TOMORROW IS FOREVER: EXAMINING NARRATIVE
STRUCTURE AND CULTURAL ARCHETYPES IN
THREE MEXICAN TELENVELAS

by

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ABSTRACT

Telenovelas are a staple of Mexican popular culture and their narratives communicate discursive, ideological meanings stemming from the history and myths of that culture. The current study provides an in-depth textual analysis of three Mexican telenovelas currently airing on the US Spanish-language network, Univision: Las Tontas No Van al Cielo, Cuidado con el Ángel, and Mañana Es Para Siempre. One week’s worth of episodes, from Wednesday to Wednesday, February 25-March 4, 2009, was analyzed. The purpose of this textual analysis is to examine how narrative is constructed and what culturally specific elements are expressed and promoted through the narrative elements, character archetypes, theme songs, and imagery of these telenovelas and their opening credits. This study offers an understanding of the historical roots of the archetypes seen in these telenovela as well as a framework for understanding their narrative structure. A structuralist approach is used to facilitate analyzing both the narrative structure and character archetypes.

Ultimately, a framework was created to explain how specific narrative functions are used on a daily basis to forestall the main couple’s happiness until the very last episode. Examining the functions in telenovelas reveals how, in many ways, the storylines are variations of similar plots with similar character archetypes. This thesis also contributes to the small body of literature that exists in examining and understanding how historical figures and gender roles are presented and promoted within telenovelas. Telenovelas’ elaborate title sequences are also analyzed to see how they express narrative elements and specific cultural meanings in compressed form. Finally,
the distinctive manner in which title sequences promote the stars associated with the telenovelas is considered.
DEDICATION

Dedico esta tesis con todo cariño a mis padres, Juan Manuel De Anda y María Guadalupe Ramírez de De Anda, quienes a pesar de la distancia siempre me han hecho sentir lo importante que soy para ellos.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The telenovela is undeniably the most popular television genre in Mexico, airing in the mornings, the afternoons, and prime-time evening hours. And US Spanish-language networks such as Univision and Telemundo center their daily programming on these serials since they bring in the network’s strongest ratings. Whether they are produced in Mexico or the US, telenovelas are a cultural staple for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans—transcending socio-economic classes and gender. Mexican telenovelas may share some commonalities with US soap operas, such as their origins in melodrama, but the global allure of these successful and popular telenovelas has not diminished while ratings for soap operas are precipitously declining. Some scholars might also dismiss the telenovela as low-brow entertainment, unworthy of study, but the cultural significance of the telenovela cannot be denied. Its enormous popularity demands that scholars come to an understanding of its narrative structure, and what culturally specific meaning they represent. This thesis aims to understand what culturally specific elements are expressed and promoted through the narrative elements, archetypes, theme songs, and imagery of the telenovelas. I will closely analyze three telenovelas that are currently on the Spanish-language, US-based network, Univision: Las tontas no van al cielo (“Dumb women don’t go to heaven,” 2008), Cuidado con el ángel (“Be careful with the angel,” 2008-2009), and Mañana es para siempre (“Tomorrow is forever,” 2008-2009). This analysis will be accomplished by first explaining how narrative is built and how character archetypes are used to further or hinder the narrative of the storylines. Then, I will explore the cultural myths that are specific to the Mexican
culture and demonstrate how they are embedded in the narratives of these Mexican telenovelas. The final part of the thesis will consist of explicating how the producers condense the narrative elements and cultural myths in the title sequences, and how they use star power to promote their telenovelas.

Mexican telenovelas represent culturally specific elements. These texts communicate discursive, ideological meanings stemming from the history and myths of the Mexican culture. However, this genre is a relatively new area of research. While scholars have analyzed some of the dialogue and themes presented in the telenovela genre, more in-depth research relating to how its narrative is structured and how myths of the culture are used in the text still needs to be explored. Consider one scene from the Mexican telenovela Mañana es para siempre. Liliana Elizalde (Dominika Paleta) reveals to her nanny, Soledad (Maria Rojo), that Bábara (Lucero) is the one who murdered her mother. Soledad, determined to expose Bábara to her boss, Gonzalo Elizalde (Rogelio Guerra), encounters Bábara on the way out the door. Soledad reveals she knows the whole truth and will let her boss know “the class of animal” Bábara really is. Bábara, unperturbed by her accusations, informs Soledad that she has made sure all the evidence leads back to Liliana. As Soledad tries to hit Bábara, Bábara grabs her arms and malevolently says, “Now you know what I am capable of.” Bábara sarcastically responds, “Don’t ask stupid questions if you already know the answer.” Many of the telenovela’s conventions are evident in this scene: deceit, betrayal, the conflict between an exaggeratedly evil woman and a supremely virtuous one. Such scenes occur frequently in the genre. This is why we must ask questions such as, “How do scenes such as this fit into the telenovela narrative structure, and what culturally specific meanings do they represent?”
In addition to the lack of in-depth narrative examination by scholars, no research as of yet has focused on analyzing telenovela title sequences. In US television, the title sequence is an endangered species that frequently runs just ten seconds and does little more than identify the title of the show and its producers. In contrast, telenovela title sequences are lavish productions of 90 seconds or more, presented day after day at the program’s start. Title sequences are both used as a promotional tool to grab viewers’ attention through their theme songs and telenovela stars, and they illustrate the themes and narrative storylines in a condensed format.

A semiotic/structuralist approach will be the main theoretical method used to examine the syntagmatic (sequential and/or narrative) structure and to uncover what myths are presented in this genre and how they are used within the episodes. More specifically, I will be relying on two of the pioneers in structuralist approach—Claude Lévi-Strauss and Vladimir Propp—as well as research done by film and television scholars Will Wright, Jeremy Butler, and John Fiske.

Before using the structuralist approach to explain how narrative is built, the literature review in Chapter Two will survey works in genre theory, the soap opera and telenovela, narrative structure, title-sequence analysis, and cultural identity and gender. These various topics will set the foundation for the chapters that follow. Chapter Three will first explain how a telenovela’s narrative is broken down into segments, accommodating commercial breaks. Then, using a structuralist approach to analyze the syntagmatic structure, I will uncover character types, themes, and narrative elements common to all three telenovelas. When using a structuralist approach, the researcher does not just focus on the syntagmatic structure. The paradigmatic relationships (arrayed in binary oppositions) in a text are also examined. Thus, Chapter Four will consist of taking parts of the text out of the linear storylines of the previous chapter in order to examine the character types that are placed in binary oppositions in these telenovelas. The last
analytical chapter will look at how title sequences are used as promotional tools and, more importantly, how they establish the syntagmatic structure and the paradigmatic sets that were explored in Chapters Three and Four.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand how cultural myths are presented in the telenovela, I will survey works in genre theory, the soap opera and telenovela, narrative structure, title-sequence analysis, and cultural identity and gender. I will begin by presenting a brief overview of how genre is defined, and the importance of studying television genre. Subsequently, literature on the similarities and differences between the soap opera and telenovela genres will be presented. The next section will consist of describing the different methods I have used for analyzing narrative, specifically structuralism and semiotics. The section that follows examines research done on television title sequences. Since there is lack of research related to specifically analyzing telenovela title sequences, the literature presented relates to analyzing US television title sequences. The last section will offer a review of literature discussing cultural identity and gender since this thesis looks at the representation of culture in popular Mexican media. That being said, most of the existing literature on telenovelas looks at various Latin American countries. Thus, as a result of the lack of research focusing on Mexican cultural myths in telenovelas, research done in Mexican cinema, as it relates to the Mexican culture, will be included. These various topics further situate the importance of the research topic. All of this scholarly work will help uncover the ideological discourses embedded in the narrative and title sequences in Mexican telenovelas as they relate to cultural identity and gender.
Genre Theory

Genre theory consists of the idea that television shows or films can be placed into categories of related works (Butler, *Television* 430; Feuer 138; Neal 1). However, there is great debate about how to define genre. For example, researchers Jim Kitses, Edward Buscombe, and Richard Collins all take different approaches when defining the Western genre. Whether it’s Kitses defining Western genre through history, themes, archetypes, and icons (25), or Buscombe defining it according to mise-en-scene (36), or Collins defining it according to key situations occurring over and over again (158), when it comes to defining a Western genre, or any genre, researchers have used different methods.

Similarly, Jane Feuer distinguishes between two main approaches used when describing genre: one based on theory and the other based on the history of television. Defining genre, based on theory, consists of drawing from principles from a preexisting theory or a particular critical method. In contrast, defining genre based on history consists of a cultural consensus between the TV industry and television viewers (Feuer 140). Jeremy Butler explains that within the theoretical and historical approaches there exist three categories that help define a particular genre: audience response, style, and subject matter (*Television* 432). Audience response consists of presumptions of how audiences will react. Style analyzes the techniques of sound and image that are used. Subject matter consists of looking at the narrative and theme. However, these three categories (audience response, style and subject matter) are not mutually exclusive when defining genre. The soap opera genre, for example can be defined by style and subject matter (Butler, “Notes on Soap Opera” 53-54). Common themes in this genre as well as the melodrama genre from which soap operas originated revolve around domestic love, in which the woman suffers and sacrifices for their loved ones, and those of romantic love, in which the protagonist
has to decide between two suitors (Haskell 163). The style of the soap opera genre can be defined by the use of multiple cameras, constant close-ups and three point lighting.

While Butler defines television genre according to audience response, style, and narrative, Feuer defines it by the aesthetic, the ritual and the ideological approach, and also states that more than one approach can be used to define a genre (145). The aesthetic approach includes trying to define narrative according to the specific narrative conventions that they follow and also includes the visual style, set design, and editing. The aesthetic approach also examines whether a TV show not only uses particular conventions, but also whether it breaks some of those conventions and transcends its genre (Feuer 145). According to Feuer, the most common approach used is the ritual view, which sees television as a cultural form that involves the “negotiation or shared beliefs and values and helps to maintain and rejuvenate the social order as well as assisting it in adapting to change” (145). By using this approach, one can see how TV in some respects affirms social values in their shows. Butler also mentions this by stating that some researchers argue that “genre based television shows operate as modern-day rituals that reinforce certain values and social beliefs” (Television 431). The last approach, which Feuer explains is sometimes combined with the ritual approach, is the ideological approach. The ideological approach examines how shows are ideological in so far as they reproduce the dominant ideology of the capitalist system, suggesting to viewers that they should believe certain values and beliefs and reinforces them (Feuer 145).

In addition, Butler mentions that since the formulas or conventions of genre are produced by both the viewers of television and the creators of the shows, they can be said to share common codes or language and therefore share the same values as well. Because of this, genre is an important tool for analyzing a society’s values and beliefs (Butler, Television 431).
Therefore, studying the telenovela genre through its themes, narratives, and audio/visual style can help determine aspects of Mexican society’s current values and beliefs system. As Feuer states, “genre criticism is cultural criticism” (143). She further asserts that

The audience—without conscious awareness—continually rehearses basic cultural contradictions that cannot be solved within the existing socioeconomic system outside the text: law and order versus the idea of individual success (the gangster genre); nature versus culture (the Western genre); the work ethic versus the pleasure principal (the musical) (143).

In the same vein, telenovelas have contradictory ideas or binary oppositions that are constantly reinforced in the text that becomes difficult to solve outside the world of the telenovela

**The Soap Opera and Telenovela Genres**

In order to understand why Latin American telenovelas are considered to be closely related to the US soap opera genre, it is important to look at their common roots. Robert C. Allen’s book, *To Be Continued…Soap Operas around the World* contains essays from several scholars who analyze soap operas from different countries. The introduction, provided by Allen, explains what all of them have in common. As Allen states, “whether they are called soap operas, soaps, telenovelas, *teleromans*, or as my mother calls them simply ‘my stories,’ television serials constitute one the most popular and resilient forms of storytelling ever devised” (1). This book is fundamental in helping to explain the utility of analyzing soap operas on a global scale. Allen asserts that “no other form of television fiction has attracted more viewers in more countries more regularly over a longer period of time than has the serial” (3). Telenovelas and soap operas are considered to be a staple of the culture and history of their respective countries. In fact, even though both soap opera and telenovelas are currently shown on television and the internet, their popularity dates back to the radio serials in the 1930s (Jesus Martinez-Barbero 278). However, while ratings for US soap operas are currently declining and some
long-running soap operas such as *Guiding Light* are being canceled (Starr 1), ratings for Latin American telenovelas are currently increasing (Juarez 1).

Besides sharing a common origin US soap operas and Latin American telenovelas have other similar characteristics. Whether they end in a couple of months (as in Latin American telenovelas) or are still around a half century (as in US soap operas), what soap operas from Latin America and the US have in common is their serial narrative structure (Allen 1). A serial narrative structure is different from a series narrative structure. The audience does not need to make narrative connections between one episode and the next when watching a series since the links between each week’s episodes are usually vague and each episode’s plot is self contained. The narrative problem of a particular episode is answered by the end of the episode. An example of a series is the TV show *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992) or *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968). However, in a serial, like the TV show *Lost* (2004- ), each episode ends with a narrative enigma that remains unanswered until the next episode or sometimes even seasons later. As John Ellis explains, the traditional TV series is based on a “narrative problematic,” a fundamental question that may be repeated each week. Individual episodes resolve a single incarnation of that problematic, but in such a way that it may again be presented the following week. For example, Cliff Huxtable, on *The Cosby Show*, solves a family crisis each week, but the underlying problematic (“Will the family be disrupted?”) is never totally resolved and thus can be repeated ad infinitum. As Ellis notes, the serial contrasts with series, because it offers no resolution at the end of the episode (154). In the case of a telenovela, its on-going narrative problematic will not be answered until the conclusion of the serial. Instead of answering the narrative problematic, such as “Will the main couple finally be together?,” there are minor narrative dilemmas that arise and are sometimes answered within the episode (Ellis 154-157). The audience is also expected to
make narrative connections between episodes (Butler, *Television* 40) and even between seasons or, in some cases, decades.

Regardless of the production, text, and reception of the text of soap operas from around the world, Allen believes that people from any culture recognize all of them as soap operas because of their distinctive serial narrative structure (17). However, even if both telenovelas and soap operas have a serial narrative structure, their overt similarities end there. While Allen spends more time looking at the common roots between soap operas and telenovelas, Denise D. Bielby and C. Lee Harrington explain the differences between them. In their article, “Opening America? The Telenovela-ization of U.S. Soap Operas,” the authors explain that it is not easy to place all kinds of soap operas into the same genre. The authors further contend that, “While Americans are most familiar with seriality in the forms of daytime soap operas, there is such a diversity of serial forms worldwide that the genre itself is increasingly difficult to define” (384). Therefore, while Allen defines the soap opera genre by its narrative structure, Bielby and Harrington believe that this definition is not enough since they are presented so differently in every country.

Although the genre can be difficult to define, the researchers do suggest ways in which these serials can be categorized. Bielby and Harrington propose dividing soap operas into two different categories based on the presence or absence of narrative closure. Soap operas that do not have narrative closure are typically produced in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia, while soap operas that do have a definite narrative closure may be found in Latin America, India, Japan, China and South Africa (384-385), and Spanish-language channels broadcast in the US.
Furthermore, Emile G. McAnany and Antonio C. La Pastina describe other differences between a telenovela and an American soap opera. McAnany and La Pastina state that telenovelas are shown during prime time instead of daytime, which means that that telenovelas appeal to a larger, more general audience and not just a female audience (831). In addition, telenovelas are currently just as popular on Latin American channels in the US as they are in their native country of origin (Juarez 1).

Even though several scholars have pointed out the differences between US soap operas and Latin American telenovelas, there has not been a more in-depth look at the narrative structure of both. Researchers tend to provide just a basic outline of the differences between both. A more in-depth look into the differences of the text would be beneficial for understanding the cultural values, beliefs and ideologies of both cultures, and is essential to further develop current research.

The research done by Bielby and Harrington explains how US soap operas are starting to experiment with the genre. Producers of US soap operas are trying to adopt aspects of the narrative structure of the Latin American telenovelas in order to attract more viewers because ratings for US soap operas have recently started to decline, while Latin telenovelas continue to generate high ratings in Latin American countries and Latin American channels in the U.S. Because the Latin American population is growing in the US, the producers of US soaps are trying to attract this key market demographic by adapting its product to the telenovelas that they are used to seeing (Bielby and Harrington 385-386). However, the producers of Port Charles attempt to shift toward shorter story arcs, similar to what is commonly seen in telenovelas, failed since after this article was published the show ultimately was cancelled.
While the producers of US soaps are trying to implement aspects of the Latin American telenovela, producers of Latin American telenovelas are also trying to apply aspects of US soap operas. Marietta Morrissey’s research looks at how the Mexican telenovela Tres Mujeres (1999) is similar to US soap operas. Morrissey explores how this particular telenovela tried to free itself from the usual themes of a Mexican telenovela that deal with Catholic Manichean morality and close family relationships. The incorporation of socially relevant themes such as “male and female sexuality, women’s health issues, women’s economic status” (Morrissey 223) shows that the producers are trying to bring about a change in telenovela productions, and are trying to reflect more contemporary social issues, and at first attempted to show more sexually liberal women. Yet, Morrissey explains that as the narrative progressed, “women’s sexual liberation, the apparent hallmark of this telenovela, is portrayed as dangerous. Women’s promiscuity is particularly perilous” (227). The majority of the good and evil female characters suffer similar tragic fates because of their sexual encounters outside of marriage (Morrisey 227). Even though this telenovela attempts to get away from the typical traditional, moral story, by the end of this telenovela, it stays true to these generic conventions including that of the sexual double standard. Women are expected to control their sexuality while men are forgiven for their sexual transgressions (Morrisey 221). Ultimately, they are unable to incorporate aspects of US soap operas. Instead, they stay true to their traditional moralistic messages and fail to completely break from the types of telenovelas that are typically produced in Mexico.

**Narrative structure**

When analyzing the narrative of any genre, including that of telenovelas, sometimes researchers have to rely on methods that originated in other disciplines (Butler, Television 434). One important method that should be considered is mythic analysis. According to Will Wright,
“A myth is a communication from a society to its members: the social concepts and attitudes determined by the history and institutions of a society are communicated to its members through its myths” (16). And myth making is a universal cultural process. In order to understand the deeper meanings behind the myths, a structuralist theoretical approach is needed (Fisk 131). In television studies, the mythic analysis method is used by researchers who “see genres as twentieth century myths, as stories shared by large segments of a culture, which offer the researcher evidence of that society’s process” (Butler, Television 434). This idea of myth comes from French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss who posits that myths function unconsciously in people’s minds (12). Lévi-Strauss uses structural anthropology to demonstrate, in his book The Raw and The Cooked, how indigenous tribes such as the Bororo Indians of central Brazil used binary oppositions in the stories told by their societies. Furthermore, the concept of the raw versus the cooked is used to describe the dichotomy of nature vs. culture, good vs. evil, humankind vs. gods that he sees in the myths of the tribes he observed. Lévi-Strauss believes that these myths are unresolvable contradictions in the culture, but the culture finds ways to live with them. For example, even though myths cannot solve certain opposing values such as male vs. female, the structural approach can help in analyzing how the culture deals with these contradictions (Fiske 133). Therefore, the idea of binary oppositions is an important concept in the structuralism method. These myths are abstract. An example, provided by John Fiske, is in the Western genre. The abstract concepts of culture and nature can be transformed into something more concrete like indoor vs. outdoor or have values associated with them such as law and order vs. lawlessness or white vs. Indian (Fiske 132).

Another aspect of structuralism is the study of the narrative structure of the text. Vladimir Propp analyzes the narrative structure of fairy tales in his book Morphology of the Folk Tale.
Characters perform actions. These actions are called functions and fairytales have a limited number of functions. After analyzing numerous Russian fairytales, he notices that their plots are also based on the repetition of functions and in the end, all fairy tales have identical functions or limited plot elements (Propp, “Structure and History” 62). Some argue that the characters from different fairy tales executed the actions in very different ways. But Propp states that “composition is the constant factor; plot is the variable factor” (“Structure and History” 72). In other words, the ways in which the tasks are performed varies, but their assignment is always the same (Propp, “Structure and History” 69). Therefore, these standard functions do not have to be performed by the same kind of character in every story, but his ultimate point is that the narrative structure or skeleton of the story is still the same no matter who performs the function or why these characters were in the fairy tale. In the end, these functions seem to occur in a standard, constant, fixed way in all the fairytales, thereby reducing them all to a very simple and specific narrative structure. Therefore, the fairy tale genre, according to Propp, consists of one basic narrative structure, which has identical sequences of limited functions that that are performed by different characters.

Peter Wollen also discusses the influence that structuralism has had on analyzing films in his chapter “The Auteur Theory.” However, he focuses on analyzing films by the same director. Using structuralism to analyze films by the same directors is called auteur-structuralism. While Propp analyzes different Russian fairytales, Wollen focuses only on films by the same auteur. He calls the recurring elements seen in films, motifs. Wollen’s approach is different from Propp’s since Wollen believes that media should be analyzed not only to see their universality but also their singularity by seeing how one text is different from another (138-139); otherwise, it becomes a formalist approach instead of a structuralist approach. In other words, when taking the
A structuralist approach one should not just rely on finding redundancies or similarities within the text, but should also try and find oppositions or antimonies. He gives examples from a collection of films by two American directors: Howard Hawks and John Ford. Binary oppositions are seen more clearly in Howard Hawks’ films by comparing his adventure dramas vs. the screwball comedies. The characters, themes and motifs in his adventures and westerns are inverted in his comedies and musicals. The strong male characters from the dramas are contrasted with the weaker male characters from the comedies whose life is disrupted by a woman (Wollen 139).

However, other films may be more complicated. In John Ford films, for example, some binary oppositions may overlap and different binary oppositions may be more prominent than others in different films. In addition, at times some binary oppositions may be discarded completely, but Ford’s master antimony or main binary opposition is that of the wilderness vs. the garden (Wollen 140-143). Wollen uses Ford’s films to explain that sometimes the antimonies are not as simple as nature vs. culture or good vs. evil. Rather, “the antimonies invade the personality of the protagonist himself” (141). The struggle in antimonies does not have to be between outside forces, but instead can be within the individual. Wollen believes that a structuralist method is a valid tool for finding out whether the director is a true auteur, by analyzing whether the films are complex and shifting antimonies rather than constant and fixed (143).

In his book, Sixguns & Society: A Structural Study of the Western, Will Wright uses both Lévi-Strauss’ and Propp’s methods to analyze Western film genre because he believes that in order to truly understand the social meaning of myth one must look at both its binary oppositions and its narrative structure, which consists of how events progress and how they are resolved (24). Much like Propp uses functions to describe the narrative structure of the fairy tale, Wright reduces the Western film into a list of shared functions and find a set of functions for
each of the four different kinds of Western films. He describes the functions in one sentence
statements that either describes “a single action or a single attribute of the character” (25). This is
where Wright differs from Propp. Propp mainly focuses on actions of the characters, while
Wright focuses on this in addition to the attributes of the characters (25). For example, the
functions are not pertinent to a particular heroic character in a Western film, but rather to the role
of the hero in these Western films. He goes on to state that the function does not have to refer to
a particular individual character. A function can also refer to a group of characters in the film
(Wright 25). One other difference between Propp’s and Wright’s work is that Wright believes
that the functions in a narrative do not have to follow a rigid, fixed order. Instead, there may be
stories that are essentially the same with a slightly different order of events and sometimes the
same function is repeated various times in the same film (Wright 25-26). Lastly, according to
Wright, the oppositions will reveal “what the characters mean; the function reveals what they
do” (26).

In the same vein, film scholar Butler also uses Lévi-Strauss’ structuralist method to
analyze three films—The Iceman, Greystroke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes, and
Splash—that came out within five weeks of one another. They all deal with similar binary
oppositions that are seen in the Western genre: wilderness vs. civilization and nature vs. culture.
However, in this “genre” the antimonies, or binary oppositions, are inverted. He analyzes these
three films using Wright’s method of analyzing the Western genre by using a set of functions
that are seen throughout the three films. Like Wright and Kitses, Butler discusses each function
without making them into a fixed structure (“The Raw” 5). Each function does not have to occur
in all three films and they all might not follow the same order in sequence of events. However,
the overall structure that was found is symmetrical. In all three films, the savage enters
civilization, attempts to adapt to the new culture, but ultimately ends up returning back to the wilderness (Butler, “The Raw” 7-8). Therefore, the antimonous pair is resolved in the end once the savage decides to choose the wilderness over civilization (Butler, “The Raw” 13), which is vastly different from the majority of Western films in which culture and civilization end up conquering the wilderness. The idea of the antimonies being resolved in the end is an important concept that is seen throughout Propp’s, Wright’s, and more recently Butler’s research.

While Wollen, Wright and Butler use the structuralist approach to analyze films, John Fiske dedicates a chapter in his book, *Television Culture*, to explain how the structuralist approach can be applied to television. Most researchers use the structuralist approach to demonstrate how characters present either side of a binary opposition Fiske, on the other hand, shows through the example of the *Miami Vice* characters Crocket and Tubbs how characters can also have both sets of values and, thus, act as mediators of both oppositions:

Their embodiment of the values and lifestyles of both demonstrates an imaginative way of coping with the conflict, which is a crucial mythic function, for the conflict itself can never be truly resolved. The “success” of the vice squad at the end of each episode is only temporary and in no way offers a permanent resolution of the conflict. It is only the hero figures of Crockett and Tubbs who demonstrate that society has ways of living with and coping with the opposition, even if not of resolving it (133).

This idea of the conflict never being truly resolved is more apparent in a television show than in film since a television series cannot have a complete resolution or narrative closure; otherwise, the audience would not tune in from week to week. Because of this, the ending of any particular episode must make the audience question whether the conflicts were in fact finally resolved. These narrative conflicts are necessary for the series to continue (Butler, *Television* 39). Therefore, television narrative lends itself to Propp’s idea of a repetitive straightforward structure. However, as Fisk points out, because TV shows lack narrative closure “they must be
able to build into it contradictions that weaken its closure, and fragmentations that deny its unity” (148).

Fiske also provides a detailed list of all of Propp’s 32 functions and divides them into six sections. He then uses examples from TV shows to explain how these functions work to advance the narrative. What they do to further the narrative is thus more vital than what the functions actually are (Fiske 136). Moreover, when describing the characters in the fairytales, Propp is also more concerned with what they do to further the narrative instead of who the characters are. The character is ultimately defined by “the sphere of action.” Propp comes up with eight character roles that have seven different spheres of action. These ideas have been applied to films, but now Fiske applies the functions and spheres of actions to television shows, such as an episode of the Bionic Woman, and realizes that the types of characters and their narrative structure are almost as precise as Propp has described it in fairytales. Furthermore, Fiske states that in television shows when you see heroes or villains, what they are representing are the ideas of good vs. evil that are seen in any society and “such a struggle is fundamental to all societies, and the narrative explores the role of the human and social agents in it” (Fiske 138).

While some researchers have mainly focused on a structuralist approach, researchers like Ellen Seiter have combined semiotics and structuralism to analyze their case studies (Seiter 32). To be clear, semiotics is a field of study; while structuralism is a method of analysis often used in semiotics. The term semiotics, coined by American philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce, refers to the study of signs. More specifically, the most important assumption of semiotics is that words, images, symbols, sounds, and so on (Seiter 31) can be studied to analyze how these objects or sounds end up communicating meanings to a culture (Butler, Television 436-437). In other words, how these signs create meaning for a culture is more important than what the signs
literarily mean. Moreover, when it comes to analyzing media, the researcher is more concerned
with analyzing the television program itself, than what the producers of a program intended or
what the audience member received from the show. Thus, semiotics is text oriented (Butler,
Television 438) and can help uncover how TV produces meaning in its host culture by
repeatedly using the same conventional signs in its television programs.

In Peirce’s use of semiotics, signs are divided into two components: the signifier and the
signified. The signifier is the physical aspect of the sign; while the signified is what the object
represents (Butler, Television 438). Television studies terminology today originates from
semiotics and structuralism (Seiter 31). There are three main types of signs: the indexical, iconic,
and symbolic sign. When looking at iconic signs, “the signifier resembles the signified.”
Indexical signifiers are “physically caused by the signified.” And lastly, “the signifiers of the
symbolic signs are exclusively linked through cultural conventions by the shared knowledge of a
specific society” (Butler 438-440). Moreover, Seiter explains that television regularly uses all
three kinds of signs at the same time (35).

Another important assumption about semiotics that Seiter points out is that “each
language marks off its own sets of meaningful differences: we can imagine an infinite number of
possibilities for signifiers and signified, but each language makes only some differences
important and detectable” (33). Verbal language is arbitrary, but signs—the signifier and the
signified—are linked solely through repetitive and collective use by the shared knowledge of a
specific society (Seiter 34). Signification is attained mainly through combining and contrasting
several signs within a system of signification (Butler, Television 441; Seiter 51). Similar to
structuralism, binary oppositions are a key concept to the study of signs in the field of semiotics
since signs are compared and contrasted in order to have significant meaning.
Signs can be combined in two ways: syntagmatic and paradigmatic. Syntagmatic structure deals with signs that are organized in a linear or chronological fashion. For example, in terms of editing a television show, this would mean editing the order in which the shots appear. The order of a sequence of shots in a television show can alter the meaning of the scene. And the paradigmatic structure “consists of the associations we make with a particular signifier that gives meaning to that signified” (Butler, Television 444). In other words, the audience derives meaning through associations when watching a TV show or film. For example, in the gangster genre, the gangsters wear fedora hats and heavy coats over their pinstriped suits. The suit has more pronounced shoulders, is narrower at the waist, and has wider trouser bottoms. Hence, the signifier: the fedora hat and atypical business suit signifies a gangster. The meaning comes from the paradigmatic association the audience makes with other clothes that could have been chosen for the characters instead of atypical business clothes. The audience associates this outfit with a gangster versus substituting those clothes with a navy blue police uniform. The meaning changes from crime to order.

Moreover, paradigmatic sets can be established in a shows opening sequences and ending credits. Seiter explains how other researchers have applied a structuralist method to analyzing the title sequences of TV shows and then goes on to apply the binary opposition, or paradigmatic sets, of nature vs. culture to another cartoon series—Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. While she finds the utility in a structuralist approach when analyzing a cartoon, she emphasizes that it would be more pertinent to analyze a cartoon with a genre criticism lens while using the structuralist method as the primary tool. Understanding the history of a genre is crucial to understanding the significance of the binary oppositions (60).
Analyzing Title Sequences

Title sequences are microcosms of the narrative elements of TV shows. They serve to communicate a certain meaning about the show and pique viewer interest. Ultimately, the purpose of the title sequence is to set up important characters, locations, storylines and production credits, but in a fragmentary manner. More importantly, the syntagmatic sequence establishes the themes or overall meaning of the show via the signs and connotations displayed throughout the shots (Grispsrud 191).

Jostein Grispsrud analyzes the audio/visual aspect of the title sequence of the TV show Dynasty. He examines the syntagmatic and paradigmatic features of the 86-second title sequence and deciphers the main themes of this TV show from them. His research also reveals that the overall structure and basic elements of the title sequence stayed the same even though the cast of the show changed throughout the shows’ nine seasons. The Dynasty title sequence is divided into three sections. The first shot always establishes the location. The first shot is then followed by a few seconds of shots that introduce each of the characters. Those shots are not stills; instead, they are shots that are taken directly from certain episodes of the show. The last part of the title sequence re-establishes the spatial location of the TV show. Furthermore, these shots do not have dialogue from the show or ambient sound, and the musical theme does not contain lyrics (Grisprud 189). An interesting aspect of these title sequences is that they are not presented in order of narrative importance nor are they separated into categories such as good or evil, since Joan Collins is always the last actress to be shown in the title sequence and is a villain on the show (Grisprud 190). Lastly, he discusses the importance of the music in a TV show. The purpose of the music over the title sequence is to help the viewer make sense of the montage of
images. The images are edited to fit the music, which makes it easier for the viewer to follow the fast-paced editing of the shots. It also helps establish the mood of the TV show (Grisprud 196).

Television scholar Jason Jacobs explains that the music of a TV show helps signal to the viewer that their favorite show is about to start besides establishing the tone of the show. In his analysis of ER, he discusses how the sounds heard throughout its title sequence signal a lot of the themes of the show. The fast paced style of the edits of the first season of ER with the sounds of medical machines helps establish the dire life and death situations that happen in an emergency room and sets up the characters (Jacobs 440) instead of making the actors the focal point, which has been done with other shows such as Dynasty. However, as the seasons passed the shots were rearranged so that the actors names appears next to images of their characters, which changes the pacing of the edits and consequently makes the show more about the actors than about the themes of the show. Furthermore, Jacobs explains that in order to be able to judge the value of a title sequence, it must first be compared to other title sequences of the same genre (441-442). Thus, he spends the last part of the article analyzing other medical dramas, comparing and contrasting their audio/visual style with that of ER.

Until recently, the opening credits of TV shows performed a simple task—to introduce the cast and creators of the show. However, Ann Klein reveals in her article “The Horse Doesn’t Get a Credit” that more recent TV shows like House, Desperate Housewives, and Deadwood reveal more connotative than denotative meanings through their sequences of disconnected and at times abstract images (Klein 93-94). What sets a show like Deadwood apart is that it more clearly reveals the themes of the show instead of making the actors the center of attention, as in shows such as Dynasty. Images of the characters are never revealed. Instead, faceless people and iconographic images of wagons and horses exemplify multifaceted meanings of life in the Old
West. More importantly, she explains how the title sequence reveals a binary opposition that is repeatedly seen in numerous Western films: civilization vs. savagery (95). Hence, she takes a structuralist approach to demonstrate how cultural meanings are illustrated in the title sequence of a show.

Even though a show like Deadwood tends to complicate and constantly question the binary opposition of civilization vs. savagery that is seen in the Western genre, Klein’s research reveals how the title sequence clearly illustrates this antimony. The shots are chosen in a somewhat chronological sequence going from individuals traveling in the frontier all the way to the indoor shots of the town of Deadwood. Moreover, the syntagmatic order of the shots reveals the paradigmatic sets of a TV show. The prospectors and prostitutes seen in this title sequence signify civilization as these images are juxtaposed with images of a wild horse galloping through open frontier. However, if the title sequence were not continuously interrupted by images of an untamed horse, the images of the prospectors and prostitutes could also signify an undomesticated aspect of the West (Klein 97). The conflict of wilderness vs. civilization is resolved in the last shot of the title sequence since it shows the horse stop in front of the town of Deadwood and then it disappears, signifying the end of the frontier (Klein 98). Thus, the order of the shots plays a very significant role for establishing antimonies. In addition, the meaning behind the antimonies changes depending on the combinations that are chosen. This research demonstrates how producers can generate title sequences that clearly illustrate binary oppositions that are well-known to a specific genre and then reverse those antimonies and deconstruct them through the narrative of the show (Klein 100).
While most researchers either analyze a particular text or the reception of a particular text, few researchers examine all areas that encompass a telenovela such as the production, text, and influence of the text on people’s lives. Carolina Acosta-Alzuru uses Paul du Gay’s circuit of culture which consists of 5 areas: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. This theory suggests that by looking at all five areas one can see how meaning is created in a cultural text. All the areas are connected to one another, which results in a unifying impact on the whole circuit and thus the cultural text. Change in one area will affect all the other areas (Acosta-Alzuru, “I’m Not” 274). Acosta-Alzuru’s article explains that there is a lack of comprehensive studies that approaches all of these aspects of a telenovela. In her article, “I’m not a Feminist. I Only Defend Women as Human Being,” she uses the circuit of culture to analyze how feminism and feminists are represented in the Venezuelan telenovela, El Pais de las Mujeres by looking at how these words are given meaning by the producers, writers, and actors of the telenovela and then, in turn, how these meanings affect the audience’s lives (Acosta-Alzuru, “I’m Not” 270).

The circuit of culture research method has also been used to analyze the “the production, mise en scene, and consumption of the representation of sexual harassment, domestic abuse, abortion and homosexuality” that are seen in the telenovela El Pais de las Mujeres (Acosta-Alzuru, “Tackling the Issues” 193). This study shows how meanings are produced and negotiated through a cultural production that deals with difficult social issues. Findings, using the circuit of culture method have reinforced the idea that cultural meaning exists in every area of the circuit of culture. As stated before, elements of the circuit of culture do not exist independently. Rather, they all influence one another. Telenovelas like El Pais de las Mujeres are
trying to create more public debate with its difficult, almost taboo topics. However, some telenovelas like to play it safe because the commercial demands of making a telenovela successful will always go before the author’s creativity and before the audiences’ needs. Telenovelas in Venezuela are always regulated in order to maintain their cultural expectations. For example, homosexuality is rejected and women are expected to be quiet and docile both in Venezuelan society and in Venezuelan telenovelas, but the high ratings of El País de las Mujeres indicates that some form of social critique can be a part of a successful telenovela as long as there is still some form of “crime and punishment” present in the narrative (Acosta-Alzuru, “Tackling the Issues” 212).

Even though this study is based on telenovelas produced in Venezuela, it provides an essential step in creating a more clear and in-depth analysis of how media, culture and society are interrelated. Current research does not use the circuit of culture to analyze Mexican telenovelas and their meaning for both Mexicans living in Mexico and Mexican Americans living in the United States.

In addition to using a new research method for analyzing telenovelas, Acosta-Alzuru’s results from using the circuit of culture on a telenovela provides vital information on the representation of gender in a telenovela. In her article, “I’m Not a Feminist. I Only Defend Women As Human Beings,” Acosta-Alzuru uses the circuit of culture to analyze “how meanings, associated with the words feminism and feminist are produced, negotiated and legitimized” (“I’m Not” 270). Her conclusions are that “the production, representation, and consumption of feminism in El País del las Mujeres, are fraught with ambiguities and contradictions that are interexically linked to the meanings associated with gender roles that circulate in the Venezuelan social formation” (“I’m Not,” 286). Her research explores the reasons
why producers of this telenovela, which proposes to depict real social issues plaguing women in order to try and help them overcome these real-life obstacles, end up distancing themselves from the negative connotations associated with feminism for fear of losing their viewers. Feminist ideas are therefore presented but are not acknowledged as such in this telenovela. The commercial demands of the telenovela seem to overpower the message of empowerment that the author is trying to create in his “feminist” telenovela by negating in the text any association with the term feminism or feminist (“I’m Not”285).

In order to understand the representation of Mexican culture in popular media it is useful to examine the work of scholars focusing on Mexican cinema and other popular culture texts. What they all have in common is their examination of the dichotomous nature of women, as either “virgins” or “whores” in Mexican film—especially in films from the 1940s (Hershfield 4). This is because there are contradictory discourses of gender that women had to deal with after the roles of women had changed after the Mexican Revolution (Hershfield 8).

Joanne Hershfield dedicates a chapter to explaining the origin of the myths of La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe (“The Virgin of Guadalupe”) and spends the rest of her book providing examples of the theme of nationalism and gender construction and the history of their representation in films from the classical era of Mexican cinema (1940-1950). Sergio de la Mora, on the other hand, spends a chapter entitled “Midnight Virgin: Melodramas of Prostitution in Literature in Film,” which explains the social and cultural history of prostitution in Mexico by discussing the connections between “discourses and representations of women’s sexuality, sex work, and motherhood to national identity” (26). More importantly, he as well as other film scholars such as Charles Ramírez Berg reveal the two main narratives that are repeatedly seen in Mexican models of womanhood: La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe (de la Mora 28,
Ramírez-Berg 56). Both of these models that are of Mexican national origin are shaped by significant Biblical figures: Eve, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene. In addition to having been shaped by the ideology of Catholicism, which plays a crucial part in Mexican national identity, these models are also influenced by the history of the Spanish colonization of the Americas (de la Mora 27).

La Malinche is considered the sexual and alluring woman—the Mexican Eve. She is the symbolic mother of the mestizo culture. La Malinche was an Aztec princess who was sold to conquistador Cortéz to help him conquer Mexico by being his Indian translator and mistress, and is hence considered an evil woman for betraying and causing the psychological and political fall of the nation and destroying its racial purity (De la Mora 28, Ramírez Berg 56, Hershfield 18). Even though she was sold to Cortéz, the legend states that she gave herself willingly to him. In European Christianity, Eve is considered to be the first mother and the person responsible for the downfall of man. Similarly, La Malinche is considered to be Mexico’s first mother and betrayer of Mexico (Hershfield 20). Therefore, she plays a specific part in Mexico’s patriarchal society. As Ramírez-Berg points out, La Malinche is “the symbol of Mexicanidad betrayed” (57). Even though La Malinche had been forced into this role, the years since that occurred were not very favorable for her. Ramírez Berg further explains that most of the discourses revolving around La Malinche were produced by males and can be “one-sided, unfair, and self aggrandizing” (57). By placing her in this role, she becomes the sole person responsible for the destruction of the indigenous tribes instead of the European Cortez and the Aztec leader Montezuma (Hershfield 20).

Octavio Paz further explains in his book, el Laberinto de Soledad, that La Malinche has another name: La Chingada (“violated mother”) and so the Mexican people are hijos de la
Chingada ("sons of the violated mother"). In Mexican culture, even when a woman gives herself to a man, she is still torn open by a man. Therefore, she is violated and is the Chingada ("violated") and thus her offspring are hijos de la Chingada (Paz 80). Because of this, people shout, "Viva Mexico, hijos de la Chingada." Paz believes that Mexicans shout this statement in order to denounce their origins and refute their hybrid nationality. By doing this, Mexicans try to deny this past and these origins and thus live lives of solitude (86-87).

La Virgin de Guadalupe on the other hand, is the most important iconic symbol that unifies the Mexican nation and was made Mexico’s patron saint by Pope Pius XII in 1945. Hershfield, as well as other scholars believe that analyzing the history of the cult of La Virgen de Guadalupe, can reveal the “evolution of Mexican attitudes toward the female sex” (21). As Ramírez Berg explains, on top of having the madonna/whore dichotomy that is known in the American culture, there is a

distinctive, culture-specific twist because of the role of the crucial feminine figures in Mexico’s historical past. Thus it is not enough for Mexican society to call on the Mexican to be a virgin, untouched and modest, chaste and innocent; she must also be the Virgin, the embodiment of virtue, purity, and piety as exemplified by the nation’s spiritual patroness, the Virgin of Guadalupe (56).

Hence, La Virgen de Guadalupe exemplifies the ideal woman for a Mexican man, a virginal woman who is self-sacrificing and pious.

La Virgen de Guadalupe appeared to poor Indian Juan Diego ten years after the Spanish conquest and destruction of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán and thus became the contrasting symbol to La Malinche. The apparition took place on a hill that used to contain a sanctuary for Tontazin, the goddess of fertility (Paz 84). La Virgen de Guadalupe purified what La Malinche had tainted and provides Mexicans with a maternal heritage as well as providing an equilibrium that was previously offset by La Malinche. As the years went by, the myth of La Virgin de
Guadalupe provided the mestizos and the poor Spanish and Indian groups with a place in society and the hereafter (Ramírez Berg 57). Moreover, La Virgen de Guadalupe became the universal mother who shielded the weak and helped the oppressed. She is also considered the mother of orphans since human beings are “born disinherited and their true condition is orphanhood” (Paz 85).

De La Mora goes on to describe literary texts and films in which the dichotomy of La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe are combined by having characters which are not “bad women,” but instead are victims of a merciless society. This is especially seen in the films that came out in the 1930s and 1940s. According to de La Mora, “The ‘mother’ of modern Mexican industrial film was a whore” (46) because the first sound film in Mexico was Santa, which is based on a novel about a woman who was forced into a life of prostitution. They are presented as self-sacrificing women whose lives end tragically (de La Mora 63-64). De la Mora goes one step further and explains why the women from these films die tragically. A woman cannot be both a virgin and a whore at the same time. In these films, the characters were women, mothers and prostitutes all in one. Through his examples he demonstrates how the prostitute can also be considered one of the major Mexican motifs, and shows how the prostitute in literature and films can have an alternative take on the traditional distinction between mother and whore in Mexican culture. Moreover, Ramírez Berg states that out of the duality of La Malinche and La Virgin de Guadalupe, comes a third archetypal role for women: the Mexican mother (58). This role stems from Aztec mythology. Coatilicue is considered the first god of Aztec mythology and she was impregnated by balls of feathers that fell from space. She gave birth to the sun god Huitzilopochtli. Hence, the myth of La Virgin de Guadalupe “neatly synthesizes the Christian myth of the virgin birth with the Aztec myth of Coatlicue” (Ramírez Berg 58).
Furthermore, *La Malinche* eventually converted to Catholicism and the Spaniards renamed her Doña Marina. By then her betrayal was not only physical and political but also spiritual. She is the model of motherhood because she physically gives birth but is spiritually betraying, and *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is also the mother but is nurturing and self-sacrificing. Because of this, Ramírez Berg concludes:

Thus the origin of that bundle of contradictions: the long-suffering Mexican mother, who gives life by succumbing to the will of the father, who provides lifelong nourishment, out of love like *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, and like *La Malinche* perhaps, out of a need to expiate her guilt for betraying her roots and for allowing herself to be physically violated and spiritually debased (58).

In the rest of Ramírez Berg’s chapters on woman’s images in Mexican cinema, he goes on to explain that the four different kinds of women roles that are seen in countless Mexican films: virgin (pure, innocent women), or Virgin (saintly, self-sacrificing women), mother or whore. For example, films based on the *La Virgen de Guadalupe* were seen during the silent era. While in later decades women were presented as virgins or women who were pure and good. And in some films female characters were good and self-sacrificing, almost saintly, which meant they ended up representing both kinds of roles—virgin and Virgin. In the later Mexican films of the 1970s, one more role was added, that of *La Llorona*. There are different versions of the *La Llorona* myth. Ultimately, it is the story of a beautiful woman who murders her children either to be with the man she has fallen in love with or because her lover is unfaithful to her. She ends up feeling guilty and commits suicide. People say her spirit still wanders around in the night and people can hear her weeping while she searches for her dead children. This woman, driven by madness, is considered to be the most threatening to men since she destroys the family structure of the Mexican patriarchal society (Ramírez Berg 78). “Madwomen” who reject the traditional familial
role or are unable to understand their role in a male dominated society are seen in several Mexican films that came out in the 1970s.

Jack Glascock and Thomas E. Ruggiero also examine the representation of gender by looking at the content of primetime Spanish language programming available in the US. Other researchers have argued that more attention is placed on ratings, then on the impact that the role of characterizations can have on viewers. Their results indicate that depicting traditional gender roles in telenovelas could influence or even reinforce existing behaviors and attitudes of young female Latin viewers (Glascock and Ruggiero 399).

Another approach, used by Julie Tate, when analyzing gender roles examines the “dichotomy between the representation of the good woman/maternal mother and the bad/non-maternal mother in three different Latin American soap operas from three different countries” (97). This research has shown how these archetypes are present not only in Mexican telenovelas but in other Latin American countries as well. Tate explores how telenovelas base the characterizations of good and bad women on how the Latin American audience believes that these characters should behave. Cultural beliefs about marianismo in Latin American countries are part of the reason why these dichotomies exist (Tate 97). Marianismo, as the name implies, is based on the idea that women pattern themselves after La Virgen de Guadalupe, and should reject secular roles that might place them in the category of the bad woman (Tate 98). Tate believes that “from an early age women are taught to view themselves and other women through the lens of marianismo. As a result, women experience social pressure to conform to their assigned roles as wives and mothers” (Tate 98). She provides ample evidence in explaining how the characters in each telenovela exemplify both the maternal/self-sacrificing kind of woman (a good character) or the ambitious and sexual non-maternal woman (a villainous character). The
maternal woman/heroine of the story always lives happily ever after by the end of the telenovela; while the non-maternal/villain ends up miserable by the end of the telenovela.

Vivian Barrera and Denise D. Bielby explore how Latinos in the US identify telenovelas as cultural products and their reasons for watching them. They also ask how viewing telenovelas contributes to the construction and reproduction of Latin cultures through mass media, and how telenovelas serve as a means of resisting the surrounding dominant American culture. After interviewing 13 women who have seen telenovelas, Barrera and Bielby’s results indicate that cultural elements such as religion, scenery and language in telenovelas helped the Latina women feel more connected to their Latin American roots. They also point out that viewing telenovelas was an active, not passive experience since they engaged with the text and interpreted the cultural elements in order to feel closer to their heritage. In addition, watching telenovelas also help Latin Americans stay fluent in Spanish. Others watch them because of the representation of families in the telenovelas sparked conversations within their own families. Overall, watching the telenovelas in the US helps Latin Americans recreate or maintain a strong cultural bond to their Latin American roots and helped them find depictions of their culture in the novelas, which legitimized their cultural heritage (Barrera and Bielby 13-14).

Media scholar Vicki Mayer explains how Mexican Americans identify with telenovelas. Her research examines how a small sample of young Mexican American girls from a working class background living in San Antonio, Texas perceive and talk about telenovelas on a daily basis by looking at how “telenovelas mediate national and social identities” (479). Her results show that when watching the telenovela Maria Isabel, which is about an Indian woman who is stuck between two cultures (that of her native Indian culture and Mexican culture), the young girls reflect on their own lives since they are stuck between two cultures—the American and
Mexican culture. Therefore, through watching the telenovela Maria Isabel, they consider some of the national, ethnic, gender and class tensions that exist in their own lives (492-493).

Barrera and Bielby’s research, as well as Mayer’s research, only examine one aspect of what role television serves for its audience. They do not explore what Latinos get from watching US soap operas in the United States. Diane Rios explores both aspects by focusing on the cultural-based experiences that Latinos have when watching both American soap operas and Latin telenovelas. Rios proposes that watching these television serials helps Latinos with cultural maintenance and cultural assimilation (60). Rios’s results indicate that some Latinos watch telenovelas to feel a sense of comfort from watching something that comes from their native homeland or is presented in their native tongue, and some watched the US soap operas in order to be familiar with the American way of life and how American people act. However, some people did not fit neatly into either or both categories (Rios 64).

Maria de la Luz Casas Pérez has taken a different approach to analyzing cultural identity. Her research explores how telenovelas can help construct cultural identity and also provides examples of how reality and fiction can become blurred at times. Casas Pérez argues that some people believe that their lives resemble those of the TV shows. She asserts that telenovelas are changing and so are the people who watch them. Therefore, the way in which people deal with the values and beliefs that are generated by these shows have changed as well. She explains further by saying, “individual, cultural, and national identities are being transformed by new patterns of consumption and production of media content” (408). These findings were extrapolated from a content analysis of one week’s worth of episodes of two telenovelas (one from Televisa and one from TV Azteca) in 2001 and discussions generated by focus groups.
TV Azteca changed the narrative elements of telenovelas as well as the way in which they were presented. The themes and dialogue of the shows became more realistic and less like a fairytale (Casas Pérez 410). In turn, the producers at Televisa kept the same kind of narrative structure, but made the programming targeted for a wider audience. Afternoon telenovelas shown on this station were targeted towards children and teenagers, while telenovelas presented in the late afternoon were targeted towards housewives. Telenovelas presented in the evening were targeted towards both male and female viewers (Casas Pérez 410). The telenovelas from TV Azteca seemed to be moving away from fiction and moving more towards realistic storylines. However, certain dichotomous aspects still persist throughout their storylines. For example, one may clearly witness the poor and honest characters suffering at the hands of the “elite.” One can also identify themes suggesting that love will ultimately prevail in the end (Casas Pérez 412). Casas Pérez also indicates that the traditional characteristics of Mexican cultural identity such as religion, language, history and national character are still being interwoven into the more “realistic” telenovelas in order to appeal to a wider audience (412).

The analytical chapters that follow will analyze the narrative structure and paradigmatic relationships of the telenova genre. I will mostly employ Propp’s, Lévi-Strauss’ and Wright’s structuralist approaches for analyzing texts. One can say that telenovelas are modern day fairytales. Therefore, Propp’s analysis best suits the explanation of how narrative is broken down since this method worked well for uncovering the functions seen in fairytales. However, Propp mainly focuses on actions of the characters, while Wright focuses on this in addition to the attributes of the characters. Since I also look at the characters’ actions in the subsequent chapters, I will be using Wright’s idea of character attributes to explain my list of functions in Chapter 3. Wright’s idea that functions in a narrative do not have to follow a rigid, fixed order will also be
applied. The multiple stories and characters in telenovelas result militate against one single narrative order defining the genre’s structure. Because of television’s segmental nature, it is the nature of the segments, more than their order, that is most significant. Moreover, functions not only occur in various orders, they may also be repeated numerous times within a particular episode and/or across several episodes. In order to uncover the deeper, conceptual meanings of the narrative, Lévi-Strauss’ method of analyzing paradigmatic relations will be used. Analyzing the similarity and differences in these texts, usually in terms of binary oppositions, can help uncover the deeper structure of cultural meanings embedded in these Mexican texts. The Mexican myths that were first explored by Mexican cinema scholars and telenovela scholar Julie Tate will be sought in the Mexican telenovelas. This will be done by taking the characters that are analyzed in Chapter 3 and exploring the similarities and differences between them in Chapter 4. The last analytical chapter will address title sequences. Because of the lack of literature that exists for analyzing title sequences, I will incorporate some of the ideas presented by Grisprud, Jacobs, and Klein in order to explain how title sequences communicate meaning to the viewer. Title sequences manipulation of narrative functions and binary oppositions will be analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4, as well as explaining how the producers promote their stars in these sequences. Lastly, Pierce’s semiotic approach to understanding images and Seiter’s application of it to television and television title sequences will be used briefly to illustrate the significance of some of the images presented in the telenovelas.
CHAPTER 3
DECONSTRUCTING THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

The telenovela has developed a narrative form that differs both from theatrical film and from its nearby relation, the US soap opera. In order to understand this narrative form, it is important first to examine how a telenovela is broken up into segments in ways quite different from theatrical film—as is true of all commercial television—as well as explain the differences between a series and a serial. Unlike theatrical films, television programs are constantly being interrupted by commercial breaks. As a result of television’s segmented structure, serials need to structure their storylines so that their segments or “acts,” as they are called in the industry, can fit between commercial breaks (Butler, _Television_ 13). Therefore, the narrative structure of a telenovela needs to accommodate the commercial breaks, and the telenovela has developed its own unique temporal characteristics. These characteristics have not been examined by other telenovela researchers in the past. While some researchers do focus on the telenovela’s diegesis and dialogue, no research as of yet has broken down the narrative elements of a telenovela into a set of distinct Proppian functions. These functions will help uncover the paradigmatic relationships (binary oppositions) of the next chapter. As a result, after explaining how a telenovela is broken down into segements, I will briefly go over the way other researchers have examined the syntagmatic (sequential and/or narrative) structure of fairytales, the Western genre, and some US TV series. These different approaches will help explain how I arrived at a list of 23 shared telenovela functions, which were divided into eight categories. The listed functions are a result of examining the narrative elements of three Mexican telenovelas currently shown on the
Spanish-language, US-based network, Univision: *Las tontas no van al cielo* (“Dumb women don’t go to heaven,” 2008), *Cuidado Con el ángel* (“Be careful with the angel,” 2008-2009), and *Mañana es para siempre* (“Tomorrow is forever,” 2008-2009). Even though the order of the listed functions may vary from one telenovela to the next, all functions are present in all three telenovelas, and will be described in detail.

These functions, as mentioned in the literature review, express either actions or attributes of the characters in the narrative. Thus, in the last part of this chapter, I will explain how these functions express characteristics of telenovela character roles such as noble characters, the *marianistas*, the *mujerigros*, the seductresses, and the confidantes, which will be pertinent information for the next chapter on binary oppositions. Lastly, while explaining these functions, I will provide examples of how the functions are used within the narrative time of telenovela episodes.

**Telenovela Time**

Telenovelas, like US soap operas, are presented on a daily basis from Monday to Friday, and start each episode *in medias res* (“in the middle of things”). In other words, as Butler explains, “the story has already begun, the action already in progress” (Butler, *Television* 41). What transpired from the day before continues at the start of the next episode, which is different from classical cinema. Most classical films do not start *in medias res*. Classical cinema centers around one main character, and the exposition, explaining who the characters are and their location, is established only once in the film—customarily at the film’s beginning, but sometimes it may be delayed, as is typical in mystery films. Once the exposition is established, the film’s narrative moves forward in a cause-effect chain (Butler, *Television* 24-26).
Unlike classical films, which do not need to repeatedly re-establish characters and settings, telenovelas must establish and re-establish them in each episode because of their serial format. This occurs largely through the conversations of the characters. For example, in the first episode of the entire telenovela *Cuidado con el ángel*, the viewer learns that Marichuy (Maite Perroni) is an orphan through repeated conversations that occur between various characters. Furthermore, Marichuy’s relationship with her confidante Candelaria (Evita Muñoz “Chachita”) starts in the middle of things. How they first met is only explained through conversations between both characters and other characters throughout various episodes.

For the purposes of this analysis, a “scene” is defined as the smallest narrative unit in television. The events that transpire in the scene take place within the same location and time frame. A change of scene thus occurs when there is a switch in space and time—most clearly when both space and time change, but also when only one or the other changes. Examining my sample of three current, primetime telenovelas—*Las tontas no van al cielo*, *Cuidado con el ángel*, and *Mañana es para siempre*—I found the number of scenes per act and per episode was different in each telenovela (Table 3.1). The total amount mostly depends on how many main characters are seen in a daily episode. For example, *Cuidado con el ángel* has more characters and more storylines. Therefore, the majority of the scenes last less than a minute, which is different than in a telenovela such as *Mañana es para siempre* which centers on fewer characters who have longer scenes. As seen in Table 3.1, *Cuidado con el ángel* averages approximately 40 scenes per episode while *Mañana es para siempre* has just 30. The scenes for individual episodes of these telenovelas are divided into five “acts” or sections since television shows must accommodate commercial breaks. These three telenovelas have four commercial breaks which typically last 3-4 minutes each. The commercial breaks and other non-narrative material total
nearly 20 minutes of each episode’s broadcast hour (Table 3.2). Because of this, Mumford’s idea that the narrative structure of a soap opera needs to be centered on the expectation that the story will be interrupted can also be used to exemplify the narrative structure of a telenovela (87).

Table 3.1 The Segmentation of Scenes in Three Telenovelas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Scenes</th>
<th>Act 1</th>
<th>Act 2</th>
<th>Act 3</th>
<th>Act 4</th>
<th>Act 5</th>
<th>Average Scene/Act</th>
<th>Total Scene/Episode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manana es para siempre ep 1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manana es para siempre ep 2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manana es para siempre ep 3</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manana es para siempre ep 4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manana es para siempre ep 5</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manana es para siempre ep 6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Averages</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>3.667</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Scenes</th>
<th>Act 1</th>
<th>Act 2</th>
<th>Act 3</th>
<th>Act 4</th>
<th>Act 5</th>
<th>Average Scene/Act</th>
<th>Total Scene/Episode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los tontas no van a cielo ep 1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los tontas no van a cielo ep 2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los tontas no van a cielo ep 3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los tontas no van a cielo ep 4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los tontas no van a cielo ep 5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los tontas no van a cielo ep 6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Averages</strong></td>
<td>9.17</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Scenes</th>
<th>Act 1</th>
<th>Act 2</th>
<th>Act 3</th>
<th>Act 4</th>
<th>Act 5</th>
<th>Average Scene/Act</th>
<th>Total Scene/Episode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuidado con el ángel ep 1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuidado con el ángel ep 2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuidado con el ángel ep 3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuidado con el ángel ep 4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuidado con el ángel ep 5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuidado con el ángel ep 6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Cuidado con el ángel, the last scene which takes place just before the start of the commercial break is the first scene that is shown again after the commercial break has ended. But, in this telenovela, this only occurs after the end of the first act. All subsequent acts do not follow this trend. Manana es para siempre, however, follows this pattern consistently throughout the various acts. This can be due to the fact that there are less characters in this telenovela, therefore, they can be allotted more screen time. Las tontas no van al cielo, on the other hand, has the opposite pattern. In general, the last scene before a commercial break is never the first
scene of the following act. This may be because this telenovela has more characters than the other telenovelas. As a result, more screen time needs to be given to the various characters and the multiple storylines.

The first act of a telenovela typically lasts the longest, ranging from 12-15 minutes and averaging 13.1 minutes in the three sampled programs (Table 3.2). The purpose of the longer first acts is to set up several storylines in order to keep the viewer wanting to see how the multiple narratives unfolds. In order to keep the viewer from switching channels between commercial breaks, the last scene before a commercial break always sets up questions, secrets, or revelations intended to hook the viewers into wanting to find out what happens next. For instance, in the last scene right before the commercial break during the first act of *Mañana es para siempre* from February 26, 2009, Monserrat (Erika Buenfil) finds drugs on her daughter Liliana’s (Dominika Paleta) dresser. The drugs had been planted there by Bárbara (Lucero), Monserrat’s new confidante and helper. Liliana pleads to her mother and tells her they are not hers. Monserrat does not believe Liliana and asks her to leave the house. This leaves viewers wondering whether Monserrat will find out the truth and keeps the viewers wanting to watch the rest of the episode because each event has consequences.

Table 3.2 Timing of Telenovela Acts and Episodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Show</th>
<th>Act 1 (min)</th>
<th>Act 2 (min)</th>
<th>Act 3 (min)</th>
<th>Act 4 (min)</th>
<th>Act 5 (min)</th>
<th>Average Episode Length (min)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Las tontas no van al cielo</em></td>
<td>12.37</td>
<td>7.49</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>41.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cuidado con el ángel</em></td>
<td>14.74</td>
<td>10.66</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>41.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mañana es para siempre</em></td>
<td>12.19</td>
<td>7.85</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>6.43</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>40.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Act Length x Show</td>
<td>13.10</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>7.78</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the last scene of the second act, Bárbara murders Liliana’s mother, Monserrat. After Bárbara slips out of the room, Liliana goes to talk to her mother, thinking her mother is just resting. Bárbara then walks in as she hears Liliana’s father, Gonzalo (Rogelio Guerra),
approaching the room. Bárbara then shouts to Liliana, “What are doing?! What are you doing?!”
She then walks toward Monserrat, checks her body and shouts “Mrs. Monserrat! Mrs. Monserrat!!
What have you done Liliana?! What have you done?! Your mother is dead! She’s dead!” This
cliffhanger leaves the viewer wanting to find out whether Gonzalo will believe that his daughter
killed her own mother because of her supposed drug use, or if Gonzalo will believe Liliana, who
overheard a phone call in which Artemio (Rogelio Guerra) orders Bárbara to commit this crime
in order to marry Gonzalo. The consequence of Monserrat’s murder for the Elizalde family is
more important than the actual murder itself since the consequence of the action is more
important than the action itself in this genre (Mumford 73).

As the episode progresses, the acts become shorter since theoretically, the viewer has
become more invested in the show, wanting to know how it all “ends.” Usually the last act is
between 3-6 minutes—averaging 4.73 minutes in my sample—and contains the fewest number
of scenes, but generally has the biggest cliffhangers (Table 3.1). For example, at the end of act 5
of this particular episode of Mañana es para siempre Liliana tells her nanny Soledad (María
Rojo) that she didn't kill her mom and tells her that Artemio told Bárbara to kill her mom. After
this, Bárbara walks in. Soledad confronts Bárbara and tells her that she will tell Gonzalo the
truth, but Bárbara threatens to kill Soledad’s son and the other children if she says anything. This
dramatic tension keeps the viewers hooked to watch the next day to see how Soledad will react
to this threat, and whether Bárbara will continue hurting the Elizalde family and Soledad. Rarely
is a storyline ever resolved in one episode in these serials, sharply differentiating them from US
TV series like The Andy Griffith Show (1960-1968) or The King of Queens (1998-2007) or a
All five acts have storylines or story arcs which have specific questions that are trying to be
answered throughout the series. As Mumford mentions, “Problems and questions continue to build across several days, weeks, and months” (70).

While the Bárbara/Soledad cliffhanger scene creates a new story arc, at times cliffhangers have mini-resolutions. An example of a mini-resolution comes from the March 2, 2009 episode of Las tontas no van al cielo. After several episodes, the faithful Chayo (Jacqueline García) finally discovers that her husband Eduardo (Alejandro Ibarra) continues to be a mujeriego (“womanizer”) and catches him cheating on her once again. Now that Chayo knows that Eduardo has not changed, questions have been raised as a consequence of this. For instance, viewers may ask: “Will she forgive him once again? Or will she ask him for a divorce?” The following episodes deal with Chayo’s reaction to discovering his unfaithfulness.

Moreover, the cliffhanger that ends one episode of a telenovela is generally the first scene of the following episode. Since episodes always begin in medias res these first scenes are essential for establishing the previous storylines and generating new storylines and enigmas for the new episode. The cliffhanger scene from the previous day is repeated verbatim the following day. In lieu of exposition, repetition is used in every episode in order to re-establish the characters and their storylines (Butler, Television 42). This is pertinent because it helps the viewer get caught up if they missed an episode, and it helps new viewers understand what is happening in the telenovela.

Since the producers have to account for viewers missing episodes, there are other ways in which a viewer can find out information that was missed. Characters repeat relevant information throughout the episode so that any viewer tuning in at any point of the story can understand the history of the characters. The most frequent method of repetition on Cuidado con el ángel is the flashback. It utilizes this method repeatedly throughout each episode and across episodes.
Characters even have flashbacks about events that have occurred as little as one minute after they took place. This can be seen in act 1, scene 9 of the February 26, 2009 episode of Cuidado con el ángel in which Juan Miguel (William Levy) has just finished participating in the baptism of his son. Moments after Juan Miguel steps out of the church, he starts reminiscing about his son’s baptism. Images of the baptism, which have just occurred, are then shown again less than one minute after they have transpired.

This format of repetition is especially pertinent if the cliffhanger is presented on a Friday. Typically, the cliffhangers on Friday lead up to revelations that are then presented on Monday. Other times these cliffhangers consist of storylines that have been developing throughout the whole week or weeks and months and finally culminate during a Friday episode. For example, in the last scene of act 5 of the Friday, February 27, 2009 episode of Mañana es para siempre, Eduardo (Fernando Colunga) finally returns to his hometown after being gone for 15 years. This plot has been building throughout the whole week. During the last scene of this episode, Eduardo (Soledad’s son) runs into his childhood friend Jacinto (Alejandro Ruiz), but Jacinto does not recognize him. The last line of this episode is Eduardo revealing who he is to Jacinto. No one, including his mother Soledad, is aware of his return. Eduardo in turn is unaware of how many malicious things Bárbara has done since the last time he was there, and how much his mother has been mistreated. His return to the town and the new information he will discover on Monday will make the viewers want to tune in the following week to see what Eduardo will do with this new information. Other questions will also arise such as: “Will Bárbara try to kill either him or Soledad if she is made aware of his arrival? Will his childhood love, Fernanda (Silvia Navarro), find out his true identity and want to leave her fiancé to marry him instead?” Therefore, a mini-resolution, such as Eduardo finally returning, leads to more questions.
What holds all these multiple storylines with different characters together is their continuing temporal and dramatic involvement with one another. Their storylines are intertwined. Even if the emphasis shifts from Soledad and Bárbara to Eduardo and Bárbara, all the characters are still connected to one another and are affected by each other’s actions. The later story arcs are contingent on the consequences of the arcs of earlier storylines such as Monserrat’s murder, and Bárbara threatening Soledad to keep quiet about the truth. Making narrative connections, therefore, is essential when following a telenovela (Butler, *Television* 40); otherwise, the viewer would have a hard time keeping up with a telenovela that had multiple non-connective storylines throughout a series.

**Functions**

After analyzing several Russian fairytales, Propp notices similarities among them. They all follow the same essential narrative structure. He calls the narrative elements of the stories, functions, since “what they do to advance the story is more important than what they are” (Fiske 136). All of these functions, however, do not appear in every single fairytale, but the way in which the story unfolds is always the same (Fiske 135-136). In his syntagmatic structural analysis of the Russian fairy tale, Propp found 32 functions, which he divided into six sections. How the characters act in the functions is called “sphere of action” (Fiske 137). Propp argues that what is important about characters is what they do, not who they are as individuals in a story. For example, different characters at different times can perform the character role of a villain (Fiske 137). However, in telenovelas there tends to be less variation. There are usually very distinct character types that perform specific actions.

As explained in my literature review, Propp’s structuralist approach to analyzing fairytales has been used to analyze films and TV shows. For example, Will Wright has used
Propp’s theory about functions, character roles, and spheres of actions to analyze four different kinds of Western plots: classical, vengeance variation, transition, and professional (30). To do this, Wright limits his study to the highest grossing Western films since 1930 (29). He is able to show that each kind of plot had various amounts of functions. Like Propp, Wright believes that not every function needs to be present in every story. However, unlike Propp, Wright does not divide the functions into different sections nor does he believe that the functions have to unfold in the same manner in every single story. Therefore, functions can occur in different places in a narrative’s syntagmatic chain and some functions can be repeated more than once in a story (Wright 40).

John Fiske has also applied Propp’s syntagmatic structuralist approach, but to TV shows instead of films. His results indicate that in general, the narrative structure of an episode of Bionic Woman (1976-1978) unfolds in the same manner as Propp’s fairytales. The sections in which Propp divides his functions are usually represented in the different acts of this TV show. Like Wright, Fiske finds that at times functions are repeated to emphasize some of the action of the plot and others are less emphasized. Some character roles are also emphasized more than others and, like Propp states in his analysis, certain roles are performed by various characters in the different episodes. The role of the victim, for example, is not always performed by the same person, but is played by anyone other than the villain (Fiske 138). However, in telenovelas, the duplicitous villain can play the role of a victim or false hero.

While a TV series like the Bionic Woman has a syntagmatic structure that follows the strict narrative structure that Propp presents, telenovelas are presented in a different format since they are serials, not series. A serial does not always present the functions in the same order since they have more ongoing storylines, more commercial breaks between segments, and have
climaxes that do not generate permanent resolutions. Instead they create new questions (Butler, *Television* 45). In addition, the television series is different from the Western films that Wright analyzes since Westerns have a beginning, middle, and ending instead of the never-ending middle of every episode of serial TV shows. Therefore, Telenovela episodes have developed a specific time structure in which to place these characters into basic narrative elements or “functions,” to use a term borrowed from Vladimir Propp. For Propp, a function is an individual narrative action or a character’s attributes. These narrative functions construct the storylines of the telenovela. Typically, a function plays out in a single scene, the smallest unit of narrative in television. For this reason, every scene in all the episodes that were analyzed for functions.

Examining the functions in telenovelas will reveal how the storylines end up being variations of similar plots with similar character archetypes. In other words, the functions are the constant. The ways they are presented are the variables. They may not always be presented in the same order, but all the functions are seen in the different storylines in every episode.

I arrived at the following functions after closely examining the narratives of *Las tontas no van al cielo*, *Cuidado con el ángel*, and *Mañana es para siempre*. There are over 100 episodes for each telenovela, making an unwieldy narrative sample. To facilitate analysis, one week’s worth of episodes was chosen at random: February 27-March 4, 2009, Wednesday through the following Wednesday. Inevitably, events that occurred in prior and following weeks must also referenced, but only in order to comprehend the narrative structure of our sample week. All 18 episodes were broken down by the different acts and scenes. After observing the common character types, themes, and narrative elements, I reduced the storylines into a list of common functions. My study resulted in 23 telenovela functions, which may be divided into eight categories: encounters, selfless acts, advice, love and seduction, murder, secrets and lies,
religious acts, and revelations (see Table 3.3). These functions rely on set groups of characters: villains, noble characters, marianistas (Virgin Mary figures), mujeriegos (“womanizers”), and seductresses. The self-sacrificing marianistas and the noble characters suffer at the hands of the villains, mujeriegos and seductresses. The villains impede the happiness of the marianistas and noble characters in these telenovelas.

In order to understand these functions, I will examine each in some detail, providing illustrative examples from these three telenovelas. Although I will consider them in the order listed in Table 3.3, it must be remembered that the sequence of functions may vary from one telenovela to the next.

Table 3.3 Telenovela Narrative Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encounters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Noble characters confront the villain.</td>
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<td>2. The villain argues/taunts/blackmails the noble characters.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Selfless acts</th>
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<tr>
<td>3. Marianistas sacrifice and perform selfless acts for others.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. The noble characters seek advice or help from their confidantes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. The confidantes offer advice to the noble characters/villains.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Love and Seduction</th>
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<tr>
<td>7. The male suitors become enamored of the main female protagonist.</td>
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<td>8. The seductress seduces/tricks the male characters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Male characters reject the seductress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Male characters accept the seductress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. The seductress tries to get pregnant or uses pregnancy against the male characters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Mujeriegos cheat on the marianista.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Murder</th>
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<tr>
<td>13. The villainous character commits/attempts murder.</td>
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Secrets/Lies
14. The villain hides a secret.
15. Noble characters hide a secret.
16. Noble characters lie to their friends/family.
17. The villain lies to the noble characters.

Religious Acts
18. Noble characters pray to La Virgen de Guadalupe.
19. Noble characters participate in religious activities.

Revelations
20. Characters reveal their true feelings for their lover and then deny them.
21. The villain reveals their sinister plans to the audience.
22. The noble characters discover a secret.
23. The noble characters’ secrets are revealed.

Encounters
1. Noble characters confront the villain.
2. The villain argues/taunts/blackmails the noble characters.

In all three telenovelas, there are confrontations between the noble characters and the villainous characters. These arguments occur between both main and minor characters and are not one-sided. The villains are not the only ones that start confrontations. The noble characters also assert themselves against the villains. Telenovelas thrive on this primary function. This especially occurs at the beginning and ending of an episode. In the scene previously mentioned in the Introduction, Soledad confronts Bárbara during the last scene of the episode. She tells Bárbara she knows that she murdered Monserrat. This conversation is repeated again during the first scene of the following episode, both reminding the audience what transpired the day before and setting up the storylines for the new episode.

On the other hand, Marichuy in Cuidado con el ángel does not initiate a confrontation with a villainous character, but she does defend herself against one. Ivette (Maya Mishalska)
who exhibits a double personality and goes to Marichuy’s workplace to taunt and threaten her to leave Leopardo (René Strickler). This confrontation occurs right before the first commercial break so the audience will not switch the channel during commercial break. Grabbing their attention with these types of functions is important in the medium. After the commercial break, the audience sees Marichuy defend herself, but ultimately, she becomes scared of Ivette after she physically hurts her. The same situation occurs after Soledad confronts Bárbara in Mañana es para siempre.

However, the protagonist from Las tontas no van al cielo, Candy (Jacqueline Bracamontes), does not allow anyone to threaten or blackmail her. For example, during the last scene of the February 27th episode Candy informs Marissa (Sabine Moussier) that she will no longer be a bridesmaid anymore because she is still in love with her fiancé Santiago (Jaime Camil). Marissa agrees it is for the best but then starts taunting Candy. Candy confronts Marissa and threatens her to be careful with what she says or else she will ruin her wedding day. In some instances, a noble character like Candy not only confronts the villains, but also threatens them as well. This dramatic tension occurs during the last scene of a Friday episode, leaving viewers eagerly anticipating what will happen in the next episode the following week. This is why confrontations are also repeated during the first scene of the next episode.

Even though the audience waits in anticipation for a resolution to this tension, they never see one. The first scene of the March 2nd episode repeats the exact conversation that Candy and Marissa were having on Friday, February 27th. After the last line from the previous week is repeated, “Marissa, don’t provoke me because maybe I will regret my decision and decide to be a bridesmaid after all and then ruin your whole wedding day,” the lines from the new episode continue. Marissa’s responds by saying, “You wouldn’t dare.” However, the dramatic tension
ends there, Candy just laughs it off and tells Marissa she has to go deliver a package for one of
the woman at work and leaves the room. After Candy departs, Marissa ponders out loud, “You
wouldn’t go through with it,” yet she does not say this line with absolute certainty. Her
intonation is more quizzical than assertive. The viewers must continue watching the telenovela
in order to find out whether Candy will ultimately stop the wedding and come between Marissa
and Santiago.

Sometimes minor confrontations between major and minor characters occur in the middle
of an episode. For example, Candy argues with a plastic surgeon's lawyer whose credentials are
being questioned. It is revealed that one of Candy's sisters died because of a botched plastic
surgery. She does not want this to continue happening to other women, therefore, she talks to a
lawyer about this situation and then confronts the plastic surgeon’s lawyer. After this
confrontation, she decides to write an article showing how the plastic surgeon has destroyed the
lives of his clients. Even though this scene does not occur at the beginning or end of the episode,
this conversation and the outcome of this conversation is divided into several segments
throughout the episode. One conversation leads to another, but they do not occur back to back.
Other scenes with other storylines take place and then Candy’s storyline eventually continues in
order to keep viewers watching and waiting to see how this storyline will be resolved. After
Candy finishes the article, she shows it to Santiago and recaps what she has done. This is meant
to let the audience who may have missed Candy’s prior conversation know what is happening.
Therefore, repetition is important in TV serials.

While noble characters confront villains in order to defend themselves or the people they
care about, villains, on the other hand, have a different purpose for their confrontations. Villains
primarily enjoy taunting and blackmailing the noble characters and usually succeed. For
example, because Bárbara threatens to hurt her child Eduardo and the rest of Gonzalo Elizalde’s children, Soledad decides to keep her son away from the town and does not tell anyone the truth about Bárbara. After Soledad dies, Bárbara threatens the poor workers Jacinto, Margarita (Dacia Arcaráz), and Gardenia (Aleida Núñez). If these workers let anyone from the Elizalde family know that Soledad has passed away, she will fire all of them and take away their home.

**Selfless Acts**
3. Marianistas sacrifice and perform selfless acts for others.

Aside from being threatened and blackmailed, the noble characters also perform selfless acts in all three telenovelas, and all of these marianista and noble characters suffer. For function #3, it is useful to differentiate between the marianista characters and the noble characters, although a marianista character is a defined as a specific type of noble character. “Marianista” refers to the female characters whose traits resemble that of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, a good, selfless and sacrificing mother. Suffering is considered a virtue for the marianista (Tate 100). Marichuy from *Cuidado con el ángel*, decides to sacrifice her love for Juan Miguel, the man she loves, after Blanca (Maya Mishalska) tells Marichuy that she is a strong woman who does not need a man in her life. Even though she loves Juan Miguel, she decides not to tell him how she feels since Blanca explains that she, unlike Marichuy, is a weak woman who needs a good man like Juan Miguel in her life. Blanca also tells Marichuy that at least Marichuy has her son. She, on the other hand, is alone and has no friends or family. Even though Marichuy is not Blanca’s friend, Marichuy decides to give up her chance to be with Juan Miguel so that Blanca can be with him. In addition, Marichuy’s mother, Cecilia (Helena Rojo), gave up her daughter Marichuy when she was a baby because she was sick and thought she was dying. Therefore, she also performed an act of sacrifice in order to save Marichuy’s life.
Similarly, Soledad, whose name literally means “solitude,” decides to give up seeing her son for the rest of her life and lives alone in order to keep him safe from Bárbara in the telenovela *Mañana es para siempre*. When her son returns 15 years later, she asks him to leave and never see the Elizalde family again because she is afraid of what Bárbara might do to him and the Elizalde family.

While Soledad sacrifices for the love of her child, Purita (Georgina Salgado), whose name literally means “purity,” decides to sacrifice her love for Adrián (Abraham Ramos) so she can help her mother Olga (Rebeca Manríquez) in *Cuidado con el ángel*. Purita’s mother Olga was once a prostitute. Because people in her neighborhood always judge her mother for her past indiscretions, Purita decides to take action and performs a selfless act for her mother. In order to purify her mother’s past sins, she consecrates her life to God and becomes a nun instead of marrying Adrián.

In addition to *marianista* characters sacrificing themselves for their children and other good people, they at times unknowingly also make sacrifices for a villainous character. Even though Candy is in love with Santiago, she tells him that she cannot be with him. She wants Santiago to marry Marissa instead because Marissa is pregnant with his child. Marissa, however, has been using her pregnancy to keep Santiago by her side. At the end of the last act in the March 4 episode, Santiago confesses his love for Candy once again and tells her that he is willing to call off the wedding to be with her. Marissa overhears this conversation and vows to keep Santiago from ever seeing his child, even if he ends up marrying her. Candy, not knowing Marissa’s intentions, always tells Santiago that she cannot be with him because she does not want his son to grow up without a father.
Noble characters always suffer in telenovelas. The specific ways in which the characters suffer are not systematically defined in the functions since the characters suffer in various ways. Some characters like Marichuy and Candy suffer because they cannot be with the men they love. Others like Soledad and Cecilia suffer for the love of their children, and Purita suffers for her mother. At times, even male characters like Jacinto and Eduardo suffer because they are threatened by a villainous character and are forced to keep silent about what they know about the villain. Other minor characters like Margarita and Gardenia also suffer at the hands of Bárbara. Therefore, the act of suffering in telenovelas comes in many different forms and all types of characters suffer.

Advice
5. The noble characters seek advice or help from their confidantes.
6. The confidantes offer advice/help to the noble characters/villains.

Another function used repeatedly throughout the three telenovelas is characters receiving and seeking advice. The noble characters in telenovelas always seek advice from their confidantes. This is clearly seen in Cuidado con el ángel, which in some ways resembles the melodrama Imitation of Life (1934 and 1959), and the mammy figure in it. In almost every single episode, Marichuy has an intimate conversation with her friend Candelaria. Candelaria is depicted as a very humble and un-educated character. She always asks Candelaria, who has never been married and has no love interests, for love advice. Thus, Candelaria resembles the African-American character in Imitation of Life, who counsels her white friend about romance, but is presumed to have no romantic desires of her own. Candelaria always encourages Marichuy to follow her heart and is always supportive of Marichuy whenever she needs guidance or comforting. In addition to giving Marichuy advice, she also helps take care of Marichuy’s son whenever Marichuy leaves to perform at the theatre. Candelaria gives Marichuy advice when she
debates whether to leave the theatre because her two suitors, Juan Miguel and Leopardo, no longer want her to perform anymore.

In addition to Candelaria, Padre Anselmo (Héctor Gómez) is also Marichuy’s confidante. While Candelaria is loyal to Marichuy and her decisions even if she disagrees with them, Padre Anselmo always guides Marichuy to do the right thing and uses the word of God to help her find the right path. Whenever Marichuy mentions that she does not want Juan Miguel to be a part of their son’s life, Padre Anselmo advises her do the right thing. He repeatedly tells her that it is important for her son to have his father in his life. Furthermore, he always encourages Marichuy to forgive her mother Cecilia for having abandoned her when she was a child, and to also forgive Juan Miguel for having forced himself upon her one drunken night when Marichuy was a young girl.

While Candelaria tells Marichuy to listen to her heart and Padre Anselmo advises Marichuy to do the right thing, Ana Julia (Michelle Vieth) gives her conflicting advice. In recent episodes, she has also become Marichuy’s confidant. However, the times when Marichuy asks Ana Julia whether she should be with Juan Miguel or Leopardo, Ana Julia always gives her different advice. Sometimes Ana Julia advises Marichuy to be with Juan Miguel. Other times she advises her to be with Leopardo. Ana Julia acts as an important function to the story since it helps prolong Marichuy’s decision about who she should be with since Marichuy is unable to decide between them.

Similarly, in Las tontas no van al cielo, Candy always seeks love advice from her homosexual uncle Meño (Manuel 'Flaco' Ibáñez). Since this telenovela combines drama and comedy, Meño advises Candy to stay with both men, which creates humorous results. Additionally, her two suitors ask Meño tell help them win over Candy’s affections. In every
episode that was analyzed, Meño goes back and forth, helping Santiago at times and then helping Patricio (Valentino Lanus) at other times. Meño’s role as an advisor to both Candy and her two suitors creates more confusion than decisions for the main protagonist, which helps prolong her ultimate decision between her two suitors.

Moreover, Candy created an institute whose purpose is to advise women on relationships. This institute, run by women, was created to help women learn to become independent and not let their husbands mistreat them. However, sometimes their advice backfires. At times, people who they advise come back to the institute angrily telling them their advice backfired. Furthermore, the majority of the listed functions of a telenovela occur at this institute. Therefore, a place can also function to create or further storylines for the characters.

Lastly, in Mañana es para siempre, the poor and humble worker Jacinto is the one who helps Eduardo seek revenge for his mother Soledad’s death. He asks Jacinto to keep his arrival secret. In a later episode, when he acquires a false identity, Jacinto does not reveal his true identity. He becomes Eduardo’s right hand man and is there whenever Eduardo needs him. Furthermore, while Padre Anselmo from Cuidado con el ángel has guided Marichuy since she was a baby at the orphanage, Padre Bosco (Luis Gimeno) from Mañana es para siempre has known and taken care of Eduardo since he was a young boy as a result of Soledad not being allowed to see him all those years. Padre Bosco also advises Eduardo not to seek revenge for the death of his mother. He acts as Eduardo’s conscious.

While noble characters usually seek advice from their confidantes, at times these confidantes give advice to the villains as well. Gregoria (Ana Bertha Espín), from the telenovela Las tontas no van al cielo, advises her daughter Alicia (Fabiola Campomanes) to stop blackmailing her father-in-law. Alicia decides not to listen to this advice because she believes
Gregoria favors her sister Candy over her. Even though Gregoria does not agree with Alicia’s actions, she never abandons Alicia despite their disagreements. The same can be said of Marissa’s brother Raúl (Carlos de la Mota) since he always advises Marissa to do the right things, but Marissa never listens. Ultimately, Raúl does anything for his sister even if Marissa does malicious things. Even though characters like Gregoria and Raúl fit the archetype of a noble person, they serve to further enable the motives of the villainous characters.

**Love and Seduction**
7. The male suitors become enamored of the main female protagonist.
8. The seductress seduces/tricks the male characters.
9. Male characters reject the seductress.
10. Male characters accept the seductress.
11. The seductress tries to get pregnant or uses pregnancy against the male characters.
12. Mujeriegos cheat on the *marianista*.

Telenovelas, like soap operas, revolve around love and seduction. The primary storyline consists of the male suitors becoming enamored of the female protagonist. In *Cuidado con el ángel*, Marichuy has Juan Miguel and Leopardo. Both men pursue Marichuy in every episode that was analyzed. Similarly, Candy from *Las Tontas no van al cielo* has two suitors: Santiago and Patricio. Both characters from both telenovelas need to choose between their husband/ex-husband and a new suitor. Fernanda also has to choose between two suitors: Damián (Sergio Sendel) and Eduardo. However, in this telenovela Damián is a duplicitous character who works for Bárbara. Eduardo, on the other hand, is a noble character. However, Eduardo hides his true identity from his childhood love Fernanda in order to get his revenge from Bárbara. Regardless of Fernanda being unaware of Eduardo’s true identity, she still falls in love with Eduardo and must decide between him and her husband Damián.

While the noble female characters have to decide between two suitors, the male characters have to resist temptation from the seductresses. The seductresses’ function is to be an
obstacle between the male and female protagonist. In all three telenovelas, the villainous female characters seduce/trick the male characters. Cuidado con el ángel has Ivette, Blanca’s other personality. The noble Blanca is Juan Miguel’s girlfriend (ex-husband of Marichuy), but when Blanca turns into Ivette she always attempts to seduce Leopardo, Marichuy’s suitor. In most of the episodes, Leopardo rejects Ivette, but at times he gives in to her seduction.

Estefanía (Ana Patricia Rojo) is also another seductress on Cuidado con el ángel. Estefanía repeatedly tries to trick Juan Miguel into thinking that Marichuy does not love him. Therefore, her function is to prevent Marichuy and Juan Miguel from getting together. Since Juan Miguel repeatedly rejects Estefanía, she also tries to seduce other men. When Israel (Mauricio Mejía) becomes a rich doctor, Estefanía tries to seduce him. Israel used to be in love with Estefanía, but she rejected him because he was poor. Now that he is rich, she tries to seduce him, but ultimately fails. Her function is one of seduction. But, in general, the seductresses ultimately fail in telenovelas.

In Mañana es para siempre, Bárbara is the seductress/trickster. Her employer Artemio orders her to seduce Gonzalo. She ultimately marries Gonzalo after Monserrat death. She then hires Damiánto seduce the noble Fernanda who is Gonzalo’s daughter. While Damián seduces Fernanda, Bárbara and Damián cheat on Gonzalo and Fernanda.

Alicia, Candy’s sister, is the seductress in Las tontas no van al cielo. In the first episode of the entire telenovela Las tontas no van al cielo, Alicia seduces Patricio, Candy’s fiancé, the night before their wedding. Candy finds out after she and Patricio have just exchanged their wedding vows, and as a result, abandons Patricio. Episodes following the week sampled deal with Patricio asking for forgiveness and trying to regain Candy’s affection. In addition to Patricio trying to get Candy to fall in love with him again, Alicia, who is now Patricio’s wife,
still tries to seduce him although he rejects her now that Candy is back in his life. Alicia continues to come between Patricio and Candy, and in the episodes that were analyzed, she tries to get pregnant in order to prevent Patricio from finally leaving her.

Santiago, Candy’s other suitor, is repeatedly seduced by Marissa. Once Marissa becomes pregnant, she uses her pregnancy to keep Santiago at her side. This is the main reason why Santiago has reservations about leaving Marissa and finally being with Candy. The episodes consist of a back and forth dilemma for Santiago: “Does he stay with the pregnant Marissa or does he go with Candy who is the love of his life?”

Priscila (Arleth Terán) from Mañana es para siempre also tries to seduce her husband in order to get pregnant. While her husband only married Priscila to receive information from the company’s rival business (her family’s business), Priscila wants to have a child to merge the family fortunes and names. However, Aníbal (Guillermo Capetillo) is more interested in business than pleasure, causing Priscila to find numerous ways to seduce and trick her husband into sleeping with her.

While female characters are typically the seductresses, in telenovelas there are also mujeriegos (“womanizers”) who cheat on the marianista characters. Las tontas no van al cielo has Eduardo, Chayo’s husband, who repeatedly cheats on Chayo. Before Santiago met Candy, he was also a mujeriego who slept with many women, and Patricio was also a mujeriego before Candy came back into his life. Moreover, Camilo (Roberto Palazuelos) cheats on Erika with numerous women and Damián cheats on Fernanda with Bárbara in Mañana es para siempre. Lastly, Amador (Arturo Carmona) from Cuidado con el ángel tries to seduce Marichuy while sleeping with Beatriz (Ana Isabel Corral) and eventually Ana Julia.
**Murder**
13. The villainous character commits/Attempts murder.

Besides love and seduction, murder is also a narrative function that is often used in telenovelas. Bárbara from *Mañana es para siempre* murders two characters and attempts to murder various others. Bárbara murders Monserrat in order to gain power, while she has attempted to murder other characters because she fears her secrets will be revealed and thus she will lose her power. While Bárbara has murdered people to get power and retain power, Ivette from *Cuidado con el ángel* tries to murder Marichuy because she considers her an obstacle to her being with Leopardo. Estefanía also tries to murder Marichuy because she wants to be with Juan Miguel in order to climb up the social ladder. Therefore, love, power, and social status are the main motivations in these types of plots. The comedy-drama *Las tontas no van al cielo* is the only telenovela that does not include murderous plots in the episodes that were analyzed.

**Secrets/Lies**
14. The villain hides a secret.
15. Noble characters hide a secret.
16. Noble characters lie to their friends/family.
17. Villain lies to the noble characters.

Telenovelas need to have functions involving secrets and lies in order for storylines to be dragged on for days, weeks, and even months. Otherwise, the storylines would be resolved very quickly. Most secrets involve the villainous characters. Marissa from *Las tontas no van al cielo* decides to leave the country once her son is born so Santiago will never see his child every again. Throughout the episodes the audience wonders whether her secrets will be revealed before it’s too late. In *Mañana es para siempre* Bárbara has multiple secrets, including Monserrat’s murder and the true identity of her employer. She also shares secrets with other villainous characters. She hires Damián to marry Fernanda in order to steal money from the family business. They also have to keep their adulterous affair a secret. Since Bárbara has abundant secrets to conceal, she
spends most of the episodes coming up with new lies and threatening more people in order to conceal the secrets. The same thing occurs to Estefanía from Cuidado con el ángel. She has to keep track of numerous secrets dealing with the various ways that she has lied in order get Marichuy out of her life so she can marry a rich man.

Thus, villains primarily lie and have secrets, but the noble characters do much the same. Soledad from Mañana es para siempre spends years hiding Bárbara’s secret. She never reveals the identity of Artemio. She also hides the truth about Monserrat’s murder. Furthermore, Eduardo fakes his death after his mother Soledad dies. He asks Padre Bosco to lie for him and hide this secret. He acquires a new identity in order to get close to the Elizaldes and Bárbara since he wants Bárbara to pay for everything his mother and Liliana Elizalde suffered because of her actions. His poor friends Jacinto and Margarita also help keep Eduardo’s secrets through lies. Therefore, many characters are connected to one person’s secrets and their storylines become intertwined as well. As more characters become aware of the secrets, the lies become more elaborate and complicated thus creating more tension in the telenovela, which provides more pleasure for the viewer.

Candy from Las tontas no van al cielo also fakes her death. She spends years hiding her secret so her husband Patricio never finds her and their son. Many of the early episodes of the telenovela deal with Candy finding different ways to hide her identity from Patricio. Candy’s uncle Meño also helps hide Candy’s secret and lies. His function is to help prolong the revelation so this storyline can be stretched out.

Lastly, in Cuidado con el ángel Marichuy does not want her husband Juan Miguel to discover that they have a child together. Many episodes dealt with Juan Miguel almost finding out the truth. Blanca also tries to hide her double personality from Juan Miguel. Once everyone
believes that she is finally cured, she realizes that she still turns into the evil Ivette every night. Blanca tries to hide this from all the characters. Therefore, problems are only temporarily solved. Some storylines recur, recreating similar problems and lies.

**Religious Acts**
18. Noble characters pray to *La Virgen de Guadalupe*.
19. Noble characters participate in religious activities (confessions, anointing of the sick, baptism, first holy communion, matrimony, and funerals).

All three telenovelas that were analyzed have storylines that center on Catholicism and its rituals. All the noble characters participate in religious activities. In *Cuidado con el ángel*, Nelson, an atheist character, participates in the anointing of the sick hours before his death. After the local priest, Padre Anselmo, prays for him and performs the sacrament of anointing of the sick, Nelson (Rodrigo Mejía) becomes a man of faith. Acts of faith are seen in all three telenovelas. Noble characters, including the local priests, always pray for the sick or troubled characters. The noble characters also turn to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* for guidance, comfort or forgiveness. For example, Soledad in *Mañana es para siempre* asks *La Virgen de Guadalupe* to give her the strength to live a life of solitude without her son in order to keep him safe from Bárbara. Candy from *Las tontas no van al cielo* prays to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* to save her sick son from dying. Marichuy from *Cuidado con el Ángel* prays that she finds her lost son and Cecilia prays that Marichuy will forgive her for abandoning Marichuy as a child. And Mariana (Beatriz Aguirre)) appears as an angel to her granddaughter Mayita (Sarai) in every episode. Mariana explains complicated life lessons through fairytale stories. Other times characters pray to *La Virgen* to help them forget about the people they are in love with.

Even though telenovelas’ narratives focus on a limited number of protagonists, many of the minor characters have storylines as well. Of course, they have fewer scenes. Yet, their storylines are always connected to the bigger storylines. These minor story arcs affect the main
female and male protagonist. For example, during three straight weeks of Cuidado con el ángel there was a Catholic baptism, a funeral, and three weddings. After Nelson dies of a terminal illness, his death ends up being the catalyst for other events that occur in subsequent episodes. After his death in the March 2, 2009 episode, all the main and minor characters are brought together at his funeral. The same thing occurs during the three weddings and baptism that occur in this telenovela. Thus, the rest of these episodes set up multiple encounters between different characters which ultimately end up creating an abundance of revelations. The revelations and new questions that are brought up at the funeral home cause more revelations in the subsequent episodes—hence, creating a never ending chain reaction of cause and effect. As a result of this chain reaction, one can see how the death of one character does not end the narrative. It merely closes the story arc and creates new enigmas. These types of encounters also occurred in Mañana es para siempre and Las tontas no van al cielo.

Furthermore, religious activities are often subject to interruption. During Fernanda’s first holy communion celebration, Eduardo gives Fernanda a necklace that says “FE” (“faith”), but in actuality they are the initials of Fernanda and Eduardo. After they both exchange necklaces with religious symbols, Eduardo and Fernanda kiss for the very first time. However, Bárbara sees them and tells Gonzalo that Eduardo is trying to take advantage of his daughter Fernanda. This becomes the primary reason why the main characters become separated for years. Fifteen years later Fernanda marries Damián. During the wedding reception, Fernanda discovers that her nanny Soledad had died a few days before her wedding, but no one informed her of it. This revelation creates new storylines that will involve Eduardo.

Another example of interruptions is stopping a wedding. When Candy stops Santiago from marrying Marissa during an episode of Las tontas no van al cielo, the day of the wedding
and its aftermath are stretched out for various episodes. Characters’ feelings are finally revealed during these encounters but are then quickly denied, which leads to another main function in telenovelas—revelations.

**Revelations**

1. Characters reveal their true feelings for their lovers and then deny them.
2. Villains reveal their sinister plans to the audience.
3. The noble characters discover a secret.
4. The noble characters secrets are revealed.

One of the main narrative elements of telenovelas that is used repeatedly is the main female protagonist revealing her true feelings and then denying her love for her male suitors. In *Cuidado con el ángel* for instance, Marichuy has multiple encounters with Juan Miguel. He and Marichuy were once married, but are now separated. Juan Miguel constantly insists that she still loves him and wants them to be a family once again. As a result, countless scenes revolve around Juan Miguel asking Marichuy to leave Leopardo (her other suitor). Almost every time they see each other, he asks Marichuy if she still loves him. These questions typically arise at the end of an act, and are generally not answered in the next act. The answers are usually non-conclusive because like soap operas, this medium thrives on delay (Butler, *Television* 45). These questions and encounters typically occur before the commercial break. Usually, the ends of these scenes before commercial breaks in *Cuidado con el ángel* are not the first scenes of the following act. The viewer must continue watching in order to find out Marichuy’s answer. When the scene finally continues in the next act, she stares deeply into his eyes, but never answers his question directly. This continues to delay the viewer from finding out if they will finally end up together again.

*Las tontas no van al cielo* has the same acceptance/denial narrative structure. Candy constantly goes back and forth between two suitors: Patricio and Santiago. Every episode that
was analyzed deals with both suitors asking Candy if she still loves them. Candy always provides them with vague answers. At other times, she does admit that she loves one of the suitors, but after they have a romantic moment and kiss, she tells them that she cannot be with them because she also has feelings for the other suitor.

Mañana es para siempre is no different. Fernanda constantly has internal and external monologues in which she admits that she still cares and thinks about Eduardo, her childhood love. However, when people ask her if she still loves Eduardo, she denies it. For example, in the February 27th episode, after 15 years of being separated, Fernanda and Eduardo are finally reunited. However, she does not realize it is Eduardo. When she offers him a ride to the town, she tells Eduardo that she will be marrying Damián. When Eduardo asks Fernanda if she has ever loved another man, she admits that she once had a childhood love, but then explains that her childhood love was unimportant and does not count. She explains that her current relationship is a more mature adult relationship. Eduardo returns, in episodes following the sampled week, but with a different identity. These later episodes deal with Fernanda being torn between her feeling for Franco (Eduardo) and her husband Damian.

Sinister plans are also revealed in telenovelas. However, most revelations are done through internal monologues and soliloquies. Thus, the audience knows villains’ sinister plans, but the noble characters are unaware of them. This provides more tension and pleasure from the audience since they are left wondering if the sinister plans will ever be discovered. Bárbara from Mañana es para siempre, Ivette and Estefanía from Cuidado con el ángel and Alicia and Marissa from Las tontas no van al cielo all have moments of internal monologues/soliloquies.

However, at times, noble characters eventually become aware of a villain’s plans. Candy overhears Marissa saying that she will use her baby to hurt Santiago. Then, on the day of Marissa
and Santiago’s wedding day, Candy overhears Marissa telling her brother Raúl that she will not let Santiago see their baby once he is born even if they are married. This revelation causes Candy to stop the wedding. When Candy tries to stop Santiago from marrying Marissa the day of the wedding, this day and its aftermath are stretched out for various episodes. Therefore, even though time is not manipulated within a scene, it is manipulated throughout episodes by stretching “real” time (Butler, “Notes on the Soap Opera” 62).

Other times when a villain’s sinister acts are discovered, the villain decides to reveal every evil act that they ever committed. If they had accomplices, they also reveal their evil acts. This occurs in Cuidado con el ángel. After the police discover that Estefanía tried to kill Marichuy, she ends up revealing every evil act she and her accomplices ever committed. Because of this, many unanswered questions throughout the series are finally revealed, but this only causes temporary closure since these revelations cause other complications for the main characters.

The same situation occurs when the noble character Soledad reveals to her son Eduardo in Mañana es para siempre why she had to stay away from him for 15 years. After she finally explains some of the truths about Bárbara to Eduardo, she passes away. This causes Eduardo to seek revenge on Bárbara and to continue investigating more information about Bárbara’s actions in order to find out the whole truth. Therefore, Soledad’s death and her revelations during the first week of this telenovela becomes the catalyst for the rest of the storylines in the telenovela.

Furthermore, even though it appears that telenovelas consist of a never ending middle, there are conclusions to some story arcs. When a wedding is disrupted or a marriage does not last because the female character remembers a traumatic incident, it interrupts the marriage, but closes the storyline of the traumatic incident the female characters have had at some point
For example, in episode 33 of Cuidado con el ángel, the day after Marichuy and Juan Miguel’s wedding night, she finally remembers the man who forced himself on her when she was 14 years of age. Her new husband was the man who committed this act. This story arc, which had been building for several weeks, is finally closed. A sense of closure is reached with Marichuy discovering the man who haunted her dreams. However, this revelation creates new stories and new problems, which allows the narrative to continue (Mumford 79). Therefore, a resolution is seen, but the arc itself continues far beyond this revelation because this will now create a new story arc, “Will Marichuy ever forgive Juan Miguel?” This story arc is important because it encompasses the main narrative problematic of the show: “Will Marichuy and Juan Miguel be together at the end of the telenovela?” The main narrative problematic or storyline will never have complete narrative closure until the end of the series. Before the ending though, the question is ongoing.

Other minor story arcs are also created when it is revealed to the audience that Marichuy is now pregnant with Juan Miguel’s child. As a result of this new revelation, a new question arises, “Will Marichuy tell Juan Miguel she is pregnant even though she despises him now?” These types of events are delayed for weeks or even months. As Mumford explains about soap operas, “We long for closure, yet the progression toward it must be impeded and delayed in order to prolong the pleasure of viewing or reading. Without this postponement, after all, there would be no narrative, only synopsis” (86). This idea can also be applied to telenovelas. Even if telenovelas only last a few months, the producers still need to find numerous obstacles to keep the main characters apart in order to keep the viewer watching. In telenovelas the journey is more interesting for the viewer than the destination. In other words, even though the audience knows that the ending of a telenovela will always be the same, the situations which the
characters go through and how they react to those situations to resolve the narrative problematic of the series is the reason people keep watching.

This chapter examines the different ways in which the narrative of a telenovela must accommodate commercial breaks and the various methods that are used to help the viewer keep track of narrative information of a serial that typically consists of more than 100 episodes. The second purpose of this chapter is to reveal how the narrative of a telenovela has a set of functions that are used consistently, although at times not every character has the same function in every episode, and other times characters can have multiple functions in a single episode. This demonstrates that no matter how intricate a serial’s narrative is, it can still have a set of recurring functions. The next chapter will examine in more detail the character archetypes presented in these functions by placing them in paradigmatic sets (binary oppositions) in order to further unravel how cultural myths continue to be illustrated in these telenovelas.
CHAPTER 4
DICHOTOMIZING CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

When using a structuralist approach, the researcher looks at the syntagmatic (sequential and/or narrative) structure and paradigmatic relationships (binary oppositions) in a text. The syntagmatic structure deals with the way signs are organized into a chronological fashion (Butler, Television 442). In this thesis, the previous chapter examined the ways in which scenes and episodes in a TV serial develop over time through the use of functions. However, the syntagmatic structure only examines telenovelas on the surface. In order to uncover the deeper, conceptual meanings of the narrative, one must look at the paradigmatic structure of a text (Wright 24). Lévi-Strauss states that by analyzing their paradigmatic relations of similarity and differences, usually in terms of binary oppositions, one can find a deep structure of meanings in mythic narratives (Fiske 129). Binary oppositions are revealed “by taking characters, setting and actions out of the syntagmatic flow” (Fiske 129) and then exploring the similarities and differences that exist within the text.

The differences, or binary oppositions, are revealed through looking at the way the meaning of each image in a text is viewed in terms of its relationship to other images (Seiter 51). Structuralist theory is based on the idea that every symbol can be divided into sets, “those things it does refer to and those it does not” (Wright 22). In other words, the audience derives meaning through associations they see when watching a telenovela. For example, a villain in a telenovela
cannot exist if contrasting images of a noble character did not exist in a telenovela as well.

Meaning is produced through the differences between the two different characteristics. Since structuralism does not deal with random relationships, but instead looks at repetitive patterns that are consistently integrated in the text and are reflected in society, the first purpose of this chapter is to reveal what are the most commonly seen and repetitively used binary oppositions that exist within these telenovelas. Once again, all three telenovelas currently airing on Univision will be analyzed. In this analysis, the most common and repetitively used binary oppositions in these texts are *La Virgin de Guadalupe* (marianista figures) vs. *La Malinche* (the seductress), *marianismo* vs. *machismo*, and rich vs. poor. First, this will show how these characters are divided into distinct character types, which were first revealed in the previous chapter. More importantly, as a result of the lack of Mexican telenovela research focusing on Mexican cultural myths, this chapter will help us understand the ideological discourses embedded in the narrative of the telenovelas as they relate to gender and class difference. This will be accomplished by first providing a brief overview of the historic roots of two cultural myths, *La Virgin de Guadalupe* and *La Malinche* in order to explain how their myths are embedded in the binary oppositions of the marianista figures vs. the seductresses of the telenovelas. Then, I will briefly discuss the traditional cultural gender ideologies that exist within the Mexican culture, *marianismo* and *machismo*. This will help explain how the producers of these telenovelas use these concepts, which are central to the gender socialization of traditional Mexicans within the narrative of these telenovelas. The last part of the chapter will briefly describe with examples the binary opposition of poor vs. rich, which is more notably seen in two out of the three telenovelas analyzed.
La Virgen de Guadalupe vs. La Malinche

In Mexican culture, the Indian princess La Malinche is usually depicted as someone who willingly betrayed Mexico by helping Spanish Conquistador Hernan Cortés as a translator and becoming his mistress (Hershfield 10). Ten years after the Spanish destroyed the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán, the shame that was brought by the Mexican eve, La Malinche, was purified by a dark skinned Virgin Mary dressed like an Aztec princess who appeared before the Indian Juan Diego. This Mexican Indian Virgin would later be named La Virgin de Guadalupe. After she appeared before Juan Diego, and he presented evidence of her apparition to the bishop, a small shrine was built on Tontatzin’s hill; but the Catholic Church did not establish her as Mexico’s Indian Virgin until a century later when a Spanish bishop wanted to bring the straying Indians to become a part of the Catholic Church. For this reason, the story of La Virgen can be seen as an attempt to Indianize Catholicism so that the Indians would stop resisting the religion of their conquerors (Hershfield 22-23). As Herschfield explains, “This Indian virgin became the intermediary between the known past and the unknown future, a symbol constructed in an attempt to resolve social and historical contradictions” (23). Thus, the Mexican culture is influenced by both the indigenous civilizations and the Catholic religion that was brought to Mexico by the Spaniards. Thus, out of this mixture of Catholicism and indigenous cultures, a new fundamental Mexican myth arose—the story of La Virgen de Guadalupe, which has a very distinctive iconography (See Figure 4.1).
Thus, La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche are archetypes that are based on mythological, historical and religious women. La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche serve as key gender roles for Mexican women (Kulis, et al. 260). They represent the virgin and the whore dichotomy, and their myths are seen repeatedly in different types of media in Mexico and in Spanish-language channels in the US—finding repeated expression in the characters and storylines in telenovelas. Clearly, in these Mexican telenovelas, the heroines are the marianistas who reflect the virtues of La Virgin de Guadalupe, but minor characters can exhibit these qualities as well. These self-sacrificing, sexually pure women are being positioned as admirable characters who are the ones who should be emulated by telenovelas’ viewers. Women who deviate from the characteristics of La Virgen de Guadalupe are considered to embody the characteristics of the other historical figure—La Malinche, the symbolic whore who betrayed her people.

Marianistas can exhibit either positive or negative attributes of marianismo. Strong and independent women who have a proactive role in their own lives, but are still concerned with
taking care of their families have positive aspects of marianismo (Kulis et. al 260). Negative characteristics of marianismo, on the other hand, include submissive women who are dependent on their bad boyfriends/husbands and, therefore, endure being mistreated by them. In addition, they are patient and forgiving and take on the expected role of taking care of their husband, children and household while sacrificing their own needs and desires (Kulis, et. al 260).

When it comes to marianista characters in telenovelas, they are usually depicted with negative characteristics. Typically, viewers are taught to discern that these marianistas must suffer in order to receive their happy ending by the end of the series (Tate 100). As Tate mentions, it is hard to predict when viewers will be able to regularly watch strong and independent woman in telenovelas who are not valued just as a wife or a mother, but are judged instead as individuals who have intrinsic value (101). However, Candy’s character in Las tontas no van al cielo can be seen as a sign indicating that stereotypes are changing in telenovelas. Candy’s character embodies the positive aspects of the marianismo model. She is presented as a strong and independent woman. She left her husband after he cheated on her, and is now a single mom who has a career. Therefore, even though Tate mentions that “the good women of telenovelas view professional occupations as a simple productive way to pass the time until they begin their ‘real’ roles” (98) as mothers, Candy is a successful working mother who enjoys her career. She writes a weekly advice column geared towards women called “las estupidas no van al cielo” (“Stupid women don't go to heaven”)—echoing the program’s title. Candy’s name is a nickname for Candida, meaning honest or straightforward. Her favorite phrase for her column is “I do not have the vocation of doormat; I will not let anyone step on me.” Because of the success of the column, and her honesty and open quality when giving people advice, she has created an institute for women that helps them learn to be independent women with high self-esteem. On a
regular basis on the show, women drop by to seek advice for various problems including being mistreated by their husbands or suffering from alcoholism. This demonstrates that a single mother with a career can overcome the binary opposition by becoming a modern woman who can incorporate the two elements of the binary opposition to become a woman transcending the cultural stereotypes.

Since this institute is very important to Candy, during the March 3rd episode she tries to find ways to save it after her uncle Meño informs her that if they cannot raise the money needed to keep the institute and the family owned restaurant, then they will have to close them down. Since her family and friends are her highest priority, she spends an entire episode trying to find ways to see the owner of the properties in order to convince him to let her keep her institute, but he refuses to see her. After she climbs onto his window ledge, he finally understands how much Candy cares about the institute (Figure 4.2). He then negotiates with Candy, but she is unable to save her uncle’s restaurant. She spends several episodes trying to find a solution to her uncle’s problems. Therefore, Candy is presented as a character who can take care of herself without being the self-sacrificing mother/wife who is almost like a doormat as she suffers and watches her family/children suffer. She is a proactive character who tries to find solutions to her own problems, as well as the people, about whom she cares.
As mentioned before, Candy’s favorite catchphrase is "I do not have the vocation to be a doormat; I will not let anyone step on me." This phrase refers not just generally to the male characters, but also the male and female villains of the telenovelas. For example, during the last scene of a Friday episode (February 27), Candy tells Marissa that she will no longer be a bridesmaid at Marissa’s wedding because of her feelings for Marissa’s fiancé Santiago. Marissa agrees that it is for the best. After Marissa starts taunting Candy, however, Candy threatens Marissa. Candy tells Marissa she will ruin her wedding if she continues to be cruel to her. Unlike the stereotypical submissively weak marianista, who allows other people to mistreat them, Candy is presented as stronger marianista who fends for herself.

Even though Candy is a very strong, independent woman, the sacrificing and suffering of the marianista characters are more commonly seen in telenovelas. In addition, Tate explains that in telenovelas “the good woman often experiences motherhood as another part of martyrdom, metaphorically speaking” (100). For example, Soledad’s character from Mañana es para siempre at first embodies the positive aspects of marianismo, but this quickly changes. Her name, as previously mentioned, means solitude. From the beginning of the telenovela, she is presented as a good and noble widow who takes care of Gonzalo and Monserrat Elizalde’s children as well as
her own child Eduardo. Even though at the beginning of this telenovela, she is presented as a strong character, who tries to defend herself as well as the people she cares about against Bárbara, this immediately changes after she confronts Bárbara about murdering Monserrat.

Bárbara threatens to hurt the children she takes care of and her child Eduardo if she tells anyone the truth. As a result, Soledad starts embodying the negative characteristics of marianismo. Even though the negative aspects of marianismo include submissiveness to men, in this particular telenovela, the marianista character has become submissive to the female villain. As a result of Bárbara’s threats, she keeps her son away from the city and no longer works as a nanny for the Elizalde’s. During a scene in the February 26, 2009 episode, Soledad prays to La Virgen de Guadalupe, who is considered the original suffering mother (Figure 4.3-4.4):

> My mother, all my attempts to have my boss Gonzalo listen to me have been in vain. He fell in Bárbara’s trap. Now Bárbara is married to him. Who will accuse that murderer now? I have become her accomplice, but I’ve done it all so that the Elizalde children, Eduardo, and my boss Gonzalo do not suffer the evilness of Bárbara. I will keep my mouth shut. I accept the punishment that you have invoked for me even if the span of my life is not enough for me to pay for my sins. Blessed Mother may your will be done.¹¹

Figure 4.3-4.4 Soledad becomes a martyr.

By the end of this scene, she has fully embodied the marianismo role by becoming a martyr for the people, about whom she cares. Then, after fifteen years of self-sacrifice, hiding the truth and living in solitude, Soledad’s son Eduardo comes back and finds that his mother is sick and dying.
Before Soledad dies, she reveals some of Bárbara’s secrets to Eduardo and asks him to help Liliana since Liliana did not really murder Monserrat. After Soledad dies, Eduardo picks her up in his arms (Figure 4.5). The camera tilts up above Eduardo, showing him holding her mother in a style that is reminiscent of Michelangelo’s *Pietà* sculpture (Figure 4.6). A spotlight highlights the cross above her bed during this scene. This evocative image signifies how, in this case, after 15 years of suffering at the hands of Bárbara, Soledad literally becomes a martyr and sacrifices her life and her youth for the people she cares about.

Figure 4.5 Soledad dies like a martyr.

Purita from *Cuidado con el ángel* is also presented as a martyr. Purita is a nickname for Purificacion and her name, as previously mentioned, means purity or purification. Since her mother is constantly judged for being a former prostitute, Purita decides that the only way to purify her mother’s sins is to become a nun. She sacrifices her happiness with Adrian for her mother. During the week of analysis (February 27-March 4), Adrian comes back to town after a period of absence in order to stop Purita from going through the religious vows to become a nun. After they get married, Adrian becomes disappointed when Purita is unable to conceive a child.
Heusinkveld explains that Mexicans glorify motherhood, and place mothers on a pedestal like *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (40). Purita decides to pray to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (Figure 4.7):

> Blessed Mother, you know that I place my trust in you. Please help me. I want to have Adrian’s child. I need to have a child in order for our happiness to be complete. I don’t know why I haven’t been able to conceive. I beg of you. I want to have a child. Please Blessed Mother, please help me with what I most desire—to have a baby.¹²

Figure 4.7 Purita prays to the Virgin Mary.

This situation creates a strain in Purita and Adrian’s relationship since the *marianismo* model states that “it is actual motherhood that symbolically redeems woman from her fall from purity and restores her ‘virgin-like’ status” (Tate 100). Therefore, even though she did not go through with her vows to become a nun, she has found a different way to restore her “virgin-like” status. Adrian and Purita ultimately decide to adopt a child. Purita’s character demonstrates that although characters from other telenovelas are trying to create female characters who have careers and are not just defined by being a mother, but the more traditional telenovelas still have characters who define their complete happiness by being able to become mothers.

Another *marianista* character from *Cuidado con el ángel* is Marichuy. Marichuy is a nickname for Maria de Jesus. Jesus is a common Mexican name and Chuy is a nickname for Jesus. Unlike the other characters from the show, the local priest, Padre Anselmo, always refers
to her by her full name. He chose her name after she was left by her mother, Cecilia, in an orphange when she was a baby. Because she was orphaned, the priest chose to give her a spiritual name reflecting the two most sacred figures in Catholicism: Jesucristo ("Jesus Christ") and La Virgen Maria ("The Virgin Mary"). By doing this, Padre Anselmo established her spiritual parentage. On numerous occasions he blesses Marichuy:

I bless you Maria de Jesus. You are a noble girl with a good heart, and you have Jesus Christ, our heavenly father, as your own name. You have learned to pick yourself up time and time again against adversities, becoming stronger every day.13

During the pilot episode of this telenovela, Marichuy steals milk for the little girls at the orphanage characterizing her as a very noble orphan girl with a rebellious spirit. Characters on several occasions remark, "Be careful with the angel" ("cuidado con el ángel") when referring to Marichuy since she frequently gets into mischief. For example, she steals roses from her neighbor’s garden to offer flowers to La Virgen de Guadalupe (Figure 4.8). Marichuy is thus the "ángel" in the telenovela’s title. Others like Juan Miguel refer to Marichuy as his noble and good angel who has saved his soul. And during the ending credits of the telenovela, Marichuy is seen riding her bike and then for a few seconds she stops in front of a wall that has angel wings painted on it, insinuating that Marichuy is an angel (Figure 4.9).
As this telenovela progresses, Marichuy becomes less rebellious but continues to be naïve and self-sacrificing, placing the needs of others before her own. During the February 25, 2009 episode, Juan Miguel’s fiancée Blanca asks Marichuy to forget about Juan Miguel because she, unlike Marichuy, has no friends or family and needs him. Because of this, Marichuy decides to reject Juan Miguel so he can take care of Blanca. Thus, Marichuy is presented as a stronger character. However, in every episode that was analyzed she is constantly seen suffering for the man she loves, wishing she was with Juan Miguel. As mentioned previously, self-sacrificing and suffering is a common narrative element in telenovelas. The more the series progresses, the more she suffers. She becomes more vulnerable, selfless and naïve, even befriendng Ana Julia who turns out to be a false friend that betrays her.

Marichuy’s confidante Candelaria is also a pure, good marianista character. Mexicans practice the custom of giving their children religious names. Candelaria’s name derives from the Latin candela, “candle,” and refers to the Catholic feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary—the feast of Candlemas. In addition to Padre Anselmo comforting Marichuy with the word of God, Candelaria who raised Marichuy when she was abandoned by her mother, reminds
Marichuy, “Dios aprieta, pero no ahorca” (“God squeezes, but he doesn’t choke”). Candelaria always comforts Marichuy when she sees her suffering and crying over Juan Miguel (Figure 4.10). This religious saying reminds the audience that Marichuy will receive her happy ending one day even though she often suffers.

In addition to Candelaria, Mariana, whose name is a variant of Maria, is an angel that appears to her granddaughter Mayita. Mayita goes with her dog to the attic of her house, which turns into a magical room in almost every episode—illustrating fairytales, religious stories, or life lessons she teaches Mayita (Figure 4.11). When Mariana explains to Mayita the story of Little Red Riding Hood, the attic becomes a magical forest. When she is teaches her how to sew or cook the room changes into an imaginary kitchen. Her primary function is to teach her granddaughter how to be a young lady who has good morals and noble characteristics.

In the telenovela’s Manichean view of social roles, one can see that the noble characters are more spiritual, as embodied in the archetype of La Virgen de Guadalupe. As Stevens mentions, marianismo is seen as “a cult of superiority that demarcates that Latin American woman as the spiritual and morally superior of the sexes” (4). The Malinche archetype, on the other hand, can be said to embody the other side of the opposition, the evil, material world. As a
result, woman must transcend the sexuality associated with *La Malinche* in order to become pure, spiritual woman and mothers.

Every telenovela has at least one villainous female character. *Las tontas no van al cielo* has two: Marissa and Alicia. Marissa uses her pregnancy to keep Santiago by her side and to force him to marry her even though he is in love with Candy. During the March 3rd episode, Marissa sets up a camera in Candy’s office to spy on her. When she sees Santiago declare his love for Candy and is willing to leave Marissa for her, Marissa vows revenge on both of them. Marissa decides that she will leave Santiago after their wedding day (if he ends up marrying her), and will give away Santiago’s baby. Episodes later Santiago leaves Marissa at the altar after Candy overhears Marissa’s evil plans. After Marissa’s baby is born, she gives her baby to Alicia who is trying to trap Patricio, Candy’s other suitor. Marissa also lies to Santiago and tells him that the baby died. This demonstrates that she not only lacks maternal instincts, but also uses her pregnancy for evil purposes, as is common in telenovelas (Tate 104). She uses her pregnancy to get a man, and when this does not work, she uses her pregnancy to hurt a man. During the debut episode of *Las tontas no van al cielo*, Alicia seduces Patricio the night before his wedding to Candy. On her wedding day, she makes sure Candy sees her kissing her husband. After Candy fakes her death, Alicia marries Patricio. Years later, Candy returns and now Alicia wants to force Patricio to stay with her. During the March 3rd episode, Alicia tries to blackmail Patricio’s father. If he does not help her get Patricio back, then she will make sure he goes to jail for his illegal business transactions. When blackmailing does not work, Alicia tries to seduce Patricio to get pregnant in order to use the pregnancy to force Patricio to stay with her. Since she fails to get pregnant, she uses Marissa’s baby and pretends that it’s Patricio’s baby. Again, this demonstrates how the seductress tries to use maternity for evil purposes.
While Marissa and Alicia try to use a pregnancy to force a man to stay with them, Priscila from *Mañana es para siempre* tries to get pregnant because she wants more power. She wants to merge the family fortunes and names. She tries to seduce her husband since he is not interested in having a child. When her husband turns out to be sterile she decides to betray her husband and get pregnant by sleeping with another man and pretending it’s her husband’s baby.

Bárbara from *Mañana es para siempre* is a seductress/ betrayer who follows another man’s orders. Everything she does against the Elizalde family is directly ordered by Artemio (Figure 4.12). He orders Bárbara to murder Gonzalo’s wife, seduces Gonzalo, and marries him. She also needs to make sure Soledad, the family nanny, keeps silent about everything she knows dealing with Bárbara and Artemio’s evil actions and plans. Besides murdering and blackmailing other characters, she also seduces her stepdaughter’s future husband in order to use him to betray the Elizalde family and steal the company’s finances. Bárbara embodies every negative characteristic of *La Malinche*—a seductress, betrayer, who follows a man’s orders.

Figure 4.12 Bárbara receiving orders from Artemio.

Bárbara’s name comes from the word barbaric or barbarian, and the poor, noble Elizalde employees who know Bárbara’s true nature nickname her “La Hiena” (“hyena”). Telenovela characters often use this nickname to describe cruel, treacherous, and greedy characters. Just as
Bábrara has a duplicitous nature, the Mexican expression “¡Que Bábrara!” has two meanings depending on the intonation and the context in which it is used: either “How despicable!” or “How fantastic!” That is, it can mean being shocked by someone’s cruel actions, or it can mean that someone is in awe of how incredibly well someone has performed a certain action. This expression can also be used to explain Bábrara’s duplicitous nature. While others see her as a good character who has saved the family company, in reality she is a villain whose mission is to ultimately destroy the company and the whole family through lies, betrayal, and murder.

Estefanía from Cuidado con el ángel is also a seductress who uses her femininity in order to climb the social ladder. After rejecting Israel for being poor, he comes back months later at Nelson’s funeral and is now a doctor. Since she was not able to marry Juan Miguel, she tries to seduce Israel because he is now a rich man. During Nelson’s funeral in the March 3rd episode, she tells Marichuy’s father that she will not be praying at Nelson’s funeral because she is not a religious woman and does not believe in God, which is the opposite characteristic from the faithfully religious marianista characters. By the end of the episode, Estefanía has a soliloquy in which she thanks Nelson for having died because he brought Israel back in her life and now has one more chance at becoming rich. She ends her soliloquy by selfishly saying, “Why didn’t you die sooner?”

Out of all the characters in three telenovelas, Blanca/Ivette from Cuidado con el ángel best embodies both sides of the binary opposition: La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche. Blanca has a double personality. Blanca, whose name means white, personifies the good, sweet and timid virginal character (Figure 4.13). She is Mayita’s nanny and Juan Miguel’s fiancée. However, they have never had sexual relations. At night she turns into the sexually promiscuous seductress Ivette (Figure 4.14). She enjoys taunting and seducing Leopardo, Marichuy’s other
suitor. When Ivette realizes that Leopardo is in love with Marichuy, she attempts to murder Marichuy during the March 3rd episode. Since she is unable to find Marichuy, she attempts to murder Leopardo because she prefers to see him dead than be with another woman. In this case, Blanca/Ivette exemplifies Fiske’s point that a character can have “excessive meaning, extraordinary semiotic power, and acts as a mediator between two opposing concepts” (133).

After many episodes of suffering with her dual personality, Blanca is finally cured. Ivette is no longer a part of her, and she is no longer the timid and weak Blanca she once was. She becomes a strong, independent woman who knows what she wants. She ends up marrying the man she loves, Leopardo. As a result, she becomes the ultimate mediator between both sides of the opposition, offering a possible solution. A character who embodies the positive aspects of both oppositions. She becomes a strong and nurturing woman transcending the cultural stereotypes.

Figure 4.13 Blanca.  
Figure 4.14 Ivette.

**Marianismo vs. Machismo**

While the first binary opposition relies on the virgin and whore dichotomy, the next set of binary oppositions examines the differences between two different gender roles: Marianismo and Machismo. This binary opposition is considered the central gender roles themes that influence gender identities for Mexicans (Kulis et.al 260). Even though some Mexicans deviate from these
expected gender roles, *marianismo* and *machismo* continue to be promoted and endorsed within Mexican culture (LeVine, S. et. al 184), and the telenovelas is one cultural medium that portrays both gender roles.

Like *marianismo*, *machismo* is rooted in Mexican history and holds both positive and negative characteristics. *Machismo* comes from the word *macho*, meaning “to know” or “be known,” which has its roots in the Aztec language, Nahuatl. Before the Spaniards came to colonize Mexico, the term *machismo* had positive connotations. *Macho* men were respected in their culture for being strong, brave, and just men who took care of their family and friends (Dueñas 20-21). The negative characteristics of *machismo* came after the Spaniards colonized Mexico. During this time, the indigenous men “lost their name, their religion, their spirituality, their culture, their families, their identities, self respect, and their ability to control their destiny” (Dueñas 21). Since the men felt angry and ashamed that they no longer had power in their society, they placed their power on the people they were able to control—their families (Dueñas 22). From then on, the negative aspects of *machismo* became more prevalent: “perpetration of and tolerance of domestic violence, infidelity, abandonment of children, intransigence in male-to-male relationships, alcoholism, and aggressive and risk-taking behaviors” (Kulis et.al 260). Furthermore, being a *mujeriego* (“womanizer”) is a common characteristic of *machismo*. The roots of this unfaithfulness are also in the humiliation the indigenous Mexicans felt because of the conquistadores. Because of this Spanish conquest, Paz argues that Mexican men believe that every woman is like *La Malinche*, and thus every woman is a traitor (Paz 86). As a result, men believe that the only way to reclaim their manhood is to dominate women.

Camilo from *Mañana es para siempre* and Amador from *Cuidado con el ángel* exemplify the negative characteristics of *machismo*. Camilo sleeps with his girlfriend Erika and then cheats
on her with various women. When Camilo’s sister Fernanda confesses to Erika that she is still a virgin and will wait until the day she is married, Erika tells Fernanda that maybe things would be different with Camilo if she hadn’t slept with him. If she were still a virgin, she would be taken more seriously by Camilo. Then, on Fernanda’s wedding day, Camilo brings another woman to the wedding. As a result, Erika gets drunk and flirts with Eduardo and tells Camilo to leave her alone. Camilo gets upset and takes her away from the party and starts physically abusing Erika (Figure 4.15-4.16). He starts shouting, “You stupid woman! Never Erika! Never dare to talk to me like that ever again! Is that clear?! Never! I will give you a lesson you will never forget.”

When Prisicala takes Camilo’s brother Aníbal to stop Camilo, he angrily tells Aníbal, “She asked for it!” (Figure 4.16). His character shows a jealous, unfaithful machista who physically abuses his girlfriend. Machismo can denote a tendency towards violent behavior and dominance through various sexual conquests (Fervert and Miranda 298). Men are allowed to have various sexual relationships, but women must be faithful to one man. Amador, for example, sleeps with various women in Cuidado con el ángel, and even attempts to rape the pure, virginal Marichuy. Damián, from Mañana es para siempre, on the other hand, sleeps with Bárbara while
being engaged and then married to the pure, sweet, virgin Fernanda. After they are married, their various attempts to consummate the marriage fail, because Fernanda wants to find the right time for this occasion, but never finds it. Damian never forces Fernanda since he has Bárbara as a mistress on the side.

Eduardo, Fernanda’s first love, exemplifies the original, positive characteristics of *machismo*—a strong and courageous man who fights for justice (Dueñas 21). After his mother Soledad dies, the rest of the telenovela consists of him trying to find ways to seek justice for every evil action that Bárbara has done against the people he most cares about. The opening credits which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter shows their confrontation (See Figures 5.23-5.28 from Chapter 5).

Marichuy from *Cuidado con el ángel* has both positive and negative characteristics of *marianismo*. She is a strong woman who tries to be independent by becoming a theatre actress to support her, her baby and her friend Candelaria. However, the two men who are in love with her keep trying to convince her to leave the theatre and dedicate her life to staying at home and solely taking care of her child. Her storylines revolve around her struggling to decide which man to choose and whether she should keep working as an actress. Therefore, Juan Miguel and Leopardo in this sense, have some negative aspects of machismo—a tendency to be controlling and dominating a relationship. This negative aspect of *machismo* centers on the belief that women should be in the private sphere while men remain the public sphere (Acosta-Alzuru, “I’m Not a Feminist,” 275). In other words, men are able to have careers and work outside of their household, while women are obligated to stay at home with their children.

Even though Candy from *Las tontas no van al cielo* cares about her son, she still has trouble forgiving her son’s father’s infidelity. Candy now has two suitors: her husband Patricio
who once cheated on Candy with her sister Alicia and the plastic surgeon Santiago who is trying
to change his womanizing tendencies (Figure 4.17). Before Santiago met Candy, he had a bell
outside his office that he would ring so the secretary would be aware that he was about to have
sex with one of his patients. Therefore, both men continue to be *mujeriegos*, since Patricio goes
back and forth between Candy and Alicia and Santiago goes back and forth between Candy and
Marissa. Furthermore, while Santiago works in his clinic, which is dedicated to changing
women’s outer beauty through plastic surgery, Candy is dedicated to promoting inner beauty at
her institute. In this case, she does not embody the negative aspect of *marianismo*. Candy is not
the patient and forgiving woman who is trapped in a bad relationship.

Figure 4.17 Promotional photo for *Las tontas*.

Most of the women working at the institute are dedicated to changing the lives of other
women, while working on their own problems as well. However, during several episodes,
*marianista* characters stop by the institute seeking different kinds of advice. These women
usually embody the negative aspects of *marianismo*. For example, during the February 25
episode, a female character asks the woman at the institute for advice. Her husband is
emotionally abusive, mistreats her and constantly takes her for granted, but she, in turn, is always
patient with him and forgives him every time. After her first visit, she learns to stand up to her
husband, but consequently he ends up leaving her. She goes back the following day and threatens to sue the institute. While she is talking to the Bárbara, the psychologist at the institute, and Chayo, she explains that without her husband she has no meaning and purpose.

Francis: What will I do without him? Life for me no longer has any purpose.
Bárbara: What do you mean it no longer has any purpose?
Francis: No. No. Life for me no longer has any meaning?
Bárbara: Do you feel empty without your husband that mistreats you?
Francis: It’s because I prefer to be mistreated than feel alone because I can’t stand being alone.
Bárbara: Francis, think about what you are telling me. You prefer to be mistreated and abused than to be alone?
Francis: It’s because I love my husband so much.
Bárbara: Forgive me Francis, but that is not love. It’s dependency.17

Bárbara helps Francis see that she is emotionally dependent on her husband, lacks self esteem, and is not in a healthy relationship. Chayo, who is also present during the conversation, also mentions that she finally understands the importance of being emotional independent, but in the following scene Chayo is visibly still afraid to leave her unhealthy marriage. The next scene shows her working with the people at the institute, learning how to become emotionally independent of her husband. While Francis is improving her self-image, Chayo confesses to Bárbara that she thinks she wouldn’t know what to do if her husband Eduardo left her. This scene is meant to foreshadow what will happen in the following week’s episode when Chayo catches Eduardo cheating on her again during the last scene of that episode. The March 3rd episode that follows that cliffhanger shows Santiago’s secretary stopping Eduardo from going after Chayo. She lectures Eduardo:

Hortencia: Please let her go and then you can go and tell her the truth. Tell her the truth!
Eduardo: What truth?!
Hortencia: That you are sick. Because only a sick person can go out with so many women.
Eduardo: I am not sick. I am just a man.
Hortencia: If you were *really* a man, you'd be faithful to one woman. But you don’t know how to love.\(^{18}\)

The following scene shows Chayo asking Eduardo for a divorce instead of forgiving him and tells him that he destroyed any last bit of love she had for him. Eduardo can’t believe Chayo is asking for a divorce because he tells Chayo, “This isn’t the first time that it happens. Don’t make a tragedy out of this.”\(^{19}\) While it is acceptable for Mexican men to have affairs, Fervert and Miranda explain that “The ideal Latin woman is sexually pure, holy, caring, maternal, peaceable, faithful, handmaiden to the Lord and subservient to the will of a masculine God” (298-299). In the next scene, Eduardo promises that he won’t be unfaithful anymore. When Chayo responds by telling him, “Candy is right. The only promise a man can keep is that of being faithful to being unfaithful.”\(^{20}\) His response is, “My love, you say it like if a one night stand is the end of the world.”\(^{21}\) When Chayo angrily tells Eduardo that she has cheated on him too with his best friend, Santiago, Eduardo gets very upset:

**Chayo:** Why are you getting upset over a one night stand? It’s not like it’s the end of the world.

**Eduardo:** No, this is worse than the end of the world. Don’t you understand? You cheated on me?\(^{22}\)

Chayo then tells him that she lied in order to make him understand what she feels when he cheats on her. She tries to make him understand that being unfaithful is wrong no matter which gender does the cheating. However, the negative characteristics of machismo include the belief that men are superior to women and have more rights than them (Acosta-Alzuru, “I’m Not a Feminist,” 275) and thus Eduardo’s outrage is quite predictable.

Future episodes show her forgiving him until he makes another mistake. This time in order to make him upset Chayo makes sure Eduardo overhears her telling her friend that she was not a virgin when she married Eduardo. She slept with many men before him. This lie upsets
Eduardo since *machismo* men expect women to remain virgins until they are married. Chayo and Eduardo eventually make up again. This becomes a never-ending cycle for this couple. Later episodes also show Chayo trying to get pregnant. As a result of these characteristics, Chayo embodies the negative characteristics of a *marianismo*, showing a woman who endures being mistreated by her husband and is still willing to conceive his child. Therefore, both the negative characteristics of both *machismo* and *marianismo* reinforce the patriarchy in Mexico.

**Poor vs. Rich**

The last binary opposition that was seen in all three telenovelas is poor vs. rich. Casas Pérez explains that “stereotypes are still used to generate preferred meanings, and a basic element of telenovelas in relation to Mexican cultural identity remains: poor, honest characters suffer injustice at the hands of the elite” (412). This is clearly seen in *Mañana es para siempre*. The poor, noble employees at the Elizalde ranch suffer injustices at the hand of Bábara. As mentioned before, Soledad must live a life of solitude in order to keep the people she cares about safe. After she dies, Jacinto, Margarita and Gardenia must also lie to keep their jobs and their home. In addition to Bábara, Camilo Elizalde also mistreats his worker Jacinto at the Elizalde ranch because he feels entitled and superior to him. A flashback scene shows Camilo whipping Jacinto because he did not have time to feed Camilo’s horses (Figure 4.18-4.19). After Camilo finishes whipping him he tells Jacinto, “When I give you an order, you obey it.”23 Fifteen years later, when Eduardo returns and sees the scars, Jacinto tells Eduardo that he forgives Camilo because Camilo was only a kid when the incident occurred and did not realize what he was doing. And yet, even so many years after the incident, Jacinto continues to suffer physical abuse. After Eduardo sees the scars, Camilo appears and tells Jacinto that if he does not follow his orders effectively, then he will suffer the consequences. This shows the contrasting relationship
between the poor and the rich. Jacinto is good and forgiving, but Camilo is unforgiving and abusers his power to punish the noble characters.

Figure 4.18-4.19 Camilo whipping Jacinto (in flashback).

Figure 4.20 Camilo threatens Jacinto.  Figure 4.21 Jacinto’s scars

As a child Jacinto suffered physical abuse from the elitist Camilo. Eduardo, on the other hand, suffered emotionally because of his low socio-economic status. As a child he was in love with Fernanda. However, she was rich and he was poor. His mother, Soledad, tries to discourage Eduardo from dreaming of marrying Fernanda because of their socio-economic difference:

Soledad: My son, you are at an age where you can understand that there are things that are impossible. It’s time for you to get use to the idea that there is a great distance between you and Fernanda that not even God can cut. She is rich. You are poor. Never forget that.
Eduardo: But what does that have to do with anything?
Soledad: It means everything Eduardo, whether you understand it or not.²⁴
After Eduardo is forced to leave town because of Bárbara, he eventually graduates with a Master’s degree in Business, and starts running a successful business in hopes of earning Fernanda’s hand in marriage. When he returns he discovers that Fernanda is marrying a rich man. After his mother Soledad dies he vows to seek justice for everything his friend and family has suffered and wants revenge against the elite Elizalde family. While Jacinto is never able to become an equal with the elite Elizalde family, Eduardo assumes a new identity. He pretends to be a successful businessman, which helps him get close to Bárbara and the Elizalde family. Because of his education, he is able to become one of them, and will eventually marry the rich woman he loves.

While Jacinto and his family work hard at the ranch and are presented as noble and honest characters, Aníbal, Camilo’s brother, tries to help his family business by marrying the daughter of the rival business owners. He does not marry out of love, but out of convenience. He receives information from his wife and performs unethical and illegal business transactions in order to become richer. This shows that the wealthy characters get money in dishonest ways instead of working hard like Eduardo has done. Similarly, Aníbal’s wife also married for convenience. She wants to merge the family names and the family fortunes by having a son that will eventually have power over both businesses. She also finds unethical ways to achieve her desire to have more power. When she realizes her husband is sterile, she cheats on her husband in order to get pregnant. While Priscila and Aníbal perform unscrupulous actions for power, Jacinto is presented as someone who loves his wife Gardenia and is willing to do anything for her and the people he loves.

Another common rich/poor storyline in telenovelas deals with the poor girl who falls for a rich man. In Cuidado con el ángel, the poor and noble orphan girl Marichuy falls in love with
the rich psychologist Juan Miguel. Other poor characters include her confidante Candelaria, and people from her neighborhood. Some of the upper and middle class characters do not accept Marichuy because she is a poor, uneducated woman with no family name. But the local priest, Padre Anselmo, is friends with the rich and poor characters because in this telenovela people from all social economic levels are religious. While these rich characters do not accept her because she does not have a family name, during the February 25th episode, Marichuy is upset that Juan Miguel has legally given their son his last name. Since she is angry at Juan Miguel because of how he treated her in the past, she refuses to let her son become a part of his life. In addition, after Marichuy finds out that she is a daughter of an affluent family, she also refuses to become part of their family. Although Marichuy’s mother seeks her forgiveness and wants Marichuy to live with her, Marichuy’s father, on the other hand, does not want to accept Marichuy because of her lack of manners, education, and rebellious nature. However, during the series finale episode that was broadcast in March on Televisa, Marichuy marries Juan Miguel once again, but this time she has accepted her rich family and their name.

Las tontas no van al cielo was the only telenovela studied that did not include a story of a poor character and a rich character falling in love. All the characters belong to an upper middle or rich class. However, there are two poor, uneducated restaurant workers in the telenovela who are in scenes only to provide moments of comedic relief when talking to the richer, more educated characters.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine closely the linear storylines of the previous chapter, in order to explore and examine the character types that are placed in binary oppositions in these telenovelas. These binary oppositions are derived from the idea that “the meaning of a character in a myth is determined by an opposition motivated by the particular experiences of the
society that produced the myth” (Wright 21). In Mexican culture, the experiences that the Mexican society faced during the times of the Spanish conquest of Mexico primarily created the cultural myths of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and *La Malinche*. These myths are now seen embedded within the text of telenovelas, which are considered modern-day adaptations of those myths. Telenovelas’ producers are clearly aware of Mexican history and the cultural values and beliefs of Mexicans. Telenovelas constantly use archetypes that the audience will easily recognize as distinctly noble or distinctly villainous. And the repetitive use of these character roles helps to ensure that the binary oppositions within the show are effectively communicated to its audience. The *marianista* characters are the pure, self-sacrificing women who are based on the religious figure, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. The villains, on the other hand, are primarily the seductresses who are based on the woman who betrayed its Mexican people, *La Malinche*—the Mexican Eve. The second binary oppositions, marianismo vs. machismo, are based on gender roles that are enforced in the Mexican culture. However, as explained above, both gender roles have positive and negative characteristics. The last binary opposition—poor vs. rich—shows how these telenovelas typically present the poor characters as people who suffer at the hands of the selfish and entitled upper class characters. However, when poor characters fall in love with rich characters, in the end, the narrative illustrates that they are able to transcend their social barriers in order to be happy. The last analytical chapter will explore how the title sequences, which are presented on a daily basis, are used to both set up the syntagmatic structure and reiterate the paradigmatic sets that have been analyzed in this thesis, as well as looking at how the title sequences are used as promotional tools for their telenovela actors and singers.
CHAPTER 5

JUDGING TELENOVELAS BY THEIR TITLE SEQUENCES

Title sequences are microcosms of the narrative elements of telenovelas. They are used to establish and re-establish the syntagmatic structure and the paradigmatic sets of the serial on a daily basis. Thus, the functions and binary oppositions that were previously analyzed appear in the title sequences in an intense, condensed format. Title sequences can also be compared to the “the cover of books and magazines” (Jacobs 438). In this case, the audience might judge whether or not to watch a telenovela based on its title sequence. Viewers may be attracted to the telenovela because it has their favorite stars, or because it is made by their favorite telenovela writers and producers. The telenovela star system plays a stronger role in Mexico than the star system for soap operas does in the US. Consequently, telenovela actors are promoted much more aggressively in title sequences than their counterparts in the US are. Telenovela title sequences also rely more heavily on songs, with lyrics, that contemporary US television programs—both daytime and primetime. These telenovela songs, performed by some of the most famous musicians in Mexico, not only let viewers know that their favorite telenovela is about to begin, but they also communicate what the narrative is about and set the mood for the serial.

Chapter five looks both at how meaning is conveyed to the viewer through the theme songs and images of the title sequences and it looks at how telenovelas’ title sequences are used as promotional tools incorporating telenovela stars and Latin Americans singers. Once again, the specific telenovelas to be analyzed are Las tontas no van al cielo, Cuidado con el angel, and
Mañana es para siempre, indicating more clearly how the functions of the narrative and the binary oppositions (which were analyzed in Chapters 2 and Chapter 3) are revealed in the images and songs of their 90-second title sequences.

**Title Sequences—Microcosms of Narrative Elements**

When Grisprud analyzes the title sequence of the primetime US serial, Dynasty, he explains that one of the functions of the musical score is to help “smooth the visual ‘shocks’ provided by the fast-paced montage of so many narratively incoherent images” (194-195). However, musical themes of telenovelas serve more purposes for the viewer. As we will see later on in this chapter, they do serve as a marketing tool for the producers and singers and provide a sense of enjoyment for the viewer who is able to listen to their favorite singer or song. More importantly, however, the lyrics of theme songs reveal to the audience the telenovela’s storyline in a mostly chronological way, and also reveal the main themes of these serials. For example, the lyrics for *Mañana es para siempre* state:

> The soul brought us together  
> With just a kiss as a witness.  
> Every beat promised  
> That you would be with me always.  
> Now everything has changed  
> Because you have followed another path.  
> Although my life stayed all in your lips… all with you.  
> I beg you with my soul to remember  
> That you swore you would never lose me.  
> We promised this would never end  
> Because tomorrow is forever.\(^{25}\)

The story centers on the main noble characters, the rich Fernanda and the poor Eduardo, who fall in love when they are children. They are then separated by Bábara, the villain of the telenovela, after they first kiss (Figure 5.1). But according to the lyrics, they are meant to be together: “The soul brought us together with just a kiss as witness.” Fifteen years later Eduardo comes back a
successful business man, but Fernanda is engaged to another man (Figure 5.2), which is explained in the lyrics “Now everything has changed because you have followed another path.”

Figure 5.1 Fernanda and Eduardo kiss for the first time. Figure 5.2 Fernanda marrying Damián.

After Eduardo finds out that he was separated from his mother Soledad for 15 years not only because Bárbara falsely accused Eduardo of molesting Fernanda when they kissed for the first time, but also because Soledad witnessed Bárbara murdering Fernanda’s mother. The rest of the telenovela deals with the numerous obstacles they must overcome in order to be together again, which is revealed in the second half of the lyrics. Both characters hold on to the first and last kiss they shared as children, which is revealed with the lyrics, “Although my life stayed in your lips… all with you.” In the end, the song is one of hope since the lyrics indicate that “Tomorrow is forever,” which reiterates to the audience both the name of the telenovela and signifies that with every episode these characters have a new chance of being together again. The last shot of the title sequence shows Fernanda and Eduardo together again, indicating that the noble characters will, eventually, triumph over the villains of the telenovela (Figure 5.3). The noble marianista and the machista who presented the positive attributes of a machista overcome the obstacles presented by the seductress Malinche of the telenovela. It also shows that poor characters and rich characters can transcend socio-economic barriers to be happy.
Figure 5.3 The last shot of *Mañana*’s title sequence.

The theme song for *Las tontas no van al cielo* also reveals the main storylines and themes of the telenovela. The lyrics explain the person that Candy has become as a result of her husband’s infidelities:

One second in this life can change your course,
Clip your wings to slowly bring your world down.
Love is the disguise that will leave you in limbo.
Get rid of fear.
It’s never late to start.
Don’t be afraid to love again.
What I want is a love that knows that I am not a rug or step.
What I want is a love that knows I’m not just a person with dignity and conviction.
I want a love that knows what I am,
That I have a heart filled with passion and desires.
That is what I am.26

Candy is happy with Patricio until she sees her sister Alicia kiss him on their wedding day. Alicia has also seduced and slept with Patricio the night before their wedding. Candy leaves her husband and declares that she will not let anyone abuse her (Figure 5.4). Santiago’s wife also leaves him and their daughter behind to go advance her career in New York. As a result, he becomes a single father (Figure 5.5). This explains why the beginning of the song says, “One second in your life can change your course. Clip your wings to slowly bring your world down.”
After Candy and Santiago are left devastated, years later they find each other and fall in love (Figure 5.6), which is explained by the second half of the lyrics, “It’s never too late to start. Don’t be afraid to love again.” But their lives are affected differently by their loss. Santiago becomes a womanizer and now struggles to be faithful to one woman. Candy becomes an independent woman who constantly reminds the viewers that she does not have a vocation to be a rug and will not allow anyone to step all over her again. This is revealed through the lyrics, “What I want is a love that knows that I am not a rug or a step.” The rest of the telenovela deals with Candy and Santiago trying to learn to love again while fighting the obstacles (erected by other characters) that get in their way of their happiness. The last lines of the lyrics state, “I want a love that knows what I am. That I have a heart filled with passion and desires. That is what I am.” This is why the last shots reveal Candy typing that she will no longer be a stupid woman who gets cheated on, and then reveal Candy in a very proud pose (Figures 5.7-5.8). This title sequence reveals a marianista character with positive qualities. She does not regret who she is.
Figure 5.6 Candy and Santiago find love again.

Figure 5.7-5.8 The last shots of Las tontas’ title sequence.

Like Mañana es para siempre and Las tontas no van al cielo, Cuidado con el angel’s theme song also reveals the main theme of the show.

There are memories that turn into tears.
I am afraid to fall in love again.
My voice has been lost, even my ability to speak.
With only hearing you, with only seeing you
Love begins again.
You are the light that is able to touch this heart.
There is no one more than you.
You light stars inside me.
Wherever you go, I will go.
It’s just that there’s no one else that looks at me like you.
Only you.
It’s you.
Only you.
It’s you.27
Unlike *Mañana* and *Las tontas*, whose main characters are happy at the beginning, but then have to face difficult obstacles to overcome, the lyrics for *Cuidado con el angel* reveal that at first Marichuy and Juan Miguel are unhappy until they finally find each other. Though the lyrics more specifically apply to the main couple, the images of the title sequence reveals that they can also be referring to Marichuy’s mother Cecilia, who abandoned her daughter Marichuy when she was a baby out of necessity, and now struggles to find her (Figures 5.9 and 5.10). The first part of the lyrics demonstrate this by saying, “There are memories that turn into tears.”

Figure 5.9 and 5.10 Marianista characters suffering.

Marichuy is finally happy after she meets and marries Juan Miguel, which is revealed in the lyrics “With only hearing you, with only seeing you. Love begins again.” Yet, the narrative and the lyrics can be said to undergo a repetitive cycle. After showing shots of Marichuy and Juan Miguel married and in love, they are followed by shots of Marichuy and Juan Miguel in tears (Figures 5.11-5.14). After their wedding night, Marichuy remembers that Juan Miguel was the man who tried to force himself on her when she was a young woman. This causes their separation and creates new memories filled with suffering. As mentioned in the narrative functions chapter, Marianistas suffer repeatedly and in an enormous variety of ways in telenovelas. They do not stop suffering until the last episode of the telenovela is aired. During the last episode the noble and virtuous marianistas are finally able to be with the men that they love.
Figures 5.11-5.14 Marichuy and Juan Miguel find love, only to lose it again.

In addition to Marichuy and Juan Miguel’s struggles, Cecilia discovers who her daughter is, but her happiness is short lived since Marichuy rejects Cecilia after Marichuy discovers that Cecilia is her mother. This again shows how the narrative of the telenovela is as cyclical as its lyrics. That being said, the last part of the lyrics ends on a positive note, “Wherever you go, I will go. It’s just that there’s no one else that looks at me like you. It’s you. Only you.” The last few shots show Cecilia carrying her grandson and Juan Miguel and Marichuy together again with their baby. The final shot shows Marichuy and Juan Miguel together, demonstrating yet again that by the end of the telenovela their love will conquer the terrible memories of the past (Figure 5.15). The song is also used repeatedly throughout the episodes in various ways,
typically when Marichuy sees Juan Miguel. Thus, this is not only the theme song of the show, but more specifically it is Marichuy and Juan Miguel’s love song.

Figure 5.15 The last shot of Cuidado’s title sequence.

Besides the theme songs of the title credits, the images also signify important aspects of these serials. The selected images are mostly taken directly from the diegeses of the episodes and are presented in under two minutes. These edited images represent the narrative structure and binary oppositions that are explained in the previous chapters. The title sequence reinforces these aspects in an intense, condensed form. Their purpose is to establish the story and the character archetypes to new viewers and re-establish these elements to the regular viewers.

The order of the images of Las tontas no van al Cielo are not presented according to the order of importance of the actors/characters. Rather, they reflect the narrative of the telenovela in a chronological fashion. The first few images show Candy accepting Patricio’s proposal, getting married, witnessing his betrayal, and ultimately leaving him. All these images are taken directly from the very first episode of the serial. Each subsequent shot is also presented almost entirely in the order in which they appear in the subsequent episodes. Camil’s character, Santiago, appears in a more prominent fashion during the rest of the title sequence, representing Candy’s new love interest. The rest of the shots represent the obstacles Candy and Santiago must overcome to be
together. Candy, Santiago, and Patricio are in almost every shot. The three villains of the
telenovela, Marissa (Figure 5.16), Alicia (Figure 5.17) and Paulina (Karla Alvarez), are the
second set of characters that appear frequently in the title sequence, since their function is to
obstruct the main characters’ happiness. Marissa is wearing lingerie in one of her shots,
establishing that she is the seductress of the show. Alicia is also shown in bed, having seduced
Patricio the night before. Thus, the functions that are repeatedly seen in this title sequence are
noble characters suffering, and love or seduction.

Figure 5.16 Marissa seducing Santiago  Figure 5.17 Alicia seducing Patricio

The images of the seductresses are placed in between the shots of the main characters, showing
the binary opposition of the more virginal and suffering marianista Candy vs. the seductresses of
the show. The remaining supporting characters are practically non-existent in the title sequence,
with the exception of a quick shot of Santiago’s mother, and Candy and Santiago’s children since
at that point of the series they are both single parents. This also meant to show a binary
opposition for Candy and Paulina. Candy cares for her son while juggling with her career.
Paulina, on the other hand, cares more about advancing her career, then of taking care of her
daughter.28 The beginning of the title sequence of Cuidado con el ángel is also edited to show the
debut episode of this telenovela. It is presented in a chronological fashion up until the point
where Marichuy and Juan Miguel first meet during the last scene of the debut episode. All
subsequent shots are not presented in a chronological fashion. Instead, they represent other sets of characters and storylines. But what all the images have in common is how these characters and storylines are directly connected to the main character, the *marianista* Marichuy. A supporting character such as Candelaria is shown comforting Marichuy, establishing that she is Marichuy’s confidante, and other images of Leopardo illustrate that he is Marichuy’s other suitor. Other shots present Marichuy working as an actress or taking care of her baby. These images are meant to represent a *marianista* who must juggle her career and her role as a mother. Images of Juan Miguel and Marichuy together are placed between the other storylines, reinforcing both the fact that they are the main couple and the obstacles they must overcome to be together in the end.

The primary functions of the narrative represented in the title sequence are noble characters suffering, especially the *marianista* character Marichuy, and male suitors falling in love with the main female protagonist. During this particular title sequence, the villains are not in any of the shots. As a result, it is also important to note that alterations of the images are made in the title sequence during the serial’s run in order to establish new narrative elements that have occurred in the telenovela. However, the shots always relate to the lyrics of the song, and two sets of images always remain the same in the various title sequences: Marichuy and Juan Miguel meeting for the first time (Figure 5.18) and the final shot of the opening sequence (See Figure 5.15). The final image is the most important thematically because it reveals that after an endless cycle of suffering, they will finally end up together. Incidentally, Marichuy is wearing angel wings in Figure 5.15, signifying her *marianista* characteristics and also revealing the meaning behind the name of the show.
While the title sequence for *Last tontas no van al cielo*, presents the story chronologically and *Cuidado con el ángel* presents the story according to the various storylines related to the protagonist Marichuy, the title sequence of *Mañana es para siempre* eschews narrative chronology and instead divides into sections highlighting groups of characters. The first few shots establish the love story of the main couple, Fernanda and Eduardo. The second shot of the title sequence shows Fernanda holding the necklace that Eduardo gave her when they were children. The subsequent shots reflect a flashback sequence that Fernanda has, showing the first kiss that Eduardo and Fernanda shared as children. The next group of images represent a dream sequence that Fernanda has, showing them together again. Then, the title of the telenovela is shown across the image of Eduardo holding the necklace Fernanda gave him when they were children. This reinforces the flashback sequence, reminding the viewer that one day they will be together again because, as the title explains, tomorrow is forever. Subsequently, images of Fernanda and Eduardo seeing each other again after being apart for 15 years are shown.

While the first part of the title sequence establishes the protagonists of the story. The second half of the title sequence shows the noble characters of the telenovela suffering at the hands of the villain of the telenovela, Bárbara. It thus indicates the binary opposition of noble
character vs. villain. In addition, out of all three title sequences, this one shows the most amount of narrative functions. Love, seduction, betrayal, murder, suffering, selfless acts, and confrontations are all seen throughout the shots. Before explaining the functions and binary oppositions, I must first point out that a black horse is in the very first shot of the entire title sequence, showing the actress Lucero’s (Bárbara) name across the image (See Figure 5.31). This is significant because the first shot in these sets of images shows Bárbara with a black horse in the background (Figures 5.19-5.20). The image of Bárbara with the black horse is shown repeatedly throughout the title sequence. These images precede shots of her character performing evil actions. First, she is seen about to murder Monserrat, and then confronting the marianista character Soledad (Figure 5.21). The image of Bárbara with the horse also precedes shots of Soledad’s death, reinforcing the binary opposition of the marianista dying because of the evil seductress. It is also important to note that at this point in the title sequence, the audience can hear one word of diegetic dialogue over the theme song. This diegetic word is taken from the episode of Soledad’s death. During this scene in the March 3rd episode, Eduardo painfully screams to his mother, “Mama!” This scene from the first week of the entire serial is placed in the title sequence since Soledad acts as the catalyst that causes Eduardo to seek revenge on Bárbara. Her death unleashes a cause-effect chain for the rest of the serial. Thus, the majority of the telenovela’s storylines are directly linked to this painful moment for the main character Eduardo. The act of revenge that is a direct cause of this moment shows both the function of suffering as well as once again showing the binary opposition of noble character vs. villian Another shot of the black horse (by itself) is shown before images of Bárbara having sex with Damián, Fernanda’s husband. These images of betrayal reinforce that the seductress cheats on her husband and the mujeresos cheat on their wives (Figure 5.22).
The black horse shows up one last time during the last part of the title sequence, but this time the black horse is galloping next to a white horse (Figures 5.23-5.28). The next few shots are not taken from diegesis of the episodes. They exist only in the title sequence. In these shots, both characters duel with each other, through provocative stances and stares. Eduardo represents the good characteristics of a *machista*, a man who is there to protect his friends and family. This contrasts with the villain who seduces, betrays, and murderous the noble characters.
Unlike the title sequence for *Las tontas no van al cielo*, this title sequence does show images of the supporting characters. However, they are not shown as frequently as Bárbara, Eduardo and Fernanda. Shots of rich, affluent characters drinking champagne, dressed in expensive clothes, are shown next to shots of the poor, noble characters in work clothes, hugging each other (Figures 5.29-5.30). These images establish the binary opposition of poor vs. rich. Activities of the wealthy, such as horse racing, are also juxtaposed against pictures of poor
characters at a cantina (a bar or pub). In this cantina, women mud wrestle. Eduardo chooses this location to talk to his friend Jacinto about his plans to stop Bárbara from hurting more people. This is the only location where the affluent characters would never enter, which again establishes the rich vs. poor binary opposition. And the last shot of the title sequence shows Fernanda and Eduardo together, which is meant to foreshadow that they will overcome their social class difference (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.29-5.30 Rich vs. poor.

Title Sequences as Promotional Tools

In essence, the title sequence functions to express some of the characteristics of the telenovela—the functions and binary oppositions. But, of course, the sequences’ graphics also serve to introduce the main actors and central characters, as well as the creative crew of the show (Jacobs 438). The star status of telenovela actors in Mexico is comparable to those of movie stars in the US. Unlike the US, where actors or directors have reached “stardom” status once they have made successful films in Hollywood; in Mexico, actors reach “stardom” once they have made a successful telenovela. As Lopez further explains, “the great mass media icons are not movie stars, but telenovela stars” (258). This is in contrast to the relatively low status of soap opera actors in the US. While soap operas do generate stars, they rarely reach the same kind of
wide recognition as American movie stars because working on soap operas is considered less prestigious than being a film or theatre actor (Lopez 258). Telenovelas generate more stars than Mexican cinema does since Mexican cinema does not produce the same amount of successful films that telenovelas produce on a yearly basis. Telenovelas consistently produce more well received productions than the box office success of Mexican films. And fewer Mexican films than television programs are successfully exported to other countries (Beyerle 20).

Because of this, telenovelas produce the most well-known Mexican actors. Lopez also argues that this star system is created as a result of the narrative closure of the telenovela. While US soap operas lack narrative closure, telenovelas eventually have closure and “the need to establish closure often means that the community of the text is narratively subordinate to a stellar couple with whom the audience is clearly meant to identify” (259). As a result, the audience wants their stellar couple to stay together at the end of the serial, and they desire to continue seeing these actors’ appearance in future roles—even if this means seeing them as the main villain in a telenovela. For example, in Mañana es para Siempre, Bárbara is played by the Mexican actress/singer Lucero who is considered “La novia de Mexico” (“Mexico’s sweetheart”). She started her career in Televisa when she was only ten years old and her stage name was Lucerito. Since then, she has become the main star of various telenovelas on Televisa, won a Latin Emmy, starred in several Oil of Olay commercials, produced several musical records, and hosted telethons and the Latin Grammy awards two years in a row (2006, 2007). Her wedding to singer Manuel Mijares in 1997 was also televised live simultaneously on two networks, Televisa and Univision. Even though Lucero is a reprehensible villain in the telenovela, the very first shot of the entire telenovela title sequence shows her name, thus capitalizing on her star status (Figure 5.31).
Silvia Navarro (Fernanda), on the other hand, has the fourth credit in this title sequence even though she and her co-star Fernando Colunga are the main couple of this telenovela (Figure 5.2). Navarro graduated from TV Azteca’s acting school (Centro de Formación Actoral (CEFAC)) and has become the star of various telenovelas for the past 10 years. However, she received the first credit role in telenovelas that were produced by Televisa’s rival network, TV Aztec. Since Mañana es para Siempre is her first role as a protagonist for Televisa, she receives a different type of title credit, “La Presentación Protagónica de Silvia Navarro” (“The Presentation of Silvia Navarro as a Protagonist,” Figure 5.32).

Maite Perroni is also a singer and actress. Both she and Lucero, unlike Navarro, graduated from Televisa’s acting school, Centro de Educación Artística (CEA). While US
television networks do not have their own acting schools, Mexico’s Televisa has had great success using CEA to train its stable of stars. Indeed, it has a highly selective admission process—receiving as many as 7,000 applicants every year, with only 60 accepted. Those who are accepted do not pay tuition for this three year program, which accepts children as young as five years old, although the majority of the students are teenagers. This school ends up producing about 85% of the telenovela actors seen on Televisa (Juarez 4).

After Perroni studied at CEA, she made her acting debut on the successful telenovela Rebelde (2004-2006). Her musical group, RBD, became an international music success, selling almost 15 million albums worldwide (Juarez 4). Her band was launched off of the success of the telenovela Rebelde, whose storylines centers on teenagers in a pop band called Rebelde. Maite has websites dedicated to her both in English and Spanish. Because of her success as a singer and actress, Perroni plays the title character Marichuy and has the first credit in the title sequence of Cuidado con el ángel (Figure 5.33). Unlike Lucero, the shot of her character Marichuy has her on-screen credit superimposed over it.

Figure 5.33 Opening shot of Cuidado con el ángel.

Perroni has recorded three songs for this telenovela, which play repeatedly when Marichuy is either with Juan Miguel or when they have flashbacks about each other. As Lopez explains, “The telenovela star system has produced fascinating ancillary markets. Besides
stimulating the appearance of famous singers as characters, actors have also become singers and entertainers and have spilled out on to other programs and media” (271). For example, telenovela actors, like Perroni, appear in magazines such as TV y novelas (Figure 5.34). This Mexican magazine has photographs, articles, and interviews about the telenovela stars and the characters they portray (Pena 38). The same can be said for countless websites, and radio and TV shows, such as Univision’s El gorda y la flaca (1998- ), which is Mexico’s equivalent of Entertainment Tonight (1981- ) or Access Hollywood (1996- ). As a result of this star system, these Mexican actors have become household names. Hence, audience members have a particular interest in watching their favorite actors/singers in different telenovelas in title roles.

Figure 5.34 Cuidado con el ángel on the cover of TV y Novelas.

While Perroni and Lucero started as actresses and later launched their music careers, Jaime Camil from Las tontas no van al cielo started as a singer and host of TV shows. He became a famous telenovela actor when he received the title role as the object of Betty la fea’s (“Ugly Betty’s”) affection in the Mexican telenovela La fea mas bella (“The Ugly Most Lovely,” 2006). Because of the international success of this telenovela, Camile (Santiago) receives the first credit
in the telenovela Las tontas no van al cielo (Figure 5.35), which is produced by the same person who created La fella mas bella, Rosy Ocampo. However, Camil’s name is not aligned with his character. The first shot shows the characters Candy and Patricio. This is a result of the title sequence reflecting the chronological story of the telenovela. This shot is taken from the first scene of the first episode of this serial.

Figure 5.35 Opening shot of Las tontas no van al cielo.

Even though Lucero, Perroni and Camil receive the first credit for their telenovelas, there are still other important titles given to other actors working on these telenovelas, which are not seen in US soap operas. For example, some of the supporting characters of all three telenovelas get the title of “Actuaciones estelares”, which roughly translates as stellar or star performances (Figure 5.36). In other words, even though they do not have the main roles, their performances are considered outstanding and are central to the telenovela. Other supporting actors do not receive this title before their names. They just simply state “con los actors” (“with the actors”) and then the following shots just show their names (Figure 5.37). These supporting actors play characters that are not as central to the telenovelas, as the title sequence clearly signifies.
Besides receiving the first credit in the telenovela, the second most important title credit to receive in a telenovela is the honorary title of “primer actor” or “primera actriz,” which is roughly translated as leading actor or leading actress. In the US, when one thinks of a lead actor or actress, one is usually referring simply to a program’s protagonist, but in the telenovela, primer/primera refers to someone who has an extensive acting career in telenovelas spanning several decades, but who is usually not performing the main role. For example, in the movie, The Firm (1992) Gene Hackmen might be considered the primer actor based on his vast acting experience, despite the fact that Tom Cruise is the protagonist and receives top billing.

In addition to receiving the primer actor and primera actriz credit, when telenovela actors have not acted for a long period of time and come back to star in a telenovela they receive the prestigious title of “El Gran Regreso del Primer Actor” (“the great return of the lead actor”). Gran is more of an adjective, meaning great, but has turned into a title of recognition for established actors’ performances in telenovelas (see Rogelio Guerra’s on-screen credit in Mañana es para siempre, Figure 5.38). Such actors are considered the great leading men/women of their generation. Thus, the “great return of the lead actor” title is given to Rogelio Guerra in Mañana es para siempre because he had not acted in a telenovela for 13 years, and his career has
spanned decades. He became famous for his starring role opposite Veronica Castro in the most famous Mexican telenovela produced by Televisa, *Los ricos también lloran* (“The rich also cry,” 1979), which was successful both in Mexico and abroad (Figure 5.39). Thus, he receives this title as a sign of respect and admiration. This is also a sign of the Mexican culture’s great respect for their elders and people with professional status or a title (Heusinkveld 73).29

Figure 5.38 Rogelio Guerra’s on-screen credit in *Mañana*. Figure 5.39 DVD cover of *Los Ricos*

The final form of actor credits in Mexican telenovelas are similar to US TV shows—that of guest stars and special guest stars. Since telenovelas have characters who do not appear throughout the entire run of the telenovela, they get the title of “Actuación Especial” (“Special Performance”) if they come out during part of the run of the entire series or “Participación Especial” (“Special Participation,” Figure 5.40-5.41). For example, the well-known actress Karla Alvarez who plays Santiago’s ex-wife in *Las tontas no van al cielo* does not appear in episodes regularly and is identified as “Participación Especial de Karla Alvarez” or with the special participation of Karla Alvarez.
Figures 5.40-5.41 More examples of title credits.

Besides audience members having an interest in watching their favorite actors or actresses in these telenovelas, they also enjoy listening to their favorite musicians performing the theme songs, which become hit songs almost automatically. These songs are often times sold in compilation CDs and on iTunes. They are written specifically for the telenovelas, and are commonly sung by the main actresses of the telenovelas, such as Lucero, Perroni, or Veronica Castro. Perroni’s Latin pop group RBD had many successful albums whose songs were directly taken from the telenovela Rebelde and others that were being promoted on the telenovela. Another example is Castro, the main actress in Los ricos tambien lloran. She sang the theme song, which made her music career even more successful. Eventually, she went on to star in and sing the theme song of another telenovela, Rosa Salvaje (“Wild Rose,” 1987), which also became a hit song.

Other times the telenovela producers ask some of the most popular singers in Mexico and Latin America, such as Manuel Mijares (Lucero’s husband), Vicente Fernandez or Alejandro Fernandez to perform their songs. Vicente Fernandez performed the song “Para Siempre” (“Forever”) for Fuego en la Sangre (“Fire in the blood,” 2007), which won awards, including the 2008 Premios Oye award for best song for a telenovela, movie or series, and peaked at number
two on *Billboard*’s top Latin songs. In addition to Vicente Fernandez, Latin Grammy-winning Mexican singer and son of Vicente Fernandez, Alejandro Fernandez, performs the eponymous theme song for *Mañana es para siempre*. These theme songs are also performed during the yearly telenovela awards show, *Premios TV y Novelas*. As a result, one can say that the telenovelas and their title sequences are marketing tools for the actors, singers and producers of the telenovelas.

The first purpose of analyzing the title sequence of these telenovela is to demonstrate how meaning is visually communicated to the viewer in just a minute and a half. While previous telenovela scholars focus on the telenovela’s diegesis, it is clear that the title sequence is also an important aspect to analyze, especially since they are repeatedly shown before the start of every episode. They are meant to establish and reiterate the important storylines and character archetypes of these telenovelas. More specifically, these sequences of carefully chosen images illustrate the syntagmatic structure and paradigmatic relationships that are analyzed in prior chapters of this thesis. The second purpose of analyzing title sequences is to demonstrate how the theme songs, created specifically for the telenovelas, explain and enhance the main storyline of the telenovela. Finally, the third purpose is to consider how star power is used to promote the telenovelas and vice versa.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

The plot is always the same. In the first three minutes of the first episode the viewer already knows the novela will end with that same couple kissing each other. A telenovela is all about a couple who wants to kiss and a scriptwriter who stands in their way for 150 episodes.30

– Patricio Wills, head of development at Telemundo.

As seen throughout this thesis, Wills’ comment is fairly accurate. Examining the functions in telenovelas helps reveal how, in many ways, the storylines are variations of similar plots with similar character archetypes. In other words, the list of functions I created is the constant, but the ways they are presented in the different telenovelas are the variables. However, Wills does oversimplify the intricate details that go behind creating a syntagmatic, narrative structure for a telenovela with multiple storylines and characters and episodes that start in the middle of things. As a result, one of the objectives of my study is to see how narrative is built and then to break down the narrative into its core elements. The second purpose is to see how telenovelas, which are considered a staple of the Mexican culture, embed contemporary myths in their narrative. Because of the lack of in-depth research in both areas, no framework previously existed for analyzing the telenovela narrative elements and their myths. Thus, a structuralist approach was used to help facilitate analyzing both aspects since the structuralist method looks at both the syntagmatic (sequential and/or narrative) structure and paradigmatic relationships (binary oppositions).

The first part of the analysis focuses on the syntagmatic structure in order to help reveal the functions that exist with the narrative. Telenovela writers must first break down the structure
of their daily storylines into acts so they can fit between commercial breaks. As a result, telenovela episodes have a specific time structure in which to place characters forming specific “functions.” Hence, the narrative structure chapter examines the ways in which scenes and episodes in a TV serial develop over time through the narrative functions. Not every character has the same function in every episode, and other times characters can have multiple functions in any one episode, but in the end, the functions are repetitive throughout all three telenovelas. The framework that I have identified, consisting of 23 functions, is used on a daily basis to forestall the main couple’s happiness until the very last episode. During the last episode, the noble and virtuous characters are rewarded by finally being able to be with their lovers, while the villains are punished. But what ultimately holds all of these multiple storylines and their many characters together throughout the run of the serial is how their functions affect one another since “what they do to advance the story is more important than what they are” (Fiske 136).

Since telenovelas typically air more than 100 episodes, the producers also have to account for viewers missing episodes. Various methods are used to assist viewers with this predicament. Characters repeat pertinent information throughout the episodes so that regular viewers are brought up to speed on what they missed, and any viewer tuning in at any point of the story can also understand the history of the characters. Telenovela narrative structures must thus accommodate a certain degree of redundancy as information is re-established again and again. Consequently, narrative functions seldom occur just once. Rather, their repetition is part of the genre’s redundant structure.

While Propp argues that what is important about characters is what they do, not who they are as individuals in a story (Fiske 137), this isn’t always the case. Thus, the purpose of Chapter 4 is to show that who the characters are and the archetypes they fulfill are relevant. Analyzing
the syntagmatic structure only examines telenovelas on the surface. In order to uncover the
deeper, conceptual meanings of the narrative, one must look at the paradigmatic sets that are
placed within the chronological structure of the narrative. Telenovelas repeatedly use archetypes
that the audience will easily recognize as distinctly noble or distinctly villainous. This can help
us understand the cultural myths that are embedded in the narrative and title sequences of
Mexican telenovelas on a daily basis. I accomplished this by analyzing the most common and
repetitively used binary oppositions seen in these episodes, and explaining the myths behind
specific core archetypes: the self-sacrificing, suffering marianistas vs. machistas, the La Virgen
de Guadalupe (marianista figures) vs. La Malinche (the seductresses), and the noble poor
characters vs. the selfish and entitled rich characters. Analyzing the historic roots of some of
these concepts and myths helps us understand the ideological discourses embedded in the
narrative of the telenovelas as they relate to gender roles and class difference. The culture is
significantly reflected through the narrative. Therefore, studying the Mexican myths of the past
can help us see the effects on the actions (functions) of modern-day characters.

Telenovelas present relationships and problems of modern-day life, but the problems that
Mexican society is currently facing are rooted in problems that existed during the times of the
Spanish conquest. The dark-skinned Virgen de Guadalupe seems to be the solution for what the
people believe was the betrayal of La Malinche. These experiences result in some of the
patriarchal ideas of the present that are now reflected in these narratives. The past affects the
present and the telenovelas reflect the past in a circular cause and effect chain. In these
telenovelas, the exceedingly self-sacrificing and forgiving women (marianista figures) are
positioned as admirable characters who are the ones who should be emulated by telenovelas’
viewers. Women who deviate from the marianista characteristics are positioned as villains. They
are the betraying seductresses who use their femininity in order to gain power over others. The marianista and machista characters are also gender roles within the Mexican culture that are rooted in Mexican history. Even though not every Mexican follows the negative characteristics of these gender roles, they are promoted and endorsed within the culture via these telenovelas. The negative characteristics of marianismo and machismo reinforce the patriarchy in Mexico. Men are superior to women and have more rights. They are able to have careers and extramarital affairs while the women are expected to be faithful and must stay at home with their children. The repetitive use of these character roles and storylines ensures that the binary oppositions within a show are effectively communicated to its audience.

That being said, at times the producers do try to find ways to show how characters are able to solve the problems presented by these binary oppositions. Sometimes characters can overcome patriarchal gender roles. For example, Candy from Las tontas no van al cielo is presented as a character who can offer a possible solution to the binary oppositions. She is a strong proactive character who finds solutions to problems. Unlike other marianista characters, like Soledad from Mañana es para siempre, who suffer or watch helplessly as they or their family/children suffer, Candy is not the patient and forgiving woman who allows others to mistreat her. However, she is not presented as a heartless character. She is able to perform these actions without being considered a villain. She is a single mother with a career, who overcomes being characterized as someone who lusters for power and social status. Instead, she becomes a more positive role model by being presented as a modern woman who can incorporate the two elements of the binary opposition to become a woman transcending the cultural stereotypes.

The last chapter of this thesis maps uncharted territory—the analysis of telenovela title sequences—with the purpose of combining what was learned in the previous chapters to see how
producers incorporate both the syntagmatic structure and paradigmatic relationships of a
telenovela in their title sequences. Unlike US TV shows, such as Lost (2004-), 24 (2001-) and
Heroes (2006-), whose title sequence last perhaps 10 seconds, the analyzed telenovela titles
sequences last 90 seconds each and communicate various meanings to the audience. While each
telenovela presents their narrative and character/actors in distinct ways, what they all have in
common is their use of star power, the lyrics of the theme songs, and the edited images taken
from diegetic material from the episodes. All these aspects combined present both the functions
and character archetypes that have been analyzed in this thesis. And these title sequences also
serve to communicate the star power of the actors, which is unlike that of US soap operas. They
are promoted as both actors and singers on these serials, and are given special credits.

The popularity of the telenovela genre cannot be denied, but the paucity of scholarly
research about Mexican telenovelas is apparent. I created a framework for analyzing the
functions of the characters within the telenovelas. This thesis also contributes to the small body
of literature that exists in examining how historical figures and specific cultural gender roles are
presented and promoted within Mexican media. This study offers an understanding of the
historical roots of contemporary myths in the telenovela narrative. The sets of binary oppositions
help explain the purposes the characters serve in the narrative. Finally, the analysis of the title
sequences demonstrates the power of images and sounds presented to the viewer in less than 90
seconds. These title sequences express specific cultural meanings about the narrative and
character types and, thus, merit further research. Lastly, examining their title credits
demonstrates the vast differences between the telenovela star systems and the US soap opera star
system. Telenovela stars are promoted in various types of media and programs much like
American film stars.
While it is significant to study how narrative is built, to create a framework for analyzing the functions of the characters, and to reveal the myths embedded within the narrative and the titles sequences, this is still a provisional and limited study. Only three, prime-time telenovelas, all from the same network, were analyzed, thereby neglecting popular telenovelas that are shown during the day and those produced by companies other than Televisa. The final and most limiting factor is the size of the sample. Only a week’s worth of the three telenovelas were analyzed in-depth. The functions were not applied to all the episodes of the serial. I cannot generalize, for example, about whether these functions appear more or less frequently during the climactic last few weeks of the serial. Clearly, these findings are still preliminary. Telenovelas from other time slots, networks, and production companies need to be examined to see if these functions and archetypes are consist across the whole telenovela genre. Ultimately, the three aspects that I analyzed (the narrative structure, binary oppositions, and title sequences) can serve to be a first step for further research. Even though my list of functions is probably not the framework that will define all telenovelas forever, it is still a working, flexible framework that can be used on past, present and future telenovelas to identify the genre’s conventional narrative structure, character archetypes, and discursive mythology. A future study may determine whether these aspects change significantly over time.
NOTES

1 Mañana es para siempre

Soledad: La clase de animal

2 Mañana es para siempre

Bárbara: ¡Ahora ya sabes de lo que soy capaz!

3 Mañana es para siempre

Bárbara: ¡No hagas preguntas estúpidas si tú tienes la respuesta!

4 The dates reflect when these telenovelas originally aired on Televisa in Mexico. They started broadcasting these telenovelas on Univision months after they started on Televisa.

5 Mañana es para siempre:

Bárbara: ¿¡Qué haces?! ¿¡Qué estás haciendo?! ¡Señora Monserrat! ¡Señora

Monserrat: !¡Qué hiciste Liliana?!¡Qué hiciste?! ¡Tú mamá está muerta! ¡Está muerta!

6 Las tontas no van al cielo:

Candy: Marissa no me provoques porque tal vez me arrepienta y decida ser la madrina y pues te arruino todo el chiste.

7 Las tontas no van al cielo:

Marissa: No te atreverías.

8 Las tontas no van al cielo:

Marissa: No serías capaz.

9 A dark-skinned Virgin Mary dressed like an Aztec princess appeared before the Indian Juan Diego. She would later be named La Virgen de Guadalupe. When La Virgen de Guadalupe
appeared before Juan Diego, she asked him to tell the bishop to build a church on that site in her honor. This vision occurred at the same place that indigenous people praised the Aztec virgin Tonantzin. Since the bishop was skeptical, he wanted proof of this woman’s identity. To show proof, La Virgen told Juan Diego to climb to the top of the hill where they first met and gather the flowers that were there. When Juan returned to the hill, he found flowers growing in the frozen soil. He gathered the flowers in his cloak and took them to the bishop. When Juan opened the cloak, the flowers that fell to the ground were Castilian roses even though these flowers did not grow in Mexico. However, what was more miraculous than these foreign flowers was La Virgen’s image imprinted inside Juan's cloak.

10 Las tontas no van al cielo

Candy: Yo no tengo vocación de alfombra; y no voy a permitir que me pisoteen.

11 Mañana es para siempre

Soledad: Madre mía, ha sido en vano que el patrón me escuche. El cayó en las garras de Bárbara Greco. Ahora ella es su mujer y no acusar a esa asesina me ha convertido en su cómplice. Pero si me silencio sirve para que Eduardo y los niños Elizalde y el patrón no sufran en carne propia la maldad de ésa mujer tan mala entonces yo tengo que mantener la boca cerrada. Acepto el castigo que me impongas aunque la vida no me alcance para pagar por mi pecado. Virgen santa hágase su voluntad.

12 Cuidado con el ángel


13 Cuidado con el ángel

Padre Anselmo: Te bendigo a tí María de Jesús, que eres una muchacha noble, de buen corazón y llevas el nombre de Cristo nuestro señor en el tuyo propio. Que te haz sabido levantar una y otra vez de las adversidades haciéndote cada vez más fuerte y más grande.

14 Cuidado con el ángel
Estefanía: ¡Te hubieras ido antes!

15 **Mañana es para siempre**

Camilo: ¡Ven acá! Estúpida! ¡Nunca Erika! ¡Nunca te atrevas a volver a hablarme a sí! ¿Me entiendes!? ¡Nunca! ¡Te voy a dar una lección que en tú vida vas a olvidar!

16 **Mañana es para siempre**

Camilo: ¡Ella se lo buscó!

17 **Las tontas no van al cielo:**

Francis: Es que, ¿qué voy a ser sin él? La vida para mí ya no tiene caso.
Bárbara: ¿Cómo que ya no tiene caso?
Francis: No, no la vida para mí ya no tiene sentido.
Bárbara: ¿Te sientes vacía sin tu esposo que te maltrataba?
Francis: Es que prefiero el maltrato. Prefiero el maltrato a sentirme sola porque yo no soporto estar sola.
Bárbara: Francis, piensa lo que me estás diciendo. ¿Prefieres el maltrato, el abuso, a estar sola?
Francis: Es que yo amo tanto a mi marido.
Bárbara: Perdóname Francis, pero eso no es amor. Es dependencia.

18 **Las tontas no van al cielo:**

Hortencia: Por favor déjala ir y luego ve y dile la verdad. ¡Dile la verdad!
Eduardo: ¿Qué verdad?
Hortencia: ¡Que eres un enfermo! ¡Porque solamente un enfermo como tú puede salir con tantas mujeres!
Eduardo: ¡Yo no soy un enfermo! ¡Soy un hombre nada más!
Hortencia: ¿Un hombre? ¡Si fueras un hombre de verdad, te entregarías a una mujer! ¡Pero no sabes amar!

19 **Las tontas no van al cielo:**

Eduardo: Esto no es la primera vez que paza. No hagas una tragedia de esto.

20 **Las tontas no van al cielo:**

Chayo: Candy tiene razón. La única promesa que los hombres pueden cumplir es la de ser fiel a la infidelidad.

21 **Las tontas no van al cielo:**

Eduardo: Mi amor, lo dices como si una simple aventura fuera el fin del mundo.
22 Las tontas no van al cielo:

Chayo: Bueno te pones así por una aventura. Ni que fuera el fin del mundo.
Eduardo: No, no ésto es pero que el fin del mundo. ¿No te das cuenta? Me pusiste los cuernos.

23 Mañana es para siempre:

Camilo: Cuando yo te dé una orden, la obedeces.

24 Mañana es para siempre:

Soledad: Hijo, ya estás en edad de entender que hay cosas que son imposibles. Y óyeme bien, es hora de que te hagas a la idea que entre la niña Fernanda y tú hay una gran distancia que ni Dios padre podría cortar. Ella es rica, y tú eres pobre. Que no se te olvide nunca.
Eduardo: ¿Pero qué tiene que ver?
Soledad: Tiene todo que ver Eduardo si lo entiendas o no.

25 Since some connotations are inevitably lost in translation, I provide the original Spanish lyrics of each telenovela’s theme song for the benefit of Spanish-speaking readers.

Mañana es para siempre

El alma nos juntó,
con sólo un beso de testigo,
cada latido prometió
que ibas a estar siempre conmigo.
Hoy todo cambió,
y es que has seguido otro camino,
pero mi vida se quedó
toda en tus labios, toda contigo.
Te pido con el alma que recuerdes,
que juraste no perderme,
prometimos que no acabaría jamás,
que mañana es para siempre.

26 Las tontas no van al cielo

Un segundo en esta vida puede cambiar tu rumbo,
cortar tus alas para lentamente bajar tu mundo.
Amar es el disfraz que para nada te va al limbo,
perder el miedo para nuevamente tratar juntos.
Nunca es tarde para comenzar,
no tengas miedo de volver a amar.
Lo que quiero es un amor que sepa que no soy alfombra ni escalón
con dignidad y convicción.
Quiero un amor que sepa lo que soy.
Que tengo un corazón de entrañas y pudor.
Esto es lo que soy.

27 Cuidado Con El Ángel

Hay recuerdos que se vuelven en lágrimas.
Junto al miedo de volverme enamorar.
Mi voz había perdido hasta el sentido al hablar
Y con solo escucharte y con solo mirarte
El amor vuelve empezar.
Eres luz que puede tocar este corazón.
No hay nadie más que tú,
Que enciendes estrellas en mi interior.
Yo iré a donde vayas tú
Y es que nadie más
Me mira como tú,
Solo tú,
Eres tú,
Solo tú.

28 During the week of my analysis, the title sequence does not reflect the newer storylines, such as
Marissa’s pregnancy and Patricio trying to get Candy to fall in love with him again, and being
involved in his son’s life.

29 These on-screen actor credit titles are at times slightly different in each telenovelas since every
producer of a telenovela has a slightly different approach to their distribution of titles given to
their actors.

30 Wills has been involved in the production of over 35 telenovelas and has collaborated with
many writers who develop the telenovelas.
REFERENCES


