells us that 'we' were in the classroom. . . many novels dramatize their narrators with great fullness, making them into characters who are as vivid as those they tell us about." Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 1961. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 151.

& Ganz 193). Instead, I use it as it is used to refer to specific characteristics of musical works, as stated in *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1979):

. . . a type of many-voiced music, the fundamental characteristic of which is the equal importance of the voices constituting the texture. . . . In polyphonic music, the voices are combined in accordance with the principles of harmony, which ensure a coordinated sound. . . . [every voice] is accompanied by other voices that sound together as chords, heightening the expressiveness of the melody. Polyphony takes shape through the joining of independent, linear melodic voices that are extensively developed in a composition. (quoted in *The Free Dictionary*).

In his discussion of the polyphonic novel, Mikhail M. Bakhtin offers “orchestration” as the means for achieving it. In the glossary to *The Dialogic Novel*, the following commentary is offered under that term:

Music is the metaphor for moving from seeing (such as in ‘the novel is the encyclopedia of the life of the era’) to *hearing* (Bakhtin prefers to recast the definition, ‘the novel is the maximally complete register of all social voices of the era’). . . . Within a novel perceived as a musical score, a single ‘horizontal’ message (melody) can be harmonized vertically in a number of ways. . . . (431)

In *Sweet Diamond Dust*, the “orchestration” of the several voices narrating the various passages recounts a set number of events and circumstances (as motifs do in music), however, each narrator “plays,” as it were, a different instrument in that narration. The narratives work together, and no voice dominates the it, rather, they each contribute

different nuances to character and plot development, giving the reader to perceive the events from the variety of perspectives, as if through a prism, that inform their content.

Favoring a multiplicity of narrators, *Sweet Diamond Dust* does not privilege an overt, overall narrator, what Booth calls “The ‘*implied author*’ (the author’s ‘second self’) . . . who stands behind the scenes” (Booth 151). Instead, the narrators are the novella’s characters become, again using a Boothian term, “dramatized narrators,” that is, characters within the novella, who “are as vivid as those they tell us about” (152). Booth contends as well that “[t]he range of human types that have been dramatized as narrators is almost as great as the range of other fictional characters” (152). This is unequivocally the case in *Sweet Diamond Dust*, where the dramatized narrators run the gamut from the well-educated notary/lawyer who is writing a biography of Don Ubaldino De la Valle, the political hero of the island nation where the novella takes place, to the servile Black family retainer whose mother suckled Don Ubaldino as an orphaned infant and has served his family her entire life. The different quality of discourse in each of the narratives results in heteroglossia, which helps the reader identify each of the dramatized narrators, who are often not explicitly identified prior to the start of each narrative, and to place them within a specific social stratum as well as discern their ideological stances.

All but one of the narrators assume the first person voice and narrate only what they have themselves experienced or express their own opinions of the situations and persons involved. The one exception is Don Hermenegildo Martínez, a notary and lawyer of the elite class. Since his narrative voice is the first one a reader encounters, let us begin the discussion with his anomalous omniscient, third-person narration. The four main passages related by him are the novella’s chapters titled “Guamaní” (3-7), “The Marriage

of Doña Elvira” (8-15), “Don Julio’s Disenchantment” (26-34), and “The rescue” (52-62). The full text of each of these is enclosed within quotation marks, making it clear that they are, in fact, quoted chapters from a biography he is writing of Don Ubaldino De la Valle, the important politician and national hero of Guamaní.

The first passage is a description of an island nation that is, in fact, a fictional surrogate for Puerto Rico. Using a dense, stylistically Baroque discourse suitable for a scholarly text of the 19th Century, he describes a “candid paradise [such as] that which Le Douanier Rousseau painted in his canvases, a leafy, exuberant profusion of fruits and vegetables” (4-5) -- in sum, an earlier, lush earthly paradise of mythic proportions.⁵ The inhabitants of that former Eden are depicted as, on one hand, “[w]ell-to-do families [who] lived in elegant houses” (6) and “all belonged to the same clan” (6). They are the descendants of the Spanish founding fathers of the island. On the other hand, are the hacienda laborers whose forebears were the aboriginal Tainos (4) and the African slaves (5) brought there to make the sugar industry possible. They are depicted as superstitious (4). Not one word is said of their miserable living conditions, however.

In the final paragraph, Don Hermenegildo brings the focus of the narrative to the novelistic present, reversing the positive depiction he has made of Guamaíní:

Today, all that has changed. Far from being a paradise, Guamaní
has become a hell, a monstrous whirlpool from which the terrifying funnel

⁵ The author, herself, says in the preface to the version of her novella published in 1975, that “[t]his mythical place in the country we always dream about never existed except for a privileged few, the landed aristocracy of the nineteenth century whose praises were sung by our poets and musicians” (viii). She is echoed by Elizabeth Montes Garcés in her study, “Subjetividad e ideología en *Maldito amor* de Rosario Ferré,” saying that in Don Hermenegildo’s novel, he “intenta representar una comunidad de latifundistas azucareros y sus trabajos como la imagen del pasado ideal del Puerto Rico del siglo XIX,” *Textos Críticos* 5.10 (January 2002): 133.

of Snow White Sugar Mills spews out sugar night and day toward the north. (7)

In this passage, I propose that an ulterior motive of Don Hermenegildo's is to show the idyllic condition of Guamaní before the advent of the 19th Century of American investors, sugar planters and refiners, and their wanton destruction of a paradise for which they had no appreciation. The quality of his "language" reveals him to be a member of the educated elite who control the island and whose interests are being damaged by the ascendancy of the Americans on the island.

In the first few paragraphs of his second passage, "The Marriage of Doña Elvira," Don Hermenegildo, narrates in a less Baroque, but still elegant style, the courtship by Don Julio Font, "a well reputed Spaniard who lived by importing dry goods" (8), and who "in addition to being handsome, was a hard-working man," (10) of Doña Elvira De la Valle, a young woman of "very refined tastes" (8). Don Hermenegildo describes their courtship, again, in an idealized manner. He presents them as a romantic match, she the last heir of one of Guamaní's best families, who fell head over heels in love with Don Julio on meeting him at a *paso fino* exhibition (9). Worried that Doña Elvira is becoming pale and sickly due to her obsession with Don Julio, Doña Emilia and Doña Estefana De la Valle, her two maiden aunts who raised her from early childhood, gave their approval for a courtship and eventual marriage (9-10). After the wedding, Don Julio becomes the administrator of Diamond Dust, the family's sugar cane hacienda and mill. Ostensibly because he feels that "If you own a business you must either tend it or sell it, unless you don't mind someone else pinching your profits" (10), he moves his bride to the long-neglected hacienda in the countryside.

At this point in the narrative, as in the previous chapter, Don Hermenegildo tells of a radical change in the initial, idealized situation. Julio, it turns out, is in the marriage for his own gain, and refuses to make the needed improvements to the house that Elvira requests (10). He transgresses the ages-old conventions of fealty between land owners and peasants by taking the peasants' communal land from them to plant more sugarcane (12). The low point of the marriage arrives when an elderly worker catches his arm in the sugar mill and Elvira asks that he be given a pension, since he can no longer tend the mill. Don Julio answers her request with these words: "From today onward, in this house women may speak when chickens start to pee and I forbid you to go on meddling in other people's business" (14), then "he struck her left and right" (14). Finally, he neglects to provide medical care when, shortly after Don Ubaldino's birth, "Diamond Dust was leveled by one of the most fearful hurricanes of the century" (14-15). As a consequence of drinking the water from their polluted spring, Doña Elvira contracts an illness from which she dies without "the comforts of our Holy Church's last rites" (15), the cruelest death possible for a devout Catholic like her.

In this passage, I would posit, Don Hermenegildo's ulterior motive is to show how incongruent the match between them really was because of now-obvious class and cultural disparities. At the same time, he presents him as a foil to the good manners of the De la Valles.

In the passage titled, "Don Julio's Disenchantment," Don Hermenegildo again using "cultured language," narrates the financial troubles that befall Don Julio as a consequence of the hurricane and of the arrival of competition from sugar mills being bought and modernized by American investors. He details Don Julio's futile efforts to

acquire financial backing from his once-prosperous merchant friends or from the new American banks to avoid losing the hacienda and mill he acquired through his marriage.

The ulterior motive behind this passage, I would suggest, is to emphasize Don Julio's lust for lucre and to discredit his much vaunted business acumen and social graces by showing his inability to persuade or charm either friends or competitors to extend the loan he needs after having lost every last gold coin he hoarded during Doña Elvira's life as his wife. Further, it is to establish his unacceptability to the elite class because of his social and moral failings.

The fourth passage narrated by Don Hermenegildo is titled "The Rescue," and contains his account of how the now-adult Don Ubaldino rescued Diamond Dust from being sold to the Americans by his half-brothers. To get to that point, he first of tells how, young Ubaldino, son of Don Julio Font, became a De la Valle: A few years after Doña Elvira's death, Doña Elvira's two maiden aunts traveled to the hacienda to ask that young Ubaldino be allowed to live in town with them, so he can go to school. Don Julio quickly acquiesced without a hint of paternal love for the boy:

"After all, he's a healthy, blue-blooded De la Valle. I think it's only natural that he should be brought up by you, since you're willing to foot the bill," he said with a malicious twinkle in his eye. "You may groom him and spruce him up all you like, but don't bring him back to me afterward, because the silk-stockinged arts of music, drawing, and dancing, in which Elvira excelled so much have never been any good around here." (55)

The only thing he gives his son upon his departure is a silver coffer filled with his mother's jewelry, saying "I've saved Elvira's jewels for you all these years It's the only legacy she left in your name" (56). Having thus been declared a De la Valle by his father, the boy assumes his mother's family's patronymic. Don Hermenegildo further tells that, after Elvira's death, Don Julio established an illegitimate family with Rosa, his cook, and upon his death, disinherited Don Ubaldino of his mother's remaining holdings, bequeathing them, instead, to his illegitimate sons. As young Ubaldino had left the hacienda years before, he had shed a tear and sworn: "You may not expect me to, but one day I'll be back!" (57). That day came when, after Julio's death, Don Ubaldino's half brothers offered to sell Diamond Dust to the president of Snow White Mills for one tenth its worth. As Don Ubaldino's lawyer, Don Hermenegildo advised against Don Ubaldino's decision to go to the bank, taking with him the five Diamond Dust shares he owns and all of his mother's jewels. Don Hermenegildo's concern is that if Don Ubaldino, who was running for the Senate as a liberal Union Party candidate, were to sell his shares to the bankers, who backed the Republican candidate, the people, who were fed up with the bankers' foreclosing on the haciendas, would turn against him. In fact, Don Ubaldino had no intention of selling. On the contrary, his plan was to buy Diamond Dust right from under the Snow White Mill president's nose. He did precisely that, ironically observing: "It seems to be almost poetic justice: Diamonds must come to diamonds and Dust to dust" (62). Then he proceeded to educate the bankers on the law known as "the Right of Recall" (62). This law, he explained, provides that ". . . when the heirs of a business contract a sale without the knowledge or consent of a minority shareholder, such a shareholder has the right to acquire the whole property for the same

price previously agreed on. . . . In other words, my half brothers have no choice but to sell me Diamond Dust for the same thirty thousand dollars you had settled upon” (62). News of the forced sale appeared in Don Hermenegildo’s newspaper column in *The Nation*, and as a result, “a few months later Don Ubaldino is elected Union Party senator” (62).

In my opinion, the ulterior motives behind this passage include the justification of the adoption by young Ubaldino of his mother’s patronymic, and rejection of Font, his birth name. The father’s lack of paternal feeling, when he rejected him, underscores the ever-clearer inferiority of Don Julio. Don Ubaldino’s adoption of the De la Valle name is essential to establishing for society that he is a member of one of the elite families of Guamaní. Another ulterior motive is to make patent both the political and business acumen of the adult Don Ubaldino, thus justifying the people’s support of his political endeavors.

There are also segments narrated in Don Hermenegildo’s voice that precede or follow other character’s narrations, in which he reflects on what they have stated to him. However, he does not introduce the narrations as an implied author would. It is in one of these passages that he admits his primary reason, or ulterior motive, for writing Don Ubaldino’s biography, of which the preceding four passages are chapters, as follows:

Every country that aspires to become a nation needs its heroes, its eminent civic and moral leaders, and if it doesn’t have them, it’s our duty to invent them. Fortunately this is not the case with Ubaldino, who was truly a paragon of chivalrous virtue. (24-25)

The other narrative voices in *Sweet Diamond Dust* belong to (1) Doña Laura De la Valle, wife/widow of Don Ubaldino, (2) Arístides De la Valle, their second-born son, (3) Gloria Camprubí, former lover and wife/widow of their deceased first-born son Nicolás, and nurse to both Don Ubaldino and Doña Laura, and (4) Titina, “the De la Valles’ everlasting maid” (24). The polyphonic nature of the novella allows each of these voices to contradict, correct, or put into question the narratives presented, in turn, by each of the other voices. This presents multiple perspectives and clarifies the different interests that drive each of the narratives.

The second voice to be heard in the novella is that of Titina, a Black woman whose mother served as the infant Ubaldino’s wet-nurse after the death of Doña Elvira and, who has served him and his family for over thirty years. Her speech is filled with markers of her status as a Black person who is this family’s servant. She refers to her employer as “Niño Ubaldino” even though he has already aged and died. Another such marker is the use of popular sayings, such as “you educated gentry are geese of a feather, and will always flock together” (11), or “we’re not going to let the fox run away with the chickens” (11) when talking about losing a house promised to her. Titina’s narrative is a monologue directed to Don Hermenegildo, whose legal office she visits when she discovers that Arístides plans not to honor the promise made to her and to her husband Néstor by Don Ubaldino on his deathbed that “the balconied house at the back of the garden,” (17) in which they had lived since they started working for him thirty years prior (16), would be theirs after Doña Laura passed. He promised it because, as Titina states, “on his deathbed he confided her to our care. . . . knowing we’d never leave Doña Laura because we’d given our word to a dead man, and it’s not right to betray the dead” (18).

In her narrative, she also discloses that “Arístides and his sisters are spreading the rumor that Gloria is loose with men, . . . when what they’re really after is the money that’s coming to her” (21). On the contrary, she says, Gloria “hasn’t married again and stays home thinking of her poor dead husband, for whom she’s never taken off her mourning weeds, and still cries herself to sleep every night” (21). She also characterizes the late Nicolás as “so kind and rich and good-looking” (21) and casts doubt on the cause of the airplane accident that took his life: “If it really was an accident, Don Hermenegildo, because some of us have our doubts, and suspect that Nicolás was purposefully butchered and thrown to the winds, that someone had planned it all from the beginning” (22). Besides advocating on her own behalf, she states that she has come to speak to Don Hermenegildo

. . . to make certain that justice is done for Gloria and little Nicolás. They’re the ones who should really benefit from Doña Laura’s inheritance, because they’re the ones who need it most and because it’s God’s will it should be so. When Nicolás died she stayed here, taking care of Doña Laura day and night, instead of taking off to make her way in the world as a nurse. . . . (20)

The ulterior motives behind this narrative are, of course, to attempt, by highlighting their worthiness of the bequest, to get the help of the family lawyer in seeing that Don Ubaldino’s promise of the small house is kept in Laura’s will and by her executor, Arístides. Another is to champion an inheritance for Gloria and Nicolasito.

The voice of Arístides’s narrative confirms Titina’s worst fears. The passage narrated by him is, like Titina’s, a monologue directed to Don Hermenegildo, as they sit

awaiting Doña Laura's death. His narration is marked, if not tainted, with bitterness and a sense of entitlement, as well as by markers of a racist and homophobic member of a patriarchal social system. As he talks to Don Hermenegildo, he confesses that: "What Titina told in your office is true" (35). He states that his mother has gone against her late husband's wishes in her will. She intends to leave everything to Gloria and her son with Nicolás. Arístides plans to disinherit them, as well as Titina and Nestor, by selling all the family's land and the sugar mill to the Americans. He feels he should do this because his mother is contradicting his father's wishes as expressed in will, in which he was named as the sole heir, since his father "never forgave my sisters for marrying strangers, his business rivals to boot" (48). The reader can give credence to his immoral intentions because he confesses to having done equally reprehensible things to others in the past:

As an example of one of the most heartless measures I've had to carry out in recent years, I ordered many of our cane laborers, who I suspected were illegitimate sons of our father, to be fired unceremoniously. They were easy to recognize because they all looked vaguely like him, except duskier in skin and sullen in countenance, because of their hawk-bridged noses, raging bull's necks, and barrel chests. In this way I freed the company of a number of unnecessary expenses, as Father had always insisted on clandestinely taking care of their families. (43)

His narrative also offers his sexist and racist characterization of Gloria, who is a mulatto as, "one of those mulatto beauties who are used to stopping traffic" (41) who betrayed him, her lover, when she married his older brother (46) -- whom he qualifies as a homosexual (45-46) -- only because Nicolás could not deny his mother, who wished

Gloria to stay as her nurse through her last illness. He also claims that, at night, she has been prostituting herself in the bars ever since she became a widow (49). However, his most negative opinion of her is based merely on the fact that she is a mulatto. This prejudice causes him and his sisters to refuse to go to his mother's bedside as she is dying merely because Gloria "is in there with her, and it wouldn't be seemly if we were to share Mother's death with her" (36).

In a somewhat contradictory accusation, given his characterization of his brother Nicolás as homosexual, he claims that one morning at breakfast, Nicolás had announced Gloria's pregnancy to him saying, "Congratulations! We must have all done a good job, because Gloria is pregnant!" (48), later adding: "Forget it, brother, . . . You can't touch her again. Father thinks the baby's his and now she'll be off bounds for both of us" (48). He then denigrates her even further by calling his soon-to-be-born nephew a monster, saying that "Gloria was carrying: his father's child and his mother's grandchild, his brother's child and his brother's brother, his son, his brother, and his nephew all in one" (49). He also suggests that perhaps "the field workers of Diamond Dust took justice into their own hands and sabotaged his [Nicolás's] airplane" (49) in anger over his alleged homosexual predation.

Not even his parents escape a negative opinion from him. He describes his father as "a sordid, contemptible man wrecked by illness and disillusionment" (50), despite the fact that he was a man admired by all of Guamaní. His mother he describes as a scheming woman when he quotes her explanation of why it was best that Nicolás marry Gloria:

"A legal wife would be a costly acquisition and you wouldn't be able to save your precious money any longer. This way Nicolás will keep her safe

for you, and the whole family will profit by her services.” And calmly laying down her pen next to the inkwell, she proceeded to explain all the details of her plan: Nicolás had agreed not to touch Gloria; the arrangement would last only as long as father lived, while she needed the help of a nurse, and once he had passed away the marriage would be annulled. (47)

The only relative of whom he, surprisingly, expresses a good opinion is Don Julio Font, his paternal grandfather:

. . . in his youth Don Julio De la Valle,⁶ our grandfather had once been captain of the small cruiser *Ponce de Leon*, when he had recently arrived from Lérida to discharge his military duties on the island. The *Ponce* was the only Spanish bathtub to stand firm before the *Terror* and the *Yosemite*, both armed to the teeth with four inch cannons, during the bombardment of El Morro Castle by the Marines in 1898. (39)

I identify at least four ulterior motives behind Arístides narrative. The first is to denigrate his brother as a “fag” (46), “a pitiable pansy” (46), and a “degenerate fop” (56), who,

beneath the air of deliverer and liberator, . . . was really a closet queen, a poor degenerate fool who skewered and twisted and danced before their [the laborers’] eyes at the first opportunity he had of being alone with them; who doled and measured out the land and the houses he had promised on the basis of who would and who wouldn’t, who could be man enough to trade in his dignity for a piece of bread or a brick. (45)

⁶ Note the erroneous patronimic being used.

Such a characterization in terms of one of the most negative archetypes in the minds of Latin-America's macho men is due to his rancor as the jilted lover. It is expressed in language marked by his homophobic value system.

The second ulterior motive is to justify his rancor toward his brother by stating his conviction that his parents loved Nicolás and lavished money on his European education, while, as the second-born, he was never loved by them. Although they insisted that he study agronomy at the national university, a decision shaped by their wish that he eventually run the sugar mill, they named his older brother president of Diamond Dust. This narrative is marked with Arístides' dissatisfaction with one facet of the ideology of the patriarchal society—which he otherwise supports: the privileging of the first born male child.

The third ulterior motive, in my view, grows out of his bitterness over having lost Gloria, not only to his brother, but to his father as well. He is seeking to justify, both to Don Hermenegildo and himself, his intention to disinherit Gloria and her child. Related to this scenario is the resentment he has harbored against “that scheming, ambitious hussy” (35) whom he will not allow to inherit what Doña Laura deemed as her earned and deserved bequest.

I propose that the final ulterior motive, the one behind his positive opinion of his paternal grandfather -- to whom he refers using the wrong, but more prestigious surname -- is to attempt to diminish or erase the negative opinion the elite families have had of him since Doña Elvira's death.

The next dramatized narrator the reader encounters is Doña Laura, wife of Don Ubaldino. Her narrative is one side of her deathbed conversation with Don

Hermenegildo. It is well seasoned with a resentment that leads her to confide things usually never shared between unrelated members of the opposite sex. She reveals that, before marrying Don Ubaldino, she had reached an agreement with him to separate their worldly goods (71), making it possible for her to invest “as a private investor, all the money from the sale of [her] father’s coffee plantation into Diamond Dust” (71). Later, she shares that when Don Ubaldino was elected senator and could not tend to the hacienda, she asserted herself as an able manager. Her self-actualization also made it possible for her to deny her husband access to her bed when he contracted syphilis (72). She then divulges that, as the disease progressed, it was Gloria’s presence that shielded her from contracting syphilis herself, since her husband established sexual relations with his nurse instead of insisting that Doña Laura perform her marital obligation. She also alleges that her self-confidence also made it possible for her to convince Don Ubaldino, as he lay dying, to reflect in his will her wishes that the hacienda be bequeathed to Gloria and Nicolasito.

Secondly, and key to understanding the aggrieved tone in much of her narrative, she reveals to Don Hermenegildo Don Julio Font’s real provenance. After finding out that Gloria had grown up not far from where he lived, she recalls, she had

. . . asked her if it was true that, as family lore would have it, . . . Don Julio was a dangerously handsome man, with skin white as milk and cruel golden eyes speckled with green . . . which had so turned poor Doña Elvira’s head when she fell head over heels in love with him. (73)

As she recollects, Gloria answered that she had not met him but that, “they did say he was very good looking. . . . However, from what I’ve heard, he didn’t look at all like

what you say. He was probably like his sons, dark-skinned, tall, and brawny” (73). Doña Laura remembers how dumbstruck she was: “So that had been the secret, the unmentionable mystery that had made the aunts send their niece to live in the country when she married Don Julio . . . Doña Elvira had married a black man!” (74).

Lastly, she informs Don Hermenegildo that, unlike the rest of the family, she has always been pro-United States. She claims to have expressed herself in favor of all the improvements the Americans have brought to the island, such as infrastructure, schools, health care, and the new technology related to the production and refinery of sugar. Dolores Flores Silva, in her article on Ferré’s fiction, has noted that, “Doña Laura observa que a su hijo Arístides y a sus hijas no les importa conservar lo que pertenece a la isla y desean pasarla al enemigo” (58). This contention might well be applied to Doña Laura as well as to Don Ubaldino, of whom Titina observes: “Niño Ubaldino was always an honorable man; he’d have let his right hand be cut off before he’d sell a single acre of land to the northerners” (22).

The ulterior motives behind Doña Laura’s narrative are triple. The first one, I propose, is her outrage and resentment before the family’s hypocrisy in regard to race and lineage. She is bent on revealing the depth of their duplicity and racist insistence on the family’s purity of blood, when, in fact, Don Julio, her husband’s father, had been a Black man. In light of this, she bears a grudge against Don Ubaldino’s aunts, who had not fully accepted her when he decided to marry her, because, in their opinion, “my last name wasn’t patrician enough for a De la Valle” (86). Her father, she informs Don Hermenegildo, “Don Bon Bon Latoni, . . . was a Corsican émigré whose father had made a small fortune in the coffee mountains of Utuando during the last half of the nineteenth

century” (86). She thus establishes her own lineage as worthy; it might not have been linked to the elite caste of the island, but she did come from honest wealth, and she had been an able and intelligent manager of it.

The second ulterior motive in her narration, I would suggest, are her political convictions. The political ulterior motive is her admiration of the Americans and a wish for more of the people from Guamaní to enjoy the benefits of the American society. She is convinced that, were Arístides to inherit, as her husband had wished, he would sell at once to the Americans, whereas she trusts Gloria to follow her instructions to:

sell our land progressively, piece by piece, to aid those who have already begun to emigrate to the mainland by the thousands, fleeing from the hell of the sugar plantation, to lend the honest effort of their arms and legs to other harvests more generously repaid. (76)

The final ulterior motive behind her version of the story, in my opinion, is to acknowledge her affection for the woman who has nursed both her and her husband in their final illnesses. In connection with this, she also wishes Don Hermenegildo to understand her unorthodox wish to disinherit her remaining son (her daughters had already been disinherited by their father’s will) in favor of Gloria. She reveals that she considers her more than a mere employee; she sees her as a confidante, friend, ally, and a shield against her husband’s disease, syphilis. This portion of the narrative does not exhibit the aggrieved and resentful tone of other parts of her narration. Instead, we glimpse uncharacteristic warmth in her rapport with her nurse and daughter-in-law Gloria and her grandson Nicolasito that we do not detect in her relationship with either her

husband or her children. This suggests that she senses that all the De la Valles consider her as much an inferior outsider as they do Gloria.

The final dramatized narrator is Gloria. Her narrative is found in a monologue directed to Titina. Her language is not that of the Black servant, but it is not the always-restrained discourse of Doña Laura's, either. She has risen to her current status by her own boot straps, and it shows in her speech which is sprinkled with street talk slung without care at Titina: "How stupid of you to believe in them" (81), "You fool" (81), "you really shouldn't have gone to fetch Don Hermenegildo, . . . you idiot" (85). As her passage opens, the reader hears her chastise the De la Valle's life-long servant for her faithfulness to the family, for trusting that Don Ubaldino would bequeath the small house to her and Néstor, as well as for having gone to the lawyer's office with her request for help with her promised inheritance, and for trusting that he would bother to assist her. She also ridicules the lawyer's biography of Don Ubaldino, calling it a novel that twists "around the story he heard from the lips of the protagonists of this tasteless melodrama" (82). She also characterizes it as "a series of stories that contradicted one another like a row of falling dominoes" (82). Her portrayal of Don Ubaldino is that of an unfaithful husband who hurt Doña Laura deeply with his womanizing (83), and of a corrupt politician who voted for the issues that benefited him, regardless of their benefit or harm to the populace:

He soon realized how difficult it was to juggle from left to right, and that he couldn't keep up the way of life his senatorial appointment had made possible, the European cruises, the *paso fino* horses, the mistresses and the Rolls-Royces without giving his support to corrupt politicians. . . . (83)

She also accuses both Don Ubaldino and Arístides of being responsible for Nicolás' death in the airplane crash: "Both his father and his brother hated him, so that what the right hand would hesitate to do the left did willingly, taking care to turn the other way" (85).

In the course of her monologue, Gloria also indicates that she has already set fire to the cane fields (82-83)) and is in the process of setting fire to the house itself (85). The reader knows from Don Hermenegildo's transitional comments before the beginning of Gloria's narrative that she has already torn up Doña Laura's will which she took from under the pillow, once she shut the dead woman's eyes. Another astonishing revelation in her narrative, given the other narrators' depiction of Nicolás as a homosexual, is contained in the following advice she gives to Titina:

. . . you mustn't cry any more for Doña Elvira, for Nicolás or for Doña Laura. From now on you must sing my favorite song, that tacky, sentimental *danza* by Morel Campos that Nicolás and I used to sing as we made love long ago in those same cellars which you and I are lighting up now. (82)

I would argue that one ulterior motive behind Gloria's narrative is her conviction that, no matter what anybody's will stated, the De La Valle children would never honor any bequests made to "outsiders." Another motive is to attempt to silence the lies that are about to be published in Don Hermenegildo's "biography" of Don Ubaldino:

. . . in a way I'm not sorry he came, and I'm glad you invited him to do so, because now Don Hermenegildo will never be able to finish his novel. He's probably still sitting next to the dead woman, staring into the dark and

inventing new lies, new ways of twisting around the story he heard from the slips of the protagonists of this tasteless melodrama. (82)

To conclude, the five narrative voices of Rosario Ferré's novella, *Sweet Diamond Dust*, reflect the gamut of class and ideological differences prevalent in the De la Valle family and the island of Guamaní, from the Black servant to the intellectual biographer and all the variations between them. Each speaks the truth as he or she sees it in language that conforms to their verbal-ideological belief systems, but they coincide on very little in regard to the actual events or the character and personality of the actors. The disparities in class and privilege and their individual ideologies inform the differences in the way they understand their reality. As a consequence, each reader of the novella must make an individual decision about what the truth is in the various matters brought up by the dramatized narrators. Was Don Julio Font really a Black man and not a Spanish merchant? Was Nicolás a homosexual as his brother accuses or was he an ardent heterosexual lover as posited by Gloria? Was Arístides a homophobe and a racist? What exactly were Gloria's character and morality? How did Nicolás die? Is there one, nuanced prismatic truth, one that incorporates all the versions offered by the polyphonic narrative? It is, as I see it, inevitable that each reader will heed one narration above others in the polyphonic and heteroglossal narrative message, perhaps attending more closely to the narrator whose class or ideological system more nearly conforms to his or her own.

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