m

**a journal of english
and american studies**

miscelánea

3

miscelánea

Directoras/Editors:
Silvia Pellicer Ortín (literatura, cine y estudios culturales)
Universidad de Zaragoza
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8928-7295>

Pilar Mur Dueñas (lengua y lingüística)
Universidad de Zaragoza
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8966-1013>

Oana Maria Carciu (Reseñas)
Universidad de Zaragoza
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5799-0461>

Ayudantes de dirección/Assistants to the Editors:
Marta Cerezo Moreno. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1986-4848>

Ignacio Palacios Martínez. Universidad de Santiago de Compostela
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9202-9190>

Editor de producción/Copy Editor:
Rubén Peinado Abarrio. Universidad de Zaragoza
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8438-2637>

4

5

Isabel Carrera Suárez
Universidad de Oviedo, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7121-6528>

Frederic Chaume Varela
Universitat Jaume I, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4843-5228>

María Rocío Cobo Piñero
Universidad de Sevilla, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3814-7799>

Francisco Collado Rodríguez
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2922-9194>

Juan Camilo Conde Silvestre
Universidad de Murcia, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6985-0036>

Stef Craps
Ghent University, Bruselas, Bélgica
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6720-1689>

Maria Josep Cuenca
Universidad de Valencia, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8606-713>

Rocío G. Davis
Universidad de Navarra, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1417-9702>

Celestino Deleyto Alcalá
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3087-4556>

Marc Delrez
University of Liège, Bélgica
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0817-8407>

Jorge Díaz Cintas
Imperial College, London, Reino Unido
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1058-5757>

Olga Dontcheva-Navratilova
Masaryk University, República Checa
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0378-7975>

Isabel Durán Giménez-Rico
Universidad Complutense de Madrid, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6026-0184>

Maite Escudero Alías
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3116-3641>

Gibson Ferguson
University of Sheffield, Reino Unido
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5748-577X>

Javier Fernández Polo
Universidad de Santiago de Compostela,
España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1657-9323>

María del Mar Gallego Duran
Universidad de Huelva, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5518-7667>

María Luisa García Lecumberri
Universidad del País Vasco, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8651-7558>

Luis Miguel García Mainar
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3169-5920>

Cristina Garrigós González
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia,
España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8047-9733>

Rosa González Casademont
Universidad de Barcelona, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2038-0699>

Constante González Groba
Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0556-8362>

Pilar González Vera
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4919-8113>

Maurizio Gotti
University of Bergamo, Italia
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7203-4830>

Ignacio Guillén Galve
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5304-1290>

Christian Gutleben
University of Nice, Francia

Felicity Hand
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3766-6266>

Luc Herman
University of Antwerp, Bélgica
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6013-2900>

María Isabel Herrando Rodrigo
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3895-5534>

María Dolores Herrero Granado
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1363-0189>

Tamar Jeffers-McDonald
University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent, Reino Unido
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4905-2525>

Deborah Jermyn
University of Roehampton, London, Reino Unido
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9261-9887>

Jane Jordan
Kingston University, London, Reino Unido
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2129-6504>

Enrique Lafuente Millán
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4783-3953>

Rosa Lorés Sanz
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5574-6182>

Hilaria Loyo Gómez
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4933-2199>

Zenón Luis Martínez
Universidad de Huelva, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5228-7822>

María José Luzón Marco
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0454-5457>

Ana Manzanas Calvo
Universidad de Salamanca, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9830-638X>

Belén Martín Lucas
Universidad de Vigo, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5660-1559>

Paula Martín Salván
Universidad de Córdoba, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8514-2670>

María Jesús Martínez Alfaro
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7335-7690>

Silvia Martínez Falquina
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8054-095X>

Sergio Maruenda Bataller
Universitat de València, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3041-0110>

Paul McDonald
University of Nottingham, Reino Unido

Arsenio Jesús Moya Guijarro
Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha,
España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6591-6680>

Laura Muresan
The Bucharest University of Economic
Studies, Bucharest, Rumanía
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5585-2863>

Silvia Murillo Ornat
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1369-3590>

Marita Nadal Blasco
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2902-7613>

Claus-Peter Neumann
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6950-9153>

Ana Luiza Pires de Freitas
Federal University of Health Sciences
of Porto Alegre, Brazil
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8285-6528>

Elena Oliete Aldea
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8197-1199>

Susana Onega Jaén
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1672-4276>

Beatriz Oria Gómez
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0663-0519>

Nieves Pascual Soler
Universidad Internacional de Valencia,
España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8962-5298>

Viorica Eleonora Patea Birk
Universidad de Salamanca, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3291-5574>

Beatriz Penas Ibáñez
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2418-4695>

Javier Pérez Guerra
Universidad de Vigo, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8882-667X>

Ramón Plo Alastrué
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1151-1661>

Juan Antonio Prieto Pablos
Universidad de Sevilla, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8912-2818>

Paula Rautionaho
University of Eastern Finland, Finlandia
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5239-8407>

Constanza del Río Álvaro
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3370-3020>

María Isabel Romero Ruiz
Universidad de Málaga, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8084-4865>

Miguel F. Ruiz Garrido
Universitat Jaume I, Castellón, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9647-1039>

Noelia Ruiz Madrid
Universitat Jaume I, Castellón, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9800-5624>

Manuela Ruiz Pardos
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9115-1020>

Dora Sales Salvador
Universitat Jaume I, Castellón, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6290-2013>

Lena Steveker
University of Luxembourg, Luxemburgo
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6234-6790>

Juan Antonio Suárez Sánchez
Universidad de Murcia, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8303-044>

Rubén Valdés Miyares
Universidad de Oviedo, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9564-595X>

Javier Valenzuela
Universidad de Murcia, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0007-7943>

Rafael Vélez Núñez
Universidad de Cádiz, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0405-7357>

José María Yebra Pertusa
Universidad de Zaragoza, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5449-6556>

Francisco Yus Ramos
Universidad de Alicante, España
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5276-3251>

Krystyna Warchał
University of Silesia, Polonia
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8422-4911>

table of contents

10

11

Articles

EVALUATIVE LANGUAGE IN THE (RE)PRODUCTION AND RESISTANCE OF DISCOURSES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON X (TWITTER)

EL LENGUAJE EVALUATIVO EN LA (RE) PRODUCCIÓN Y RESISTENCIA DE DISCURSOS SOBRE VIOLENCIA SEXUAL EN X (TWITTER)

<https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202510725>

PATRICIA PALOMINO-MANJÓN
Centro Universitario de la Defensa de Zaragoza
ppalomino@unizar.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6548-8022>

Abstract

This paper investigates the role of evaluative language in the (re)production and resistance of discourses concerning sexual violence on X (formerly Twitter). Drawing on Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005) as the analytical framework, the present paper identifies linguistic patterns that either reinforce or challenge patriarchal ideologies, practices and gendered power dynamics in society. Using allegations of sexual assault made against Brett Kavanaugh during his confirmation proceedings to the United States Supreme Court in 2018 as a case study, the analysis illustrates that evaluative language was used to (re)enact opposing discourses and (re)negotiate traditional rape scripts and experiences of sexual violence. The findings also reveal the interplay between conflicting narratives —perpetrator vs. victim-survivor— on X and how communication on this platform shapes and reflects societal attitudes toward sexual violence and aggression against women in both North American society and institutions.

Keywords: X (Twitter), evaluative language, Appraisal Theory, sexual violence, online feminism.

Resumen

Este artículo investiga el papel del lenguaje evaluativo en la (re)producción y resistencia de discursos sobre violencia sexual en X —antes Twitter—. Basándose en la Teoría de la Valoración (Martin and White 2005) como marco analítico, este trabajo identifica patrones lingüísticos que refuerzan o desafían las ideologías y

prácticas patriarcales, así como las dinámicas de poder de género en la sociedad. Utilizando las acusaciones de agresión sexual de Brett Kavanaugh durante su proceso de confirmación ante el Tribunal Supremo de los Estados Unidos en 2018 como estudio de caso, los resultados ilustran que el lenguaje evaluativo se usa para (re)crear discursos opuestos y (re)negociar narrativas tradicionales sobre violación y experiencias de violencia sexual. Los resultados también revelan la interacción entre narrativas opuestas —perpetrador vs. víctima/superviviente— en X y cómo la comunicación en esta plataforma da forma y refleja las actitudes sociales hacia la violencia sexual y la agresión contra las mujeres tanto en la sociedad como en las instituciones estadounidenses.

Palabras clave: X (Twitter), lenguaje evaluativo, Teoría de la Valoración, violencia sexual, feminismo digital.

1. Introduction

Sexual violence has become a simultaneously public and private issue after the emergence of digital platforms, even though it was traditionally viewed as a private matter (Bou-Franch 2013). Research on online aggression against women has examined the use of various digital platforms to spread discourses derived from rape culture, which are used to deny the existence of such violence (Bou-Franch 2013; Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014). More precisely, the microblogging platform X —formerly Twitter— has been singled out as the most sexist and (sexually) aggressive social media platform (Jane 2017; Mendes et al. 2018). Several studies have shown that Twitter is employed to (sexually) threaten women (e.g. Hardaker and McGlashan 2016; Frenda et al. 2019), as well as to victimise victim-survivors[1] (e.g. Stubbs-Richardson et al. 2018) while portraying perpetrators as the real victims.

Despite this negative view of X, the platform has also given victim-survivors a relatively safe space to contribute to digital feminism. X's most popular function, the hashtag (#), is used as a tool for socio-political resistance and to form online communities, even if users never interact directly or know each other (Zappavigna 2012, 2018). X users challenge traditional rape myths and scripts by offering support and validating personal narratives of sexual violence (Loney-Howes 2018), which has been key to the establishment of the fourth wave of feminism (Blevins 2018). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the study of online networked feminism on X is gaining momentum in linguistics and discourse analysis (e.g. Morikawa 2019; Bouvier 2020; Jones et al. 2022; Palomino-Manjón 2022, 2024).

Even though research has focused on both digital (sexual) violence against women and feminist resistance on X separately, there is much less information of a linguistic nature on the different discourses concerning misogyny and (anti)feminism when these coexist within the same digital platform. Therefore, this paper examines the discourses and ideologies of gendered violence on X and the evaluative resources used to enact such discourses and ideologies.

The present paper is divided as follows. Section 2, which follows this introduction, begins by outlining the literature on gender and digital communication, especially from a critical perspective on gendered violence. The paper then introduces the case study employed to carry out the research. Section 3 presents the analytical framework used to examine evaluative language and continues by explaining the data and procedures carried out during the analysis. Section 4 goes on to discuss the findings of the study. Lastly, Section 5 summarises the main findings of the analysis, discusses the paper's implications for the study of violence against women on digital platforms, and provides some concluding remarks.

2 Literature Review

2.1. Gender and Digital Communication

The rise of new technologies anticipated more democratic communication, as social factors such as gender, race and class would be invisible to Internet users. However, research from a variety of fields, including linguistics, media, sociology and psychology (e.g. Herring 1999; Jane 2017; Stubbs-Richardson et al. 2018) has suggested that digital platforms are used to harass and intimidate women, thus bringing attention to pre-existing gender differences in the offline world.

Since the early stages of research on digitally mediated communication, scholars focusing on gender inequality have pointed out that women and other socially marginalised groups, such as people of colour and LGBTQIA+ communities, are often the targets of sexism and hate speech, which, in turn, reflects a (white, heterosexual, able-bodied) male-dominated Internet culture (Jane 2017). As previously mentioned, X is considered an aggressive platform towards women, since it hosts communities —sometimes formed in the manosphere (see Jaki et al. 2019)— that encourage hostile and misogynistic attitudes, thus enforcing toxic masculinities (Jane 2017; Mendes et al. 2018). Linguistic research has shown how X is used to send death threats (e.g. Hardaker and McGlashan 2016) and to perpetuate victim-blaming and sexist attitudes (e.g. Stubbs-Richardson et al. 2018; Frenda et al. 2019), hindering women's participation in digital communities and degrading and dehumanising female users.

Despite this, research has also shown that language can help victim-survivors of (cyber)abuse and their allies to resist and challenge digital practices and ideologies derived from rape and patriarchal cultures. For instance, Dynel and Poppi (2020) examine the rhetorical strategies used by Stormy Daniels when she was mentioned in hateful posts relating to her job (i.e. pornographic film actress). Additionally, the platform also allows individuals like her to connect with other users who share similar experiences. Victim-survivors take advantage of X's widespread popularity to engage in online feminist activism to bring attention to (verbal) sexual violence. Linguists have analysed how the use of specific linguistic patterns, especially evaluative language, helps victim-survivors to share self-narratives of sexual violence (e.g. Jones et al. 2022; Palomino-Manjón 2022, 2024).

X has become a tool to engage in online feminist activism and has contributed to the development of a 'call-out culture' (Lawrence and Ringrose 2018) in which sexism, misogyny and rape culture are challenged. However, it has also brought attention to victim-survivors and left them "vulnerable to criticisms, threats, and harassment from trolls who are often participating for the sole purpose of antagonising feminists" (Blevins 2018: 94). Therefore, it is evident that X has evolved into a platform where diverse and opposing discourses and ideologies coexist. Bearing in mind the aim of this paper, the following subsection introduces the case study, which will guide the research questions.

2.2. AsJ Kavanaugh's Sexual Assault Allegations

Following Associate Justice (AsJ) Anthony Kennedy's retirement announcement on 27 June 2018, the President of the United States at the time, Donald Trump, nominated former Judge Brett Kavanaugh to fill the vacancy on the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS). On 30 July 2018, Senator Dianne Feinstein received an anonymous letter in which a woman explained that she had been sexually assaulted by Judge Kavanaugh in 1982. The writer of the letter also reached out to *The Washington Post*'s lawyer, Debra Katz, who recommended she take a polygraph test so that she could not be accused of lying.

Since the press tried to reveal her identity, the accuser, college professor Dr Christine Blasey Ford, went public in an interview with *The Washington Post* on 16 September 2018. In the interview, she described the encounter with Kavanaugh and a friend of his, Mark Judge. She recounted that, when she was 15, the two men attempted to rape her, pinning her to a bed while trying to remove her clothes. As both men were heavily intoxicated, she managed to escape and lock herself in the bathroom. On 27 September 2018, Dr Ford and Judge Kavanaugh testified in a televised hearing. Republican senators attracted

attention when they accused the Democratic Party of tarnishing the nominee's reputation with false allegations. In the end, charges were not pressed against the accused, and the Senate ultimately confirmed Kavanaugh as Associate Justice on 6 October 2018.

Dr Ford faced harassment and (death) threats from Internet users for speaking out against AsJ Kavanaugh, especially on the microblogging platform X. She was also accused of being part of a political strategy to bring down his nomination as well as Trump's administration. However, she stated she had no regrets and hoped her testimony would empower other women to upend traditional rape narratives and patriarchal societal structures.

It is against this backdrop that the present paper takes AsJ Kavanaugh's confirmation process and sexual allegations as a case study to examine the different discourses surrounding gendered violence on X, including the linguistic and evaluative patterns that contribute to the negotiation of both Dr Ford and AsJ Kavanaugh's identities. Therefore, the research questions that guided this study are the following:

> RQ1: What evaluative resources did X users employ to signal different gender ideologies and patriarchal discourses during AsJ Kavanaugh's confirmation process?

21

> RQ2: To what extent can these resources be employed to perpetuate or challenge gender (in)equality, patriarchal practices and sexual violence?

3. Analytical Framework and Methodology

3.1. Appraisal Theory

Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005) was used as the analytical framework to identify linguistic evaluative patterns and discourses around sexual violence, perpetrators and victim-survivors. This framework was developed to examine the social function of language within Systemic-Functional Linguistics and is employed to examine how authors of a text use evaluative language to express their position and stance towards "both the material they present and those with whom they communicate" (Martin and White 2005: 1). The theory has also been proven to be an effective tool for analysing and categorising discourses and language (Bednarek 2008) and to understand how online communities are built (Zappavigna 2012, 2018). Appraisal Theory is divided into three meaning domains: ATTITUDE, GRADUATION and ENGAGEMENT. This paper focuses on ATTITUDE and GRADUATION (see Table 1).

Affect			
Happiness	*cheer*	Unhappiness	*misery*
	affection		*antipathy*
Security	*quiet*	Insecurity	*disquiet*
	trust		*distrust*
Satisfaction	*interest*	Dissatisfaction	*ennui*
	pleasure		*displeasure*
Inclination	*desire*	Disinclination	*non-desire*
Surprise	*positive*	Surprise	*negative*
Judgement			
Social esteem	*normality*	Social sanction	*veracity*
	capacity		*propriety*
	tenacity		
Appreciation			
Reaction	*impact*	Composition	*balance*
	quality		*complexity*
Valuation			
Graduation			
Focus	*sharpen*	Force	*intensification*
	soften		*quantification*

Table 1. Appraisal Theory categorisation (adapted from Martin and White 2005; Bednarek 2008)

ATTITUDE concerns the use of evaluations to express emotional reactions, judgements of behaviour and the worth or aesthetics of things. It is further subdivided into three domains: AFFECT, JUDGEMENT and APPRECIATION.

AFFECT is used to express "positive and negative feelings: do we feel happy or sad, confident or anxious, interested or bored?" (Martin and White 2005: 42). AFFECT can convey the emotions of the producer of a text or a third party, and it can be implied or directly conveyed depending on the expression of explicit emotional states (e.g. *happy*, *sad*, *worried*) or the physical behaviours of the person experiencing the emotion (e.g. 'rushed breath' or 'to shake uncontrollably')

22

(Martin and Rose 2007). In addition, emotions can also be conveyed through metaphors (e.g. *cold as ice* or *dull like the dead*). AFFECT is further subdivided into four subcategories, namely (Un)Happiness (*misery*, *antipathy*, *cheer* and *affection*), (Dis)Satisfaction (*ennui*, *displeasure*, *interest* and *pleasure*), (In)Security (*disquiet*, *surprise*, *confidence* and *trust*) and (Dis)Inclination (*fear* and *desire*).

However, since Appraisal Theory is still considered hypothetical (Martin and White 2005: 46), this paper adopts Bednarek's (2008, 2009) refinements to the AFFECT subsystem. This change not only introduces a new type of emotion (i.e. *Surprise*), but also modifies the subsystems proposed by Martin and White (2005). Consequently, Bednarek's framework reorganises the original categorisation and expands it into five subsystems: 1) (Un)Happiness; 2) (In)Security; 3) (Dis) Satisfaction; 4) (Dis)Inclination and 5) Surprise (see Table 1).

JUDGEMENT involves the evaluation of human actions and behaviour not only from individuals but also from organisations and institutions such as governments, courts and legislative bodies. The framework distinguishes between evaluations of social sanction, which are based on a set of rules or regulations (i.e. how legal or moral someone's actions are), and social esteem (i.e. admiring and criticising someone's actions without legal or moral implications) (Martin and White 2005; White 2011). It is relevant for this study to note that JUDGEMENT can be negotiated in context. However, according to Martin and Rose (2007), legal lexis such as *victim*, *crime*, *perpetrator*, *guilty* and *innocent* cannot be separated from their evaluative role in specific contexts.

Lastly, APPRECIATION concerns the evaluation of aesthetics, human creations, situations and natural phenomena. People can also be appraised when describing their physical appearance.

Additionally, APPRAISAL can be conveyed explicitly or implicitly. Explicit evaluation, or attitudinal inscription, refers to the use of words or fixed phrases that carry positive or negative meaning even when removed from their context (White 2004, 2011). This contrasts with attitudinal tokens or invocation, in which no single item carries positive or negative value independently of its context. This distinction between attitudinal inscription and invocation becomes relevant when the boundaries between the ATTITUDE subsystems are not clear-cut (Bednarek 2009). For example, the terms *disgust* or *revolt* may convey JUDGEMENT and AFFECT simultaneously. Martin and White (2005) name these instances 'hybrid realisations', whereas Thompson (2014) suggests the concept 'Russian doll' to illustrate that one APPRAISAL resource can function as a token or indirect expression of another subsystem. Nevertheless, the authors agree that AFFECT should be considered the primary attitudinal value as it constitutes the basis of ATTITUDE.

On the other hand, GRADUATION is related to the intensification or weakening of someone's evaluations. It is subdivided into Focus (i.e. the graduation of non-scalable lexis) and Force (i.e. the varying degrees of intensity and quantity). Whereas Focus is used to make "something that is inherently non-gradable gradable" (Martin and Rose 2007: 46), Force refers to resources that intensify meaning, such as qualifiers (e.g. *very, extremely*) and attitudinal lexis, which includes degrees of intensity (e.g. *happy/ecstatic*).

Research that has applied Appraisal Theory to the analysis of digital communication has shown that the framework is an effective tool for examining how Internet users bond and build online communities based on shared values (see Zappavigna 2012, 2018). The theory has also been applied to the study of gender and sexuality and its potential to facilitate the creation of online feminist networks (e.g. Palomino-Manjón 2022) as well as to deride and abuse verbally (del Saz-Rubio 2024a, 2024b) and to spread anti-feminist and misogynist ideologies and discourses (e.g. Heritage and Koller 2020; Krendel 2020, 2023). This illustrates the versatility of the theory as a qualitative framework for understanding the different ways in which online interactions and communities form around topics relating to gender-based violence.

3.2. Data

A corpus of X posts published during Kavanaugh's confirmation process was compiled, including specific hashtags concerning the confirmation process, namely *#KavanaughConfirmation* and *#NoKavanaughConfirmation*. These hashtags were selected for their structure, which suggests two contrasting views regarding his nomination.

Posts under the *#KavanaughConfirmation* hashtag were manually obtained using X's *TweetDeck* application, which allows for manual, advanced search functionalities using Boolean terms and filtering options, such as language, date, number of reposts, etc. On the other hand, posts containing the *#NoKavanaughConfirmation* hashtag were collected through Google Sheets's add-on *Twitter Archiver* (Agarwal n.d.), which automatically retrieves metadata about the tweets.

Posts and reposts in languages other than English were filtered out and excluded from the dataset. The complete dataset covers tweets published over 23 days: from Dr Ford's public statement (16/09/2018) to the day after Kavanaugh was publicly confirmed as an Associate Justice of SCOTUS (8/10/2018). In total, there were 112,428 tweets (N = 2,924,498 words). In addition, bearing in mind the methodological approach taken in this paper (i.e. corpus-assisted discourse analysis), X conventions such as hashtags (#), (manual) reposts and mentions (@) were removed using the software *R* (R Core Team 2020). This resulted in two corpora made up of 1,474,172 words (*#KC*) and 417,639 words (*#NoKC*).

3.3. Procedure

The present study adopts a mixed methodology that combines corpus linguistics tools and Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005). The corpora were analysed separately and then compared to identify the linguistic patterns and Appraisal resources used to (re)produce discourses concerning sexual violence.

The first step involved the analysis of the 100 most frequent words in each corpus (RQ1). The software *R* (R Core Team 2020) was used to obtain wordlists and frequencies. After carefully analysing the terms obtained in the analysis through the reading of their concordance lines, the terms were grouped according to discussion topics. For the sake of brevity, the analysis scrutinised only the most commonly occurring words related to social actors, gender and violence in both corpora.

The second analysis identified and computed the different evaluative resources employed by X users (RQ2). Based on the frequency analysis results, ten subcorpora were created around the search terms *Kavanaugh*, *Ford*, *women*, *men* and *sexual*. To avoid cherry-picking, a technologically randomised selection of 100 concordance lines of each search word was obtained using SketchEngine's (Kilgarriff et al. 2014) concordance tool (Baker and Levon 2015). This tool was also used to expand the concordance lines and retrieve complete tweets (Baker and Levon 2015; Jones et al. 2022). The resulting subcorpora comprised 100 tweets each (i.e. 1,000 X posts in total; see Table 2).

Subcorpus	Number of X posts	Number of words
#NoKC-Kavanaugh	100	3,096
#NoKC-Ford	100	3,135
#NoKC-Men	100	3,309
#NoKC-Women	100	3,208
#NoKC-Sexual	100	3,383
#KC-Kavanaugh	100	3,102
#KC-Ford	100	3,078
#KC-Men	100	3,254
#KC-Women	100	3,423
#KC-Sexual	100	3,114
Total	**1,000**	**32,102**

Table 2. Information about the subcorpora examined in the Appraisal analysis

 Patricia Palomino-Manjón

The tweets were analysed qualitatively to examine Appraisal resources. The identified resources were manually coded on a document and classified. After the coding of resources, the Appraisal values were quantified to identify the most frequent Appraisal (sub)system and the polarity of the evaluative resources. Then, these resources were grouped according to their potential to convey discourses relating to (sexual) violence against women in the different subcorpora.

Following Page (2022), an intra-analysis was conducted and measured using the test-retest reliability correlation coefficient (Pearson correlation). The results show that both analyses were highly correlated, with a correlation indicator of ≥ 0.9, which indicates excellent reliability (see Table 3).

Subcorpus	Total occurrences (1st analysis, March 2022)	Total occurrences (2nd analysis, May 2022)
#NoKC-Kavanaugh	273	273
#NoKC-Ford	235	268
#NoKC-Men	333	334
#NoKC-Women	212	215
#NoKC-Sexual	265	267
#KC-Kavanaugh	255	255
#KC-Ford	241	241
#KC-Men	221	221
#KC-Women	210	210
#KC-Sexual	143	143
Corr. coef.		0.979964863

Table 3. Test-retest reliability correlation coefficient

As stated by Page (2022), reanalysing Appraisal resources helped identify coding errors and re-code ambiguity in the resources. The subcorpus with the most significant changes in the coding was the #NoKC-Ford subcorpus, and all the changes were associated with ambiguous cases of implicit positive Veracity.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Frequency Analysis

An examination of the 100 most frequent words in each corpus was carried out to identify prevalent linguistic patterns. As illustrated in Appendix A and B, closed-class words accounted for over three-quarters of the total. The qualitative reading

of these words in context revealed that both the *#NoKC* and *#KC* corpora shared similar thematic categories (see Table 4).

Thematic category	#NoKC	#KC
Pronouns	*you, he, your, we, his, they, I, my, him, her, she, our, me, them, us, he's, I'm*	*you, I, he, they, your, his, her, she, their, my, him, me, our, I'm, the, us*
Gender pronouns	*he, his, she, him, her, he's*	*he, his, her, she, him*
Social actors	*Kavanaugh, women, Ford, FBI, Dr, Trump, men, GOP, people*	*Kavanaugh, women, he, Ford, people, judge, Brett, democrats, man, Dr, FBI, senate*
Legal field	*vote, court, investigation, supreme, SCOTUS, assault*	*vote, court, judge, supreme, senate, investigation, justice*
(Political) authorities	*FBI, Trump, SCOTUS, GOP, supreme, court*	*FBI, court, supreme, judge, senate, democrats, Brett, supreme, court, senate*
Gender and violence	*sexual, assault*	*sexual*
Miscellaneous	*thank, want, need*	*time, today, good, know, want*

Table 4. Classification of the 100 most frequent grammatically open-class words and gendered pronouns in the dataset

Thematic categories encompassed lexis concerning (gender) pronouns, social actors, politicians and authorities, terms related to the legal field, vocabulary related to gender and violence and miscellaneous words. Some terms overlapped in different categories, for instance, *Trump* as a social actor and authority, or *judge* as a title and an authority (e.g. *Judge Kavanaugh*), a verb relating to the legal field or as a social actor (e.g. *Mark Judge*).

In addition, the presence of gendered pronouns reveals that male social actors were more frequently discussed than female individuals. The male pronouns *he*, *his* and *him* and the pronoun plus verb *he's* appeared in both frequency wordlists. Male pronouns were more frequently used to refer to Kavanaugh, but X users also employed them to refer to the male senators who participated in the hearings and to then President Donald Trump. However, the qualitative analysis unveiled that the possessive *his* also referred to Dr Ford as part of the n-gram *his accuser*, thus rendering her identity as related to Kavanaugh (van Leeuwen 2008). This specific word sequence is particularly noteworthy, as explicit references to Dr Ford were scant in the list of the 100 most frequent words.

27

Social actors included not only individuals but also assimilated and collectivised actors (van Leeuwen 2008) such as political groups and organisations (e.g. *FBI*, *Senate*, *Supreme*, *Court*, *SCOTUS*, *GOP*, *democrats*). The most interesting result is that *GOP* (i.e. Grand Old Party, the Republican Party) was more prevalent in *#NoKC*, whereas *democrats* only appeared in *#KC*, which suggests the ideological and political leanings of X users in each hashtag-specific dataset.

The frequency wordlists encompassed a range of male social actors, including general terms like *man* and *men*, as well as specific and individualised male figures such as *Kavanaugh*, *Brett*, *Judge* (Dr Ford's second perpetrator's surname) and *Trump.* In contrast, the female social actors included *women* and the surname *Ford*, which highlights the scarce presence of explicit references to Dr Ford. The presence of the singular noun *man* in the frequency list, while the noun *woman* was absent, suggests that men were often individualised, as opposed to women (Pearce 2008). Another shared category between both wordlists was lexis related to gender and violence. However, whereas the *#NoKC* corpus featured the words *assault* and *sexual*, the *#KC* corpus only included the adjective *sexual*.

Bearing in mind the aim of this paper, the five terms related to victims and perpetrators and sexual violence which were obtained from both corpora during the frequency analysis were selected for further scrutiny. The surnames *Kavanaugh* and *Ford*, along with the general gendered identities *women* and *man/men*, were chosen to investigate the negotiation of victim-perpetrator identities. Furthermore, the adjective *sexual*, which ranked among the top 100 most frequent words in each corpus, was also examined.

The selected lexis showed a similar normalised frequency per thousand words (ptw) in both corpora (see Table 5), which shows that they were not only patterns of potentially frequent topics of debate in each corpus, but were also common when discussing the events of the confirmation process on X. Therefore, a qualitative analysis of these words in context is of special relevance to the objective of this paper.

Word	#NoKC	#KC
Kavanaugh	5.19	5.89
Ford	1.44	2.37
men	1.07	0
man	0	1.47
women	3.38	2.94
sexual	1.77	1.75

Table 5. Normalised frequencies per thousand words (ptw)

The following subsection (4.2) features the analysis of these terms in context, drawing on Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005; see Section 3). While it is true that the *#KC* corpus featured the singular male form *man* and the *#NoKC* corpus included the plural form *men*, both corpora contained the plural female noun *women*. Consequently, the plural form *men* was selected to compare the results to those of its female counterpart.

4.2. Evaluative Resources

4.2.1. *Quantitative Analysis*

As can be seen in Appendix C, more than half of the total occurrences of APPRAISAL in each subcorpus were negative JUDGEMENT, making up over three-quarters of the total resources in the *#KC-Kavanaugh* (80.39% 205 instances) and *#NoKC-Kavanaugh* (73.26% 200 instances) subcorpora. In contrast, negative JUDGEMENT accounted for fewer than half of the identified resources in the *#NoKC-Ford* subcorpus (48.51%, 130), despite being the most prevalent APPRAISAL resource in that subcorpus. This might be attributed to higher positive AFFECT and JUDGEMENT frequencies in the *#NoKC-Ford* subcorpus, with 34 (12.49%) and 72 (26.87%) instances, respectively. These results suggest a prevalence of negative evaluative prosodies to discuss the actions of the social actors involved in the confirmation process.

JUDGEMENT was the only APPRAISAL value implicitly conveyed aside from APPRECIATION in the *#NoKC-Kavanaugh* subcorpus, which yielded one instance of a hybrid realisation between AFFECT and APPRECIATION. Implicit JUDGEMENT resources were frequently found to express judgements of Veracity and Propriety through hybrid realisations and factual statements. However, explicit JUDGEMENT values were more common in all subcorpora than implicit realisations, as illustrated in Table 6.

Subcorpus	Explicit	Implicit	Total
#KC-Kavanaugh	161 (70.61%)	67 (29.39%)	228 (100%)
#NoKC-Kavanaugh	141 (58.51%)	100 (41.49%)	241 (100%)
#KC-Ford	161 (84.74%)	29 (15.26%)	190 (100%)
#NoKC-Ford	108 (53.47%)	94 (46.53%)	202 (100%)
#KC-Men	95 (54.29%)	80 (45.71%)	175 (100%)
#NoKC-Men	136 (55.74%)	108 (44.26%)	244 (100%)
#KC-Women	99 (57.89%)	72 (42.11%)	171 (100%)
#NoKC-Women	119 (63.98%)	67 (36.02%)	186 (100%)

Subcorpus	Explicit	Implicit	Total
#KC-Sexual	44 (37.29%)	74 (62.71%)	118 (100%)
#NoKC-Sexual	133 (64.88%)	72 (35.12%)	205 (100%)

Table 6. Explicit and implicit JUDGEMENT occurrences in the examined subcorpora

On the other hand, GRADUATION was frequently found to enhance ATTITUDE resources rather than to downscale them (see Table 7). Force was the most frequent resource across all subcorpora and was mainly used for booster evaluations. Force-Intensification, which took up more than half of the GRADUATION resources in all subcorpora, mostly involved repetitions of attitudinal lexis, superlatives and capital letters.

Subcorpus	Force	Focus	Total
#KC-Kavanaugh	39 (88.64%)	5 (11.36%)	44 (100%)
#NoKC-Kavanaugh	45 (97.83%)	1 (2.17%)	46 (100%)
#KC-Ford	36 (92.31%)	3 (7.69%)	39 (100%)
#NoKC-Ford	31 (100%)	0	31 (100%)
#KC-Men	36 (97.3%)	1 (2.7%)	37 (100%)
#NoKC-Men	35 (94.59%)	2 (5.41%)	37 (100%)
#KC-Women	52 (100%)	0	52 (100%)
#NoKC-Women	69 (97.18%)	2 (2.28%)	71 (100%)
#KC-Sexual	27 (79.41%)	7 (20.59%)	34 (100%)
#NoKC-Sexual	47 (97.92%)	1 (2.08%)	48 (100%)

Table 7. Use of GRADUATION resources in the examined subcorpora

Following this qualitative examination of these APPRAISAL resources, the next subsection analyses and delves into the different discourses identified in the corpora.

4.2.2. *Overview of Discourses of Sexual Violence*

The qualitative reading of APPRAISAL values revealed various discourses concerning sexual violence. However, they are not always clear-cut and occasionally intersect within the same X post, thus conveying more than one discourse at times.

Due to the nature of the event, Dr Ford's and AsJ Kavanaugh's identities were intertwined, since his portrayal as a perpetrator contributed to her depiction as a victim-survivor. It is worth highlighting that all subcorpora included more instances of posts that focused on the construal of AsJ Kavanaugh as a perpetrator, as shown in Example 1 below:

(1) Post65/NoKC-Sexual: A nominee for the Supreme Court committed sexual assault [-JUDGEMENT;propriety] and the President is a pussy-grabber [-JUDGEMENT;propriety] (in his own words). *And Trump sits in the Oval Office* [-token of JUDGEMENT;propriety]. Gotta love [-AFFECT;unhappiness-antipathy] republicans! #NoKavanaughConfirmation[2],[3]

As can be seen in Example 1, the representation of AsJ Kavanaugh as a perpetrator was commonly constructed by drawing parallels between Donald Trump and him. Both were depicted as perpetrators of sexual violence. In the example, the X user conveys Propriety to denounce the presence of authoritative figures as well as a lack of action to prevent perpetrators from occupying seats in U.S. institutions and politics.

(2) Post82/KC-Kavanaugh: The Brave [+JUDGEMENT;tenacity] woman who lying [-JUDGEMENT;veracity] #SCOTUS nominee #BrettKavanaugh tried to rape [-JUDGEMENT;propriety] just *came out with her story* [+token of JUDGEMENT;tenacity] she has *also* [+GRADUATION;force-intensification] taken a lie detector test which shows she was being truthful [+JUDGEMENT;propriety] *Will #kavanaugh volunteer a lie detector test too* [-token of JUDGEMENT;veracity] #KavanaughLied [-JUDGEMENT;veracity] #KavanaughConfirmation

Example 2 describes Dr Ford as a determined woman for coming forward with her story through a discourse of feminism. The use of the adjective *brave* is linked to the evoked Tenacity resource *came out with her story.* This is due to the fact many feminists and allies of feminism consider the telling of stories of sexual violence as an act of boldness (Clark-Parsons 2019; Palomino-Manjón 2022, 2024). This contrasts with the portrayal of AsJ Kavanaugh, which emphasised falsehood and negative discourses by using Veracity and Propriety values. In this example, Kavanaugh is constructed as a perpetrator as he is positioned as the agent of the negative Propriety resource *(tried to) rape.* Hence, Dr Ford is presented as the object of the crime and, therefore, portrayed as a victim.

Discourses of falsehood were frequent in all corpora as they intertwined with discourses of political violence. Dr Ford and AsJ Kavanaugh were both portrayed as victims of a political process since many X users considered they were being manipulated as pawns by both the Republican and the Democratic Parties for their political gain. However, the discourses differed when referring to the accused and the accuser, as can be observed in Examples 3 and 4 below:

(3) Post7/NoKC-Ford: So it's all a lie [-JUDGEMENT;veracity] and a sham [-JUDGEMENT;veracity] [+GRADUATION;force-intensification]. There was NEVER [+GRADUATION;force-intensification] any intention

of a fair [-Judgement;propriety] hearing for Dr. Ford. You disgust [-Affect;dissatisfaction-displeasure] me, @SenateMajLdr, @lisamurkowski @SenatorCollins @JeffMerkley -Fuck you all [-Affect;dissatisfaction-displeasure]. #TakeBackTheSenate #IStandWithChristineBlaseyFord [+token of Judgement;veracity] #NoKavanaughConfirmation #BlueTsunami

(4) Post100/KC-Kavanaugh: Such a FAKE ATTEMPT [-Judgement;veracity] [+Graduation;force-intensification] to dishonor [-Judgement;propriety] a very [+Graduation;force-intensification] smart [+Judgement;capacity] and very [+Graduation;force-intensification] fine [+Judgement;normality] *man Judge Kavanaugh* [-token of Judgement;propriety], Diane Feinstein *YOU* [+Graduation;force-intensification] employed a *CHINESE SPY* [+Graduation;force-intensification] 4 20 yrs [-token of Judgement;propriety] YOU [+Graduation;force-intensification] are the threat [-Judgement;propriety] to America *not Judge Kavanaugh* [+token of JUDGEMENT;propriety] #KavanaughConfirmation

Dr Ford was often portrayed as a victim of politicians. For instance, Example 3 illustrates how some users expressed disapproval of the outcome of the hearing. This user employs Veracity resources (*lie* and *sham*) to evaluate the confirmation process and then proceeds to provide an ethical condemnation of the GOP and the Republican senators by questioning the course and the credibility of the hearing. As opposed to this, the user in Example 4 evaluates the allegations of sexual assault as deceitful and a political strategy to discredit and ruin AsJ Kavanaugh's reputation through an intensified use of Veracity resources as well as several Propriety values. Then, they provide a positive appraisal of AsJ Kavanaugh through the use of Social Esteem (i.e. Capacity and Normality) to create a positive discourse prosody. This helps the user to depict Senator Feinstein as an unethical politician and a political perpetrator, while they present AsJ Kavanaugh as a political victim.

Discourses of political violence also constructed North American women as victims of the patriarchal system that prevails in the country's institutions. These posts intertwined with feminist discourses frequently, as illustrated in Example 5 below:

(5) Post39/NoKC-Men: @peterdaou THEY. HAVE. NO. CONSCIENCE [-Judgement;propriety] [+Graduation;force-intensification]. They gaslighted [-Judgement;propriety] Ford so bad [+Graduation;force-intensification], that as a victim I worry [-Affect;insecurity-disquiet] that she is questioning [-Affect;insecurity-disquiet] *all of her memories of the event* [-token of Judgement;capacity]. *That is what we do was survivors* [-token of Judgement;capacity]. *BECAUSE. MEN. AND. WOMEN IN. POWER. REFUSE* [-Affect;disinclination-non-desire]. *TO. BELIEVE.*

32

> *US.* [-token of JUDGEMENT;propriety] [+GRADUATION;force-intensification]
> #NoKavanaughConfirmation #VoteThemOut #MeToo

Example 5 above contains a disclosure of sexual assault which builds Dr Ford's identity as that of a political victim. The user employs judgements of Propriety, strengthened by different GRADUATION resources, to denounce the behaviour of male senators during the hearing and portray them as political perpetrators. The user also denounces rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes used against Dr Ford that make victim-survivors question their memories, which deepens their traumatic wound (Palomino-Manjón 2022). This is conveyed with implicit negative Capacity to refer to victim-survivors, as well as negative AFFECT and implicit negative Propriety to blame the use of such patriarchal discourses by North American authorities and institutions.

Lastly, all subcorpora were found to include two opposing discourses: feminism and male victimhood. Moreover, discourses of feminism were divided into discourses of empowerment and discourses of emotional pain.

(6) Post99/NoKC-Men: Women are strong [+JUDGEMENT;capacity] and truly [+GRADUATION;force-intensification] unpredictable [+JUDGEMENT;normality]. Mechanistic [-JUDGEMENT;propriety] old men [-JUDGEMENT;propriety] [+GRADUATION;force-intensification], not all men, are weak [-JUDGEMENT;capacity], *insecure* [-AFFECT;insecurity-disquiet] [-token of JUDGEMENT;capacity] and scared [-AFFECT;insecurity-disquiet] [+GRADUATION;force-intensification] of strong [+JUDGEMENT;capacity] women. *November we show them what we are made of, we will not give-up* [+token of JUDGEMENT;tenacity]. #NovemberIsComing #ProtectOurCare #NoKavanaughConfirmation

Example 6 shows the discourse of empowerment surrounding women in the subcorpora. The X user begins by expressing positive Capacity (*strong*) and Normality (*unpredictable*)[4] to depict women as powerful social actors. Furthermore, the user defines an out-group of men surrounded by negative prosody associated with conservatism, sexism and misogyny as the cluster *old men* is used to convey negative Propriety values (Palomino-Manjón 2024). In addition, the adjective *mechanistic*, which defines a patriarchal ideology that considers men as the foundation of society and human nature (Hultman and Pulé 2018), also amplifies the negative depiction of this out-group of men. Finally, they evoke positive Tenacity to portray women as determined to bring an end to Trump's Republican administration.

A second feminist discourse was concerned with emotional pain. AsJ Kavanaugh's confirmation to SCOTUS caused concern and fear among some female users

because of his conservative views. Their distress and sadness were evident in AFFECT resources, as shown in Example 7 below:

(7) Post71/KC-Women: This is beyond [+GRADUATION;force-quantification] maddening [+GRADUATION;force-intensification] [-AFFECT;dissatisfaction-displeasure], sad [-AFFECT;unhappiness-misery], unbelievably [+GRADUATION; force-intensification] disappointing [-AFFECT;unhappiness-misery] and *a wake up call* [-AFFECT;surprise] for women all around the globe [+GRADUATION; force-quantification]. #wematter #KavanaughConfirmation

The X user in Example 7 employs different AFFECT resources to convey unease, anger and emotional distress. This is conveyed through feelings resources of Misery (*sad*, *disappointing*) and Displeasure (*maddening*). Additionally, these emotions are intensified with GRADUATION values (*beyond*, *unbelievably* and *maddening*), emphasising the emotional discomfort experienced by the user.

As expected from networked feminism in social media, the subcorpora *#NoKC-Sexual* and *#KC-Sexual* also featured personal narratives of sexual violence. The employment of AFFECT values allowed victim-survivors to express their traumatic experiences to other users.

(8) Post17/NoKC-Sexual: Not really going to explain all the sexual assault [-JUDGEMENT;propriety] that I've gone through but I blamed myself [-AFFECT;dissatisfaction-displeasure] for years [+GRADUATION;force-quantification]. I was ashamed [-AFFECT;insecurity-disquiet]. I told no one for so long because I didn't know who to trust [-AFFECT;insecurity-distrust]. It never goes away nor will it ever [+GRADUATION;force-quantification]. Its a life long [+GRADUATION;force-quantification] pain [-AFFECT;unhappiness-misery] I will live with. #NoKavanaughConfirmation

The user in Example 8 employs different AFFECT resources to express their trauma. Among these, Dissatisfaction-Displeasure is found to convey a self-blaming attitude. AFFECT is also used to communicate feelings of Insecurity to express shame (Disquiet) and fear of trusting others (Distrust) regarding the crime. All these values are intensified with Quantification resources (*for years*, *it never goes away nor will it ever* and *life long*), which shows the long-term damage that sexual violence causes to victim-survivors.

In contrast, the subcorpora *#KC-Men* was heavily shaped by a discourse of male victimhood, depicting men as victims of feminist movements and, particularly, the #MeToo Movement. The user in Example 9 promotes a discourse of fear through an Insecurity-Disquiet value (*safe*), which, in turn, results in a negative JUDGEMENT of Propriety of the #MeToo Movement and elites. Additional implicit negative

Propriety is presented to blame the movement for victimising men, as well as to accuse the elites (i.e. politicians, the press) for exploiting it to further deprecate men.

(9) Tweet78/KC-Women: *Men are not safe* [+AFFECT;insecurity-disquiet] *anywhere* [-token of JUDGEMENT;propriety]. *The #MeToo movement has successfully launched the "Men are Evil* [-JUDGEMENT;propriety]*" narrative* [-token of JUDGEMENT;propriety] and *there are enough dishonest* [-JUDGEMENT;veracity] *politicians and media on the left to pump up this narrative* [-token of JUDGEMENT;propriety]. A out of control [+GRADUATION; force-intensification] [-JUDGEMENT;propriety] MeToo movement is bad [-JUDGEMENT;propriety] for both men and women [+GRADUATION;force-intensification]. #KavanaughConfirmation

Overall, the analysis of evaluative language revealed highly frequent use of negative prosodies to convey discourses of sexual violence and to depict the different social actors involved in AsJ Kavanaugh's confirmation process. A dominant pattern of negative evaluative prosody which prevailed in all subcorpora was frequently employed to construct discourses of violence, truth and falsehood in the context of the confirmation process. Negative evaluations were primarily conveyed through JUDGEMENT resources to condemn social actors' morality and ethics and denounce their dishonesty during the hearings. Emotional expressions also contributed significantly to creating negative prosodies, since a range of AFFECT lexis was employed to show anger, fear and sadness as the confirmation process unfolded. Notably, the recurrent use of GRADUATION resources helped intensify and strengthen these evaluations and display widespread discomfort and emotional distress among (female) X users and victim-survivors of sexual violence.

5. Conclusion

The present research aimed to examine the use of evaluative language in the (re) production and (counter) resistance of discourses of sexual violence and patriarchal practices and ideologies on X. The use of such resources was expected to construct discourses that condemned rape culture and gendered power structures in North American society. To do so, the sexual assault allegations against AsJ Kavanaugh during his confirmation process to SCOTUS were taken as a case study.

Overall, the results indicated the coexistence of opposing discourses on X during the confirmation process. On the one hand, the subcorpora obtained from the *#KavanaughConfirmation* corpus featured hegemonic discourses that denied and invalidated Dr Ford's testimony, which in turn allowed the spread of anti-feminist and victim-blaming discourses. These reflected the power imbalance that persists in the *offline* world (Herring 1999) and resulted in the dismissal of Dr Ford's allegations by both Republican authorities and X users.

On the other hand, X users employed counter-hegemonic discourses to resist (online) patriarchal discourses and practices by demystifying the rape scripts and myths (Loney-Howes 2018) that invalidated Dr Ford's experience of sexual assault. This also resulted in the sharing of personal narratives by victim-survivors to support her testimony (Jones et al. 2022; Palomino-Manjón 2022). These results suggest that the hashtag *#NoKavanaughConfirmation* also served as a form of networked feminism, even if it was not exclusively designed for this end.

In addition, the study of these online interactions not only contributed to examining gendered discourses surrounding X but also provided insights into its users' online identities and ideologies. These identities were constructed based on the discourses they employed to express support or opposition to the social actors and political groups involved in the process through the (re)production and defiance of feminist and patriarchal discourses (van Dijk 2006; Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014). While each group of supporters used negative values of JUDGEMENT, those advocating for Dr Ford's testimony were characterised by their use of a greater number of positive JUDGEMENT resources as well as different values of AFFECT to foster a more supportive and empathetic stance.

36

Nevertheless, the generalisability of these results is limited. Whereas this study provides relevant perspectives on the use of specific discourses to negotiate, (re)produce, challenge and sustain patriarchal discourses and gendered asymmetry in society, the results cannot be representative of all discourses concerning (sexual) violence on X, as the corpus was limited to a relatively small sample of North American society.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this paper highlights the complex role of X in shaping and spreading discourses of sexual violence and rape culture. The findings reflect social dynamics in which the combination of anonymity and easy access to the Internet (Herring 1999) enables conflicting discourses to coexist on the same platform. While some users find support and a platform to share their experiences, others display dismissive and hostile behaviours that contribute to perpetuating a pervasive rape culture in society. This illustrates the potential and limitations of X as a space for feminist and social activism.

Notes

1. The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' are considered as two ends of a continuum that carry negative and positive connotations, respectively. Consequently, this paper takes the merged term 'victim-survivor' to refer to the people who have been the object of any type of gender-based violence.

2. Explicit Appraisal resources are underlined, whereas implicit resources are highlighted in italics.

3. Examples do not include usernames to ensure authors' anonymity and avoid the traceability of the original message. Grammar, spelling and punctuation have not been altered.

4. Although Martin and White (2005) categorise unpredictable as a value of Non-normality, the context in which this adjective appears helps convey a positive evaluative prosody.

Works cited

Agarwal, Amit. n.d. *Twitter Archiver.* Google Addons. <https://www.labnol.org/>.

Baker, Paul and Erez Levon. 2015. "Picking the Right Cherries? A Comparison of Corpus-based and Qualitative Analyses of News Articles about Masculinity". *Discourse & Communication* 9 (2): 221-236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481314568542>.

Bednarek, Monika. 2008. *Emotion Talk Across Corpora*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bednarek, Monika. 2009. "Language Patterns and ATTITUDE". *Functions of Language* 16 (2): 165-192. <https://doi.org/10.1075/fol.16.2.01bed>.

Blevins, Katie. 2018. "bell hooks and Consciousness-Raising: Argument for a Fourth Wave of Feminism". In Vickery, Jacqueline and Tracy Everbach (eds.) *Mediating Misogyny: Gender, Technology, and Harassment*. Palgrave Macmillan: 91-108. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72917-6_5>.

Bou-Franch, Patricia. 2013. "Domestic Violence and Public Participation in the Media: The Case of Citizen Journalism". *Gender and Language* 7 (3): 275-302. <https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.v7i3.275>.

Bou-Franch, Patricia and Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich. 2014. "Gender Ideology and Social Identity Processes in Online Language Aggression against Women". *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 2 (2): 226-248. <https://doi.org/10.1075/bct.86.03bou>.

Bouvier, Gwen. 2020. "From 'Echo Chambers' to 'Chaos Chambers': Discursive Coherence and Contradiction in the #MeToo Twitter Feed". *Critical Discourse Studies* 19 (6): 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2020.1822898>.

Clark-Parsons, Rosemary. 2019. "'I SEE YOU, I BELIEVE YOU, I STAND WITH YOU': #MeToo and the Performance of Networked Feminist Visibility". *Feminist Media Studies* 21 (3): 362-380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1628797>.

Del Saz-Rubio, Mª Milagros. 2024a. "An Approach to the Rhetoric of Boebert and Díaz-Ayuso's Political Tweets on X: A Corpus-Assisted Analysis". *Alicante Journal of English Studies / Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 41: 75-103. <https://doi.org/10.14198/raei.2024.41.04>.

Del Saz-Rubio, Mª Milagros. 2024b. "From 'Low-class' and 'Talentless' to 'Narcissist and Pathological Liar': a Functional-pragmatic Approach to Meghan Markle's Negative Evaluation on X". *Poznan Studies in Contemporary Linguistics* 60 (3): 311-348. <https://doi.org/10.1515/psicl-2023-0068>.

Dynel, Marta and Fabio I. M. Poppi. 2020. "Arcana Imperii: The Power of Humorous Retorts to Insults on Twitter". *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 8 (1): 57-87. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlac.00031.dyn>.

Frenda, Simona, Bilial Ghanem, Manuel Montes-y-Gómez and Paolo Rosso. 2019. "Online Hate Speech against Women: Automatic Identification of Misogyny and Sexism on Twitter". *Journal of Intelligent and Fuzzy Systems* 36 (5): 4743-4752. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JIFS-179023>.

Hardaker, Claire and Mark McGlashan. 2016. "'Real Men don't Hate Women': Twitter Rape Threats and Group Identity". *Journal of Pragmatics* 91: 80-93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2015.11.005>.

Heritage, Frazer and Veronika Koller. 2020. "Incels, In-groups, and Ideologies: The Representation of Gendered Social Actors in a Sexuality-based Online Community". *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 9 (2): 151-177. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jls.19014.her>.

Herring, Susan C. 1999. "The Rhetorical Dynamics of Gender Harassment On-Line". *The Information Society* 15: 151-167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/019722499128466>.

Hultman, Martin and Paul M. Pulé. 2018. *Ecological Masculinities: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Guidance*. Routledge.

Jaki, Sylvia, Tom De Smedt, Maja Gwóźdź, Rudresh Panchal, Alexander Rossa and Guy De Pauw. 2019. "Online Hatred of Women in the Incels.me Forum: Linguistic Analysis and Automatic Detection". *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 7 (2): 240-268. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlac.00026.jak>.

Jane, Emma A. 2017. *Misogyny Online: A Short (and Brutish) History*. SAGE.

Jones, Lucy, Małgorzata Chałupnik, Jai Mackenzie and Louise Mullany. 2022. "'STFU and Start Listening to How Scared We Are': Resisting Misogyny on Twitter via #NotAllMen". *Discourse, Context & Media* 47: 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2022.100596>.

Kilgarriff, Adam, Vít Baisa, Jan Bušta, Miloš Jakubíček, Vojtěch Kovář, Jan Michelfeit, Pavel Rychlý and Vít Suchomel. 2014. "The Sketch Engine: Ten Years On". *Lexicography* 1: 7-36. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s40607-014-0009-9>.

Krendel, Alexandra. 2020. "The Men and Women, Guys and Girls of the 'Manosphere': A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Approach". *Discourse and Society* 31 (6): 607-630. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926520939690>.

Krendel, Alexandra. 2023. "The Reddit Manosphere as a Text and Place: A Three-part Analysis". In Esposito, Eleonora and Majid KhosraviNik (eds.) *Discourses in the Digital Age: Social Media, Power, and Society*. Routledge: 69-88.

Lawrence, Emilie and Jessica Ringrose. 2018. "@Notofeminism, #Feministsareugly, and Misandry Memes: How Social Media Feminist Humor is Calling out Antifeminism". In Keller, Jessalynn and Maureen E. Ryan (eds.) *Emergent Feminisms Complicating a Postfeminist Media Culture*. Routledge: 211-232.

Loney-Howes, Rachel. 2018. "Shifting the Rape Script: 'Coming Out' Online as a Rape Victim". *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 39 (2): 26-57. <https://doi.org/10.1353/fro.2018.a698452>.

Martin, James R. and David Rose. 2007. *Working with Discourse: Meaning behind the Clause*. Continuum.

Martin, James R. and Peter R. R. White. 2005. *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mendes, Kaitlynn, Jessica Ringrose and Jessalynn Keller. 2018. "#MeToo and the Promise and Pitfalls of Challenging Rape Culture through Digital Feminist Activism". *European Journal of Women's Studies* 25 (2): 236-246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506818765318>.

Morikawa, Nora. 2019. "#YesAllWomen's Language: Women's Style Shifting in Feminist Discourse on Twitter". *Discourse, Context & Media* 28: 112-120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2018.11.001>.

Page, Ruth. 2022. "Analyzing Multimodal Interactions in Social Media Contexts". In Vásquez, Camilla (Ed.) *Research Methods for Digital Discourse Analysis*. Bloomsbury Publishing: 159-176.

Palomino-Manjón, Patricia. 2022. "Feminist Activism on Twitter: The Discursive Construction of Sexual Violence and Victim-survivors in #WhyIDidntReport". *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 10 (1): 140-168. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlac.00049.pal>.

Palomino-Manjón, Patricia. 2024. "Challenging Discourses of Sexual Violence on X: The Linguistic Representation of Victims and Perpetrators in Kavanaugh's Confirmation Process". *Alicante Journal of English Studies / Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 41: 105-127. <https://doi.org/10.14198/raei.2024.41.05>.

Pearce, Michael. 2008. "Investigating the Collocational Behaviour of MAN and WOMAN in the BNC Using Sketch Engine". *Corpora* 3 (1): 1-29.

R Core team. 2020. *R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing*. Version 4.0.1. RStudio, PBC.

Stubbs-Richardson, Megan, Nicole E. Rader and Arthur G. Cosby. 2018. "Tweeting Rape Culture: Examining Portrayals of Victim Blaming in Discussions of Sexual Assault Cases on Twitter". *Feminism & Psychology* 28 (1): 90-108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353517715874>.

Thompson, Geoff. 2014. "AFFECT and Emotion, Target-value Mismatches, and Russian Dolls: Refining the Appraisal Model". In Alba-Juez, Laura and Geoff Thompson (eds.) *Evaluation in Context*. John Benjamins: 47-66.

Van Dijk, Teun A. 2006. "Ideology and Discourse Analysis". *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11 (2): 115-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310600687908>.

Van Leeuwen, Teun. 2008. *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford U.P.

White, Peter R. R. 2004. "Subjectivity, Evaluation and Point of View in Media Discourse". In Coffin, Caroline, Ann Hewings and Kieran O'Halloran (eds.) *Applying English Grammar: Functional and Corpus Approaches*. Routledge: 229-246.

White, Peter R. R. 2011. "Appraisal". In Zienkowski, Jan, Jan-Ola Östman and Jef Verschueren (eds.) *Discursive Pragmatics*. John Benjamins: 14-36.

Zappavigna, Michelle. 2012. *Discourse of Twitter and Social Media: How We Use Language to Create Affiliation on the Web*. Bloomsbury.

Zappavigna, Michelle. 2018. *Searchable Talk: Hashtags and Social Media Metadiscourse*. Bloomsbury.

39

Appendix A: Frequency list for the *#NoKC corpus*

#NoKC corpus					
Rank	**Word**	**Frequency**	**Rank**	**Word**	**Frequency**
1	the	15364	51	right	1096
2	to	11482	52	out	1094
3	and	7775	53	him	1091
4	you	7717	54	sexual	1083
5	is	6868	55	from	1051
6	of	6580	56	why	1047
7	this	4901	57	one	1038
8	for	4559	58	her	1029
9	he	4286	59	like	1025
10	in	3971	60	now	1007
11	not	3609	61	investigation	1000
12	that	3606	62	it's	997
13	on	3440	63	know	995
14	are	3353	64	can	993
15	it	3274	65	please	969
16	kavanaugh	3178	66	their	963
17	be	2989	67	there	958
18	your	2559	68	would	955
19	no	2551	69	people	937
20	we	2495	70	she	913
21	his	2450	71	our	909
22	have	2091	72	ford	879
23	women	2069	73	when	861
24	with	2052	74	more	853
25	will	1961	75	fbi	853
26	all	1878	76	assault	833
27	they	1875	77	me	793
28	do	1870	78	dr	757
29	if	1840	79	time	741
30	vote	1808	80	get	738
31	was	1770	81	never	728
32	who	1727	82	trump	726
33	what	1690	83	them	717
34	so	1613	84	us	690
35	about	1612	85	want	667

#NoKC corpus					
Rank	**Word**	**Frequency**	**Rank**	**Word**	**Frequency**
36	an	1421	86	supreme	663
37	at	1320	87	gop	661
38	i	1298	88	men	655
39	has	1291	89	did	648
40	my	1285	90	because	627
41	just	1258	91	need	613
42	as	1215	92	any	612
43	how	1211	93	he's	608
44	should	1194	94	even	603
45	up	1193	95	thing	596
46	or	1174	96	i'm	595
47	by	1138	97	say	594
48	court	1138	98	too	582
49	don't	1132	99	scotus	582
50	but	1128	100	thank	574

APPENDIX B: Frequency list for the *#KC corpus*

#KC corpus					
Rank	**Word**	**Frequency**	**Rank**	**Word**	**Frequency**
1	the	79881	51	she	5010
2	to	50076	52	out	4990
3	a	39392	53	how	4920
4	and	32611	54	their	4803
5	is	32384	55	it's	4766
6	of	31273	56	my	4580
7	you	22833	57	don't	4461
8	in	21032	58	when	4430
9	this	20624	59	can	4409
10	for	20317	60	court	4353
11	i	18892	61	should	4178
12	that	16366	62	ford	4159
13	on	16087	63	get	4127
14	be	13439	64	one	4102
15	it	13096	65	would	4038
16	are	13076	66	people	3982
17	not	12156	67	why	3744
18	have	10465	68	more	3663
19	kavanaugh	10326	69	him	3631
20	he	9915	70	know	3568
21	will	9571	71	right	3528
22	with	9193	72	there	3521
23	we	9037	73	time	3469
24	they	8759	74	judge	3458
25	if	8442	75	me	3429
26	all	8253	76	supreme	3393
27	what	8101	77	our	3385
28	was	7735	78	i'm	3249
29	your	7411	79	senate	3138
30	vote	7403	80	fbi	3112
31	as	7326	81	today	3066
32	no	7315	82	sexual	3065
33	about	7196	83	been	3008
34	his	6703	84	investigation	2990
35	so	6701	85	brett	2938

42

#KC corpus					
Rank	**Word**	**Frequency**	**Rank**	**Word**	**Frequency**
36	who	6510	86	democrats	2861
37	just	6422	87	them	2838
38	has	6150	88	think	2828
39	at	6050	89	us	2810
40	but	6044	90	did	2789
41	now	5737	91	over	2779
42	do	5691	92	these	2757
43	an	5661	93	going	2697
44	like	5562	94	want	2626
45	her	5551	95	justice	2600
46	by	5523	96	because	2580
47	or	5348	97	man	2579
48	from	5220	98	good	2522
49	women	5152	99	dr	2501
50	up	5106	100	after	2489

43

APPENDIX C: Percentages of instances of APPRAISAL resources in each subcorpus.

	#KC-Kavanaugh	#NoKC-Kavanaugh	#KC-Ford	#NoKC-Ford	#KC-Men	#NoKC-Men	#KC-Women	#NoKC-Women	#KC-Sexual	#NoKC-Sexual
Affect +	0.78%	3.66%	5.81%	12.69%	4.50%	7.78%	3.33%	6.05%	3.50%	6.74%
Affect -	4.71%	5.86%	11.62%	10.82%	13.06%	18.56%	14.28%	5.58%	10.48%	13.86%
Affect neutral	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.45%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Judgment+	9.02%	15.02%	17.84%	26.87%	12.61%	14.38%	12.38%	22.79%	13.29%	12.36%
Judgment -	80.39%	73.26%	61.00%	48.51%	66.23%	58.68%	69.05%	63.72%	69.23%	64.42%
Appreciation +	1.18%	1.10%	0.83%	0.37%	0.45%	0.30%	0.48%	0.46%	1.40%	1.50%
Appreciation -	3.92%	1.10%	2.90%	0.74%	2.71%	0.30%	0.48%	1.40%	2.10%	1.12%

THE IMPACT OF DIALOGIC LITERARY GATHERINGS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RECEPTIVE SKILLS IN EFL UNDERGRADUATES

IMPACTO DE LAS TERTULIAS LITERARIAS DIALÓGICAS EN EL DESARROLLO DE LAS DESTREZAS RECEPTIVAS DE ESTUDIANTADO UNIVERSITARIO DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

RAQUEL FERNÁNDEZ-FERNÁNDEZ
Universidad de Alcalá
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1858-2750>

SILVIA GARCÍA-HERNÁNDEZ
Universidad de Alcalá
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8276-604X>

Abstract

In recent decades, the role of literature in foreign language learning has been reconsidered in an attempt to develop integrative methodologies which benefit from its vast educational potential (Van 2009; Barrette et al. 2010; Bloemert et al. 2017, among others). Building on previous research (Fernández-Fernández 2020; Bouali 2021; Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024), this study explores the use of Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs) as an integrative practice in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in higher education. Working with literary texts using DLGs provides students with authentic language input in a meaningful context. Our research attempts to discover how this practice influences the development of students' (N = 39) receptive communicative abilities, and students' and teachers' perceptions of its impact, using standardised tests, questionnaires, videoblogs, focus groups and teachers' observation diaries. Qualitative data highlights the importance of fostering a supportive classroom environment to motivate student engagement and enhance English language practice. Our findings reveal a statistically significant relationship between DLG implementation and students' improvement of their receptive skills in English.

Keywords: shared reading, dialogic education, English as a Foreign Language, literature, higher education.

Raquel Fernández-Fernández and Silvia García-Hernández

Resumen

En las últimas décadas, el papel de la literatura en el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras ha sido reconsiderado con un interés en desarrollar metodologías integradas que se beneficien de su gran potencial educativo (Van 2009; Barrette et al. 2010; Bloemert et al. 2017, entre otros). Basándose en investigaciones previas (Fernández-Fernández 2020; Bouali 2021; Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024), este estudio explora el uso de las Tertulias Literarias Dialógicas (TLD) como una práctica integrada en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera en la Educación Superior. Trabajar con textos literarios utilizando las tertulias proporciona al alumnado la exposición a un lenguaje auténtico en un contexto significativo. Nuestra investigación pretende descubrir cómo esta práctica influye en el desarrollo de las habilidades comunicativas receptivas en lengua inglesa del alumnado español (n=39), y en las percepciones del estudiantado y profesorado sobre su impacto, utilizando pruebas estandarizadas, cuestionarios, videoblogs, grupos focales y diarios de observación de las profesoras. Los datos cualitativos destacan la importancia del fomento de un ambiente de aula positivo para motivar la participación de estudiantado y mejorar la práctica de la lengua inglesa. Nuestros resultados muestran una relación estadísticamente significativa entre el uso de las tertulias y la mejora de las habilidades receptivas en inglés del estudiantado.

Palabras clave: lectura compartida, educación dialógica, inglés como lengua extranjera, literatura, educación superior.

1. Introduction

The place of literature in English language learning has evolved throughout time. Considered an essential vehicle for language and cultural learning in the past, literary texts later fell out of favour among English language teaching methodologies because of their perceived inability to contribute to the enhancement of real communicative skills (Edmonson 1997). Recently, however, we can find proof of a renewed interest in literature in English language learning. In 2007, the Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages highlighted the importance of integrating language and literature in their report *Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World* (Geisler et al. 2007). The committee also argued for a comprehensive approach to teaching that enables teachers to combine language skills with cultural and literary studies to develop students' translingual and transcultural competences. In the same line, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages included literature as

a valid educational resource to improve students' comprehension of language and culture and advance their ability to interpret and produce complex texts (Council of Europe 2020). However, little is said about the methodologies recommended to ensure a successful integration of language and literature in the EFL classroom.

Our study proposes Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs) as a valid educational practice to incorporate literature in EFL learning. Under the principles of dialogic education (Freire 2006), DLGs provide a structured yet dynamic learning environment, favouring language acquisition and learning (Fernández-Ortube et al. 2021; Ruiz-Eugenio et al. 2023). When participating in DLGs, students engage in collaborative dialogues and fruitful discussions that deepen their understanding of the texts and enhance their communication skills (Loza 2004; Laorden-Gutiérrez and Foncillas-Beamonte 2021). This practice is consistent with current educational goals, as it promotes a comprehensive learning experience that integrates language and cultural and literary competences while promoting inclusion and diversity as well as soft skills such as working in groups, elaborating ideas with others or aiding others to understand a text.

The research project was carried out in first-year undergraduates (N = 39) enrolled in the subject English I in the Degree in Modern Languages and Translation, and was part of the educational innovation project "Dialogic Talks in Higher Education EFL contexts" (UAHEV/1465) (2022-2023) approved by the Universidad de Alcalá. The present study provides evidence of the impact of this innovative pedagogical intervention on students' receptive skills. Reception was the chosen area of focus because of the nature of the intervention, which highlights this mode of communication specifically, and due to learners' language needs, as they scored lower on receptive tasks than in the productive areas. Also, first-year undergraduates must develop a strong foundation in receptive skills to advance their learning throughout the degree. Our data was collected through questionnaires, standardised tests, students' videoblogs, focus groups and teachers' observation diaries. By looking at students' perceptions and results, this research examines whether and how the implementation of DLGs influences the development of students' EFL receptive skills in this context.

2. An Overview of Dialogic Literary Gatherings

DLGs are considered a social practice under the umbrella of dialogic education, as proposed by Freire in his fundamental work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006). As stated in Fernández-González et al. (2012), DLGs are related to the principles of dialogic education in that they foster egalitarian dialogue, promote the development of cultural intelligence, make use of instrumental

learning, promote solidarity, acknowledge diversity, give learners a purpose and boost transformation. Essentially, they highlight the power of dialogue to foster freedom and transformation, acknowledging the voice of each individual and encouraging meaningful conversations that enable learners to actively engage in their own learning process. This will lead them to develop their critical thinking and challenge oppressive structures. This approach to literature is in line with Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading (1938) inasmuch as it values reading, dialogue and critical thinking as indispensable elements in creating a better society.

In the present study, we draw upon DLGs, recognised as a Successful Educational Action (Soler-Gallart 2019; Ruiz-Eugenio et al. 2023). DLGs are considered cultural activities which involve the discussion of literary texts by a group of people. The mechanics are simple: participants bring a paragraph or piece of text they want to discuss with the group. A moderator presents the text, ensures effective turn-taking and promotes the participation of all the members of the group. In the interchange of ideas, all the participants' contributions are listened to, discussed and welcomed. These contributions may come from people other than the class, as DLGs are open to the educational community. Therefore, DLGs provide a space for students to engage in collaborative reading and discussion, emphasising mutual respect and understanding, as well as shared meaning-making.

In language learning terms, Loza (2004) asserts that DLGs can improve both receptive and productive skills but highlights their potential to promote respectful and active listening to all participants. After all, people participating in DLGs build and reshape their ideas together with others. Therefore, oral reception is developed with a critical perspective. Also, DLGs are said to improve either independent reading or reading aloud, facilitating learning through all communication modes, but using written reception as the springboard for production. In this sense, receptive skills play a fundamental role in developing DLGs successfully, while DLGs contribute to adequate development of these skills.

All the aforementioned elements align seamlessly with the considerations of the CEFR, particularly in its latest version, the Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020), which recognises language learners as social agents, emphasising their active role in language acquisition and communication. It also recommends the development of comprehensive language learning through activities that promote reception, production, interaction and mediation. DLGs, as an educational practice, engage students in reading and discussing literary texts, creating a safe and encouraging environment for learners to use their communicative abilities in an authentic context and with real-life purposes. The collaborative nature of DLGs fosters interaction and mediation, as students interpret texts, share perspectives and

negotiate meaning in an egalitarian dialogue. This approach improves linguistic proficiency and cultivates plurilingual and pluricultural competencies, since they align with the goal of promoting intercultural dialogue and social inclusion. Therefore, integrating literature into language learning using DLGs provides students with a holistic educational experience that meets the current principles of effective language education.

3. Literature Review

A recent systematic review of literature on the use of DLGs in education (Ruiz-Eugenio et al. 2023) found that scarce work on the use of this educational practice has been carried out in higher education contexts, particularly in English language learning contexts. To further prove this point, we conducted an overview of articles published in recognised academic journals from 2019 to the time of writing. To that end, the academic search engines Google Scholar and ERIC and the AI tool Consensus were used to extract relevant sources. This process led to the retrieval of eight articles on the use of DLGs in higher education (see Table 1).

Authors (year)	Context	Country
Pérez-Gutiérrez et al. (2019)	Early childhood teacher education degree	Spain
Lozano et al. (2019)	Early childhood and primary teacher education	Spain
Fernández-Fernández (2020)	EFL primary teacher education	Spain
Fernández-Ortube et al. (2021)	Sports science and primary teacher education	Spain
Bouali (2021)	EFL	Algeria
Laorden-Gutiérrez and Foncillas-Beamonte (2021)	Social education degree	Spain
Camús Ferri et al. (2022)	Early childhood education	Spain
Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes (2024)	EFL primary teacher education	Spain

Table 1. Studies reporting on DLGs in higher education contexts reviewed

The fact that most studies have been carried out in Spain comes as no surprise, as DLGs originated in adult schools in Barcelona (Spain) and, accordingly, there are several ongoing initiatives on DLGs in the country. Regarding the context of this earlier research, six studies focus on teacher education (generally at the early childhood and primary education levels), and only two deal with EFL contexts. Therefore, there is little published research on DLGs in contexts where an additional

language is used. This is especially contradictory since many studies in L1 settings, such as Fernández-Ortube et al. (2021) or Camús Ferri et al. (2022), highlight their potential to improve students' language and communicative abilities.

The studies analysed show different areas of research focus as well as a variety of data-gathering tools. One prominent area is student opinions, perceptions and/or attitudes towards the use of DLGs. Lozano et al. (2019) and Camús Ferri et al. (2022) employ semi-structured interviews, while in Fernández-Fernández (2020) and Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes (2024) there is a set of tools encompassing pre- and post-questionnaires, written or oral testimonies, focus groups, observation diaries or recorded sessions. One study (Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024) provides findings from a sustained experience applying DLGs over three years to different student cohorts. Another common area of research is cognition and, more specifically, how DLGs influence students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) (Anderson and Kratwohl 2001) as found in Fernández-Fernández (2020), Bouali (2021) and Fernández-Ortube et al. (2021).

In all the articles analysed, there is evidence of the positive impact of DLGs, as they improve students' participation in the learning process and promote academic excellence (Pérez-Gutiérrez et al. 2019); make students value the experience of sharing their ideas and experiences in a respectful environment (Lozano et al. 2019); engage learners in discussing social issues (Fernández-Ortube et al. 2021); improve student attitudes towards the use of literature as an educational tool (Fernández-Fernández, 2020; Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024) and develop their cognitive skills at higher levels (Fernández-Fernández 2020; Bouali 2021; Fernández-Ortube et al. 2021).

Concerning the development of language and communication, previous research has provided evidence on how DLGs improve students' interactional skills. However, these studies are not sufficiently systematised and are generally based on informal observations. Also, some indicate this as an area of improvement, as students seem to have difficulties expressing their thinking (Lozano et al. 2019) and using more complex communication skills to share information (Camús Ferri et al. 2022). Generally, the studies analysed delve into productive skills, especially speaking and interaction skills, and prominently in the mother tongue (Fernández-Ortube et al. 2021; Camús Ferri et al. 2022).

These lacunae found in the literature review underscore the importance of studying language gains and difficulties more systematically and observing skills other than productive ones in foreign language contexts. Thus, our study attempts to fill this gap, considering how DLGs influence Spanish students' receptive skills in English, an additional language. Students involved in this practice read literary texts and play an active role as listeners; however, little is known about the impact of this

practice on their foreign language development. Another important concern is that data is generally retrieved from informal observation. For this reason, we aim to obtain information using different data-gathering tools: standardised tests, questionnaires, videoblogs, focus groups and teachers' observation diaries, through which we will get a better insight into the possible benefits of the practice implemented. Finally, we also want to contribute to the area of EFL in higher education, which is clearly underrepresented in the literature.

4. The Study

4.1. Aims

This study aimed to explore and understand the effectiveness of literary texts as educational resources in the EFL classroom in higher education through the implementation of a teaching-learning experience using DLGs. The study was undertaken to address the following research questions:

RQ1: Do DLGs have an impact on EFL undergraduates' receptive skills?

RQ2: What are undergraduates' perceptions of the contribution of DLGs to their EFL learning and, in particular, to their receptive skills?

RQ3: What are university teachers' perceptions of the contribution of DLGs to their students' EFL learning and, in particular, to their receptive skills?

Our focus on receptive skills stems from the grounding of DLGs in the collective reading and discussion of literary texts, which directly fosters students' exposure to rich and authentic oral and written input, and encourages active listening and the interpretation of meaning. Also, as shown in the literature review, studies on DLGs are mostly focused on how these have a positive impact on students' interaction and production skills; however, little has been said regarding their impact on students' development of reception skills. This research aims to address this specific gap and provide empirical evidence in this area that, in our view, remains rather unexplored.

4.2. Pedagogical Intervention

The researchers selected the text to be worked on in the DLGs considering language complexity and a plot that addressed social issues. Once several possibilities were studied, the novel *One Crazy Summer* (2011) by Rita Williams-García was chosen. The language used is not complex, as the novel is directed at native-speaking teens. The story, set in the United States in the 1960s, revolves around the trip of three black girls to meet their mother. The context of the civil rights movement is vividly

described through the eyes of the oldest sister, Delphine. The novel, awarded with the Newbery Medal, the Coretta Scott King Book Award and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction, has been praised for its engaging narrative, well-developed characters and historical accuracy, and offers a compelling depiction of a pivotal era in American history, while informing readers about the Black Panther Party and the broader fight for racial justice and equality. The novel delves into universal and timeless topics such as racism, the civil rights movement, family, identity, motherhood and education, making it significant and valuable for students in the 1st year of the Modern Languages and Translation degree.

The lecturers scheduled one-hour DLGs for each group every two weeks, assigning students several chapters to be read outside the classroom. Students had seven sessions where they were invited to sit in a circle and discuss a sentence or paragraph they had extracted from the novel. The teacher acted as the moderator in the first session to model this role; in subsequent six sessions, students assumed this role on a voluntary basis. It is worth noting that the teachers here do not remain at the forefront, but rather emphasise their role as readers, thus altering the hierarchical relationships in the classroom layout and dynamic.

4.3. Context and Participants

The study was performed by the two lecturers who implemented the DLGs, and who are also the researchers authoring this paper, at the Universidad de Alcalá, in the subject English I, part of the first semester of the first year of the degree in Modern Languages and Translation (2022-2023). In this course, students are expected to develop all modes of communication (reception, production, interaction and mediation) to a B2 (CEFRL) level. Furthermore, they also learn how to monitor their performance when communicating in English, to identify, define and solve their problems when dealing with the oral and written skills. To assist students in achieving these academic learning objectives, lecturers included DLGs as an educational strategy in their teaching curricula, and students were informed about the study associated with it. Participation in the research was voluntary.

Volunteer participants comprised 39 first-year undergraduates. There were 32 women, five men and two non-binary students. When prompted to self-declare their English language level in the questionnaire, a majority reported having a B2 (21 students) level, followed by C1 (nine students), B1 (four students), A2 (one student) and C2 (one student). Three did not indicate their level of proficiency in the questionnaire.

Concerning their reading habits in their mother tongue and in English, students showed a low frequency of reading. In their mother tongue, most students (n = 22) read 1 to 4 books per year. However, four reported not reading any books,

whereas two students read more than 20. In English, most students (n = 25) also read 1 to 4 books. However, eight students reported not reading any books in English, and none read more than 20. Although the patterns are similar, there is a slightly lower engagement in English. When looking into their main motivation to read in English, entertainment was the most prevalent (n = 19), followed by vocabulary learning (n = 11). They also stated they have problems finding the time and motivation to read more. This information may indicate that students do not generally read literature in English in the classroom; rather, they read for pleasure and with a lower frequency than desired.

The study also included a control group (group B), which was composed of 34 students enrolled in the same course with the same teachers a year later (2023-2024). They did not engage in DLGs in any way. The distribution regarding gender was similar (six men and 28 women); and their median English level was also B2. Likewise, students completed a questionnaire on their reading habits, showing the same patterns found in the experimental group, with slightly higher results in the average number of books read in English.

4.4. Research Design and Tools

The present study is empirical and employs a mixed-methods research design, incorporating qualitative and quantitative data to gather the necessary information to respond to the research questions. Five different data-collection tools were used in this study. First, a questionnaire based on Jones and Carter (2012) (see Appendix 1) was developed to examine the participants' perception of the use of literature in the EFL classroom. The questionnaire was not formally piloted due to the small and well-defined sample. Yet, to ensure clarity, relevance and applicability, the instrument was created especially for this setting, and verified by earlier studies (Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024) as well as expert review by other members of the authors' research team. The questionnaire was administered before and after the implementation of DLGs and was divided into three sections. This first part focused on explaining the main aims of the project and asked students to acknowledge that they had been informed of their participation in the research and given their consent to take part in it. The second section revolved around general information and reading habits. This section included nine questions in which participants were asked to provide information on aspects such as their age, level of English and reading habits both in their mother tongue and in their second language (English). The last section consisted of five questions rated on a 10-point Likert scale (1 being "strongly disagree", and 10 being "strongly agree") where participants had to reflect on their perception of the use of literature in the EFL classroom, its usefulness and their motivation to engage with it.

Second, teachers completed observation diaries in the DLG lessons. While monitoring the activity, teachers took notes on students' perceptions and performance related to the development of their receptive skills in English. Third, students were asked to record a videoblog about their personal experience with this activity in the classroom to collect their general perceptions of DLGs and to evaluate their spoken performance. More precisely, participants were asked to reflect on the impact DLGs had on their development of competences in English and their awareness of salient socio-historical themes depicted in the novel. On a similar note, students also shared individually and privately with their teachers/researchers how the experience had worked for them, to allow them to express their views openly, without the pressure of what other students might think.

The fourth tool was the exam, extracted from the free samples provided by Cambridge ESOL webpage. In the seventh week of the course, that is, towards the middle of the semester, a mid-term exam was held to measure the development of students' receptive skills in English. Similarly, an additional exam was held at the end of the semester again as part of the continuous assessment of students to achieve B2.

54

Finally, focus groups were organised after the results obtained from the other data sources had been analysed. All participants volunteered to take part in these groups. A thirty-minute group interview was conducted by an external research team member to prevent participants from being reluctant to express their opinions freely, given that the teachers of the subject are the researchers developing this project, and therefore we wanted to avoid any type of bias or reservation, as well as to discourage participants from merely stating what they believed we wanted to hear. The focus group discussion was organised around the following topics:

- The concept of DLGs and their implementation in the EFL class. The discussion focused on aspects such as the classroom atmosphere generated, how the experience of using literature in the class differed from any previous experience with literature in the classroom, and how the experience of reading the selected novel would have been different if not performed through DLGs.

- Usefulness of DLGs for foreign language learning. The guiding questions revolved around the aspects they had improved, the extent to which sharing ideas with their peers had helped them, and what they had gained from working with DLGs in class.

- Difficulties and further work. In the last part of the focus group, researchers were interested in understanding students' difficulties while participating in the DLGs.

4.5. Research Procedure and Ethics

The research was conducted from September to December 2022. The instruments for data collection were applied uniformly to the two groups that participated in the research. At the beginning of the course, the researchers administered the pre-test questionnaire. The post-test, submission of student videoblogs and focus groups took place in the last weeks of the semester in December. The teachers' observation diaries, which were completed throughout the seven weeks, were collected at the end of the experience in December. Concerning data treatment and analysis, researchers gave a code to each participant to preserve their anonymity. The researchers performed statistical analysis using SPSS 28 and obtained graphic representations (tables) using this programme. The qualitative data gathered from the teacher observation diaries, the students' videoblogs and the focus groups were transcribed and then coded and analysed using the software tool NVivo 14. The analysis of the videoblogs and the focus groups was initially performed using these categories: "Comments related to oral reception"; "Comments related to written reception"; "Perceptions of improvement in communicative abilities (overall)"; "Perceptions of the impact of DLGs on their communicative performance"; "Other relevant comments".

55

The research project received the approval of the Ethics Committee of the Universidad de Alcalá. Prior to commencing the study, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, its primary objectives and the voluntary nature of their participation. They were also assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that their data would be anonymised, and they all signed a consent form that allowed the researchers to use the information provided for research purposes.

5. Results

This section presents the results under each of the research questions. For this purpose, data obtained from the five data-collection tools used in the research is offered.

RQ1: Do DLGs have an impact on EFL undergraduates' receptive skills?

Students completed two standardised B2 reading and listening tests extracted from Cambridge Exams free samples. The purpose was to measure the extent to which DLGs influenced their receptive skills in English. The following are the results obtained by students in the experimental group in the subject English I (Table 2), where they were implemented, both in the mid-term and final exams in oral and written reception tasks:

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Oral reception, mid-term	39	.00	10.00	5.4654	2.72851
Oral reception, final	39	.80	10.00	6.7603	2.52368
Written reception, mid-term	39	1.00	10.00	6.5487	2.36408
Written reception, final	39	2.20	9.50	7.8282	1.48978

Table 2. Results of mid-term and final exams for receptive skills

As shown in Table 2, the average obtained in oral reception in the middle of the course is 5.47 out of 10, rising to 6.76 at the conclusion of the semester. In the case of written reception, students obtained an average mark of 6.55 in the middle of the course, which rose to 7.83 at the end of the semester. To determine whether the improvements in the results obtained were statistically significant, two t-tests for related samples were conducted: one to compare the means in the mid-term versus the final test scores, and the other to calculate the statistical significance (Tables 3 and 4).

		Paired samples t-test			
		Related differences			
		Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error mean	95% confidence interval
Pair 1	Oral reception, mid-term - Oral reception, final	-1.29487	2.03465	.32581	-1.95443
Pair 2	Written reception, mid-term - Written reception, final	-1.27949	1.68198	.26933	-1.82472

Table 3. T-tests: means in the mid-term vs. the final tests (experimental group)

		Paired samples t-test			
		Related differences	t	df	Sig
		95% confidence interval of the difference Upper			(2-tailed)
Pair 1	Oral reception, mid-term - Oral reception, final	-.63531	-3.974	38	.000
Pair 2	Written reception, mid-term - Written reception, final	-.73425	-4.751	38	.000

Table 4. T-tests: statistical significance (mid-term vs. final test) (experimental group)

In both instances, the differences between the means are statistically relevant, with a p-value <0.001. Consequently, the results demonstrate a significant improvement in the students' grades from the mid-term to the end of the term.

As a control group, the results obtained in the listening and reading tests were compared with students (N = 34) who completed the subject the following academic year (2023-2024) (Table 5). For both listening and reading, the experimental group shows a greater improvement than the control group (+1.3). The p-value obtained is 0.095; although not statistically significant, this difference may be considered marginally significant at the 0.10 level, indicating a potential positive effect of the pedagogical intervention. These results must be taken with caution, as the samples are small.

	Oral reception, mid-term	Oral reception, end-term	Written reception, mid-term	Written reception, end-term	Diff. oral reception	Diff. written reception
Experimental group	5.4	6.7	6.5	7.8	+1.3	+1.3
Control group	6.3	6.8	6.4	7.3	+0.5	+0.9

Table 5. Average and average differences: experimental vs. control group

RQ2: What are undergraduates' perceptions of the contribution of DLGs to their EFL learning and, in particular, to their receptive skills?

Quantitative analysis of the results of the mid-term and the end-term exams shows that 94.87% of the participants improved in oral reception (37 students), and 79.48% obtained higher marks in written reception (31 students). In addition, the participants' perception of the contribution of DLGs to their learning was measured through other quantitative and qualitative data.

A relevant item in the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire provides information on students' performance in reading literature. Table 6 shows the answers to the question, "If you read literature in English, why do you do it? Choose the strongest reason".

Answers	Pre-questionnaire	Post-questionnaire
For pleasure	20 = 51.28%	14 = 35.89%
To improve my vocabulary and reading skills	9 = 23.07%	17 = 43.59 %
Because it is an assignment	3 = 7.69%	3 = 7.69%
No answer	7 = 17.95 %	5 = 12.82%

Table 6. Reasons provided for reading literature in English (pre- and post- measures)

As Table 6 shows, before the experience, students read in English "for pleasure". However, after being engaged with DLGs, the majority identified "To improve my vocabulary and reading skills" as their primary reason for reading literature in English. This change, which at first may not seem substantial, reveals deeper insights into their perception of how reading in a foreign language and practising reading through DLGs contributes to the improvement of their lexical range and written receptive skills.

Also in the general information section, students were asked about their reading habits in English and then, in the post-questionnaire, after having experienced DLGs, how many books they planned to read throughout the year. Results show that all the students are now planning to read books in English along the year (Table 7). Also, we found an increase in the number of students who plan to read 1-4 (+1) and 5-10 books (+5). This may indicate a positive effect of DLGs in fostering reading habits in the FL, which may ultimately lead to an improvement in their written receptive skills.

	Number of students (pre-)	Number of students (post-)
0 books	8	0
1-4	25	26
5-10	5	10
10-20	2	2
+20	0	0

Table 7. Students' reading habits in English before and after the pedagogical intervention

Regarding the items participants had to rate, an increase was observed in all of them except in item 4, "Reading literature in English is easy and doesn't take much effort", with a slight decrease of 0.23 (Table 8). This result may indicate that students recognise the challenges and intricacies of reading literary texts. Regarding the other items, students recognise the role of literary texts in the EFL classroom (items 1 and 2), even when they are not yet advanced learners. Also, they value the role of reading and discussing literary texts as an activity which will impact their communicative abilities (items 3 and 5).

	Pre-mean	Pre-std. dev	Post-mean	Post std. Dev	Mean diff.
1. I love the idea of working with literary texts in the classroom.	7.18	2.26	7.47	1.797	0.29
2. I think literature in English can be used even if you are not an advanced language learner.	6.68	2.19	6.82	2.19	0.14
3. I think that reading and discussing literature is an important activity in the classroom.	6.79	2.2	7.05	1.9	0.26
4. Reading literature in English is easy and doesn't take much effort.	6.73	2.2	6.5	2.1	-0.23
5. Literary language is useful for everyday communication.	7.13	2.3	7.21	2	0.08

Table 8. Students' perceptions of the use of literary texts in the classroom before and after the DLGs

A paired t-test was used to compare the means before and after the intervention to determine whether there was significant difference between them (Table 9). Significant positive changes were observed in the importance of reading literature in English as a classroom activity reported by students ($t(37)=3.832$, $p=0.000$). This may indicate that the intervention was particularly helpful in highlighting the use of literary texts in English language learning classes.

	Mean difference	t	df	p-value
1. I love the idea of working with literary texts in the classroom.	-0.289	-1.026	37	0.311
2. I think literature in English can be used even if you are not an advanced language learner.	-0.132	-0.354	37	0.725
3. I think that reading and discussing literature is an important activity in the classroom.	0.816	3.832	37	0.000
4. Reading literature in English is easy and doesn't take much effort.	0.162	0.513	36	0.611
5. Literary language is useful for everyday communication.	-0.368	-1.132	37	0.265

Table 9. Paired t-tests. Students' perceptions of the use of literary texts in the classroom (Likert-scale questionnaire)

In addition to these quantitative data, the videoblogs created by the participants provide valuable qualitative information about the influence DLGs have had on the development of their receptive skills in English. Twelve students commented on how they reflected on the ideas they wanted to share in the following DLG while reading the assigned texts. Also, they reported having read the texts in English more carefully (18 students) and having enjoyed the reading and at the

same time experiencing it in a very different way from what they were used to in high school (13 students). In a similar vein, in the focus groups they referred to the experience as something "innovative" and "totally different" from the "boring" and "demotivating" way of reading literature they had experienced as English learners before.

Along similar lines, several participants in the focus groups noted how the process of sharing the reading had enhanced their comprehension of the themes presented in the book. Through active listening to others' contributions, participants were not only encouraged to critically engage with perspectives that contrasted with their own understandings, but also to refine their own interpretations. Consequently, their engagement in the DLGs also played a key role in enhancing their oral receptive skills, as it required them to process and evaluate information in real time, fostering both comprehension and a deeper cognitive assessment of others' ideas. Therefore, students demonstrated an evolution in their communicative and language abilities in EFL, and a development in their use of HOTS, which enable them to analyse and evaluate their reading experiences.

60

Regarding their attitudes, students were at first somehow reticent and found it difficult to participate in the discussion. This may be explained because, as participants commented on in the focus groups, they had not experienced DLGs before. In addition, students were not familiar with the use of literary texts, as they stated when rating the statement, "While I was learning English at school and high school, we worked with a good number of literary texts" before the intervention. On a 10-point Likert scale, only one participant (1.95%) scored 10, and just eight of them (20.51%) agreed with the statement with more than five points. However, as they became used to DLGs, they were more participative: throughout the first weeks, just 5 or 6 students participated actively while the rest just listened and nodded, showing understanding. In contrast, in the last weeks, students were more autonomous: they led discussions, organised turn-taking and interacted freely without expecting the teacher to guide them. Also, there was much more interaction, with nearly all students participating except for two or three students, who continued to refrain from participating, likely due to either a lower level of English proficiency or affective factors, such as extreme shyness.

Another influencing aspect is that participants were first-year university students. Even though the teachers had worked with some classroom dynamics and activities to make the group homogeneous and create a suitable environment prior to working with the DLGs, it took time until most students felt comfortable in the group. The fear of feeling judged and of the possibility of being criticised by

their peers were the two main reasons given by students in their videoblogs as to their low degree of participation. Despite this, as the course progressed, we could notice how the environment created during the DLGs gave way to a much more cohesive group, as expressed by participants: "It has helped us to get to know each other better as people, because we listened to each other's opinions" (22-23_E1B_15); "Above all, it brings closer ties within the group" (22-23_E1B_7). Similarly, at the end of the course, students also said they had felt safe to express themselves and talk about both their ideas and feelings during the DLGs: "It has been an environment in which to speak freely and express emotions" (22-23_E1B_18); "The atmosphere of sharing the reading has increased my motivation to be part of the activity" (22-23_E1B_7); "I liked having the freedom to express my opinion and not feeling judged even when I shared my crazy theories" (22-23_E1B_5); "There's been a good feeling among us, you could say anything without any problem, and this is the first time this has happened to me" (22-23_E1B_13).

RQ3: What are university teachers' perceptions of the contribution of DLGs to their students' EFL learning and, in particular, to their receptive skills?

Concerning evolution, information about teachers' perceptions was obtained from their observation diaries. The teachers recorded their perceptions of the impact of DLGs on students' receptive skills. However, while analysing their reports, other categories emerged, which comprise the following areas: participation and motivation, and students' perception of literature as a learning resource.

Their perceptions were positive and were generally related to the level of engagement of students with the activity, and how they were eager to read and listen to their students, as proved by comments such as, "When I entered the classroom, all the students had already prepared the U-shape layout and were holding their books, ready to share" (22-23_T1). Comments on engagement appeared in entries written in the first two weeks but can also be found in the last entries of both teachers, hinting at a sustained positive effect of DLGs: "The passion and engagement of some of the students was clearly contagious. More and more classmates engaged in reading just because they observed the enthusiasm of their peers" (22-23_T1); "One student proposed reading the second book of the trilogy together. I was surprised because a group of them volunteered to create a reading club and invited me to join" (22-23_T2).

Teachers also perceived that students valued the role of literature in the classroom. This can be found in 15 entries throughout the experience. Also, they reported being surprised by students' proactive behaviour to initiate new shared reading activities: "We had already finished the DLG, and a group of students commented

61

on how they enjoyed the experience, and how different it was from their past experiences with literature. They said that DLGs had been an eye-opener for them" (22-23_T1).

We can find instances where teachers deal with the experience of having students act as moderators. It seems that students were reluctant to take on this role but, when they did, the experience was more fruitful. This is reported by both teachers in different comments from week 5 until the end of the experience. "Today a student volunteered to become the moderator. I noticed more students were participating this time, and they were more relaxed and confident when they were invited to share their perspectives. Also, one student told me that she liked when I was participating as a reader, rather than as a teacher. I found this interesting, as DLGs seem to create a different power relationship with students" (22-23_T1).

Researchers perceive this experience as positive for the development of students' receptive skills in English. When observing their work, most of the students had read the indicated fragment before class, some of them even had notes stuck on the pages or had sentences underlined in different colours containing ideas that they wanted to share in class. In addition, the atmosphere created during the exchange of opinions and the sharing of ideas and interpretations was characterised by respect for each other and for each speaker's turn, thus following the guidelines of DLGs provided at the beginning of the subject. This was supported by careful attention to each participant's comments, to be able to agree, disagree or otherwise react to the ideas of their peers. Because of all this, we can say that all the previous work and the development of the debates in class, together with other strategies, helped develop students' receptive skills. Their comments in class indicated an understanding of the ideas in the text and, at the same time, the responses they gave to their peers were coherent with what they had explained, demonstrating they had adequately understood what their interlocutor was saying.

6. Discussion

This study aimed to determine the extent to which DLGs have an impact on students' receptive skills in English in a higher education EFL context as well as to ascertain both students' and teachers' perceptions of the contribution of DLGs to the development of receptive skills. Our findings indicate that DLGs may positively affect students' development of receptive skills. Although our sample is small, and these results need to be taken cautiously, our outcomes are consistent with the findings by Camús Ferri et al. (2019), who also reported substantial improvements in reading and speaking abilities in higher education after DLGs were implemented.

The improvement of students' written receptive skills is not solely reflected in their exam performance, as in the focus groups students also recognised DLGs had increased their motivation to engage with literary works in English in their original form. Several students described this activity as new and challenging; hence, we can assert that the DLGs fostered academic growth and encouraged a sustained interest in reading and discussing literary texts in English.

Another particularly relevant finding is the change in students' perception of the reading process. Participants had traditionally experienced reading as an individual activity. However, and in the light of our pedagogical intervention, this perception has evolved and, in line with what Lozano et al. (2019) claimed in their study on the use of DLGs in higher education, students now recognise the value of sharing their opinions and interpretations of a text in a supportive classroom atmosphere guided by care and respect, where they can feel free to share their ideas without feeling judged. Hence, this shift to a dialogic learning environment enhances the reading experience and encourages them to be more open to discussion, critical thinking and collaborative learning. The development of these competences is in line with the idea of the foreign language learners as social agents, as put forward by the CEFRL (Council of Europe 2020).

63

Higher education EFL students' improvement of their receptive skills is also identified in the results of the exams and in the discussions. Obviously, during the course, students were exposed to other learning strategies that may have helped them improve; however, when it comes to their perceptions, they acknowledged having practised active listening during the DLGs. According to them, listening carefully to what other classmates said helped them sharpen their ability to understand spoken English. The teachers noticed improvements in most of the students' abilities to understand complex ideas, comprehend different perspectives and extract key points from their classmates' input, which contributed to developing students' confidence in their receptive skills.

There are other positive outcomes derived from the implementation of DLGs. The first one is that these favourable experiences with literature in English influenced students' view of literary texts as educational resources, increasing their value as learning opportunities for professional and personal development, in line with previous results (Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024). Our findings also suggest that learning in an interactive atmosphere can be beneficial to the learning process as a whole, as indicated by Mercer et al. (2016). In this context, the teacher is no longer 'the sage on the stage' and plays the role of a learning facilitator, observing students' individual needs and catering to those throughout the learning process. Dialogic practices, in particular, play a crucial role in

enhancing students' responsibility for their own learning. Finally, DLGs require more complex language and cognition, as highlighted by Fernández-Ortube et al. (2021), opening more opportunities for rich communication in the EFL higher education classroom.

7. Conclusions

The present study attempted to shed light on the use of DLGs in an EFL context in higher education. Our interest was to find out whether the use of this pedagogical practice had any effect on students' reception skills in English. Based on the comprehensive evaluation of students' performance, our results demonstrate a statistically significant improvement in students' communicative abilities in reception at the end of the intervention. Also, their perceptions about the use of literature as an educational resource in an EFL context improved, as students stated that literature can help them develop a better command of English and that they value the use of literary texts as a class activity. Moreover, the student participants found the experience of shared reading rewarding and enjoyable and claimed to have learned new perspectives on the reading experience thanks to their classmates' interventions. Finally, the use of DLGs also seems to have a positive effect on students' motivation to read in English, as they planned to read more books after the intervention in comparison with the number originally intended.

Although the study has produced promising results, it needs to be acknowledged that it was carried out in a particular context with a modest number of students. It is necessary to do more research with EFL university students to ascertain whether this pedagogical practice shows similar results. Also, it would be interesting to measure its impact on other modes of communication, such as production, interaction and mediation. Another area of potential research is that of discourse analysis, as sessions can be recorded and transcribed to obtain information about the type of exchanges DLGs promote and how these can have pedagogical value. Furthermore, we encourage teachers and researchers of other additional languages, or even those who are working in translanguaging or plurilingual contexts, to use DLGs, as to compare results when other languages and cultures come into play. Finally, the positive results obtained in this piece of research underscore the learning benefits of collaborative and reflective practices in foreign language learning, as they support learning and empower students to be responsible for their own learning process together with their peers.

Author Contributions

In the present paper, both authors were equally involved in all the steps of the process. They actively participated in study planning, data collection, qualitative and quantitative analysis, manuscript writing and revision of the final version of the paper.

Works cited

ANDERSON, Lorin W. and David R. KRATHWOHL. (eds.) 2001. *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Longman.

BARRETTE, Catherine, Kate PAESANI and Kimberly VINALL. 2010. "Toward an Integrated Curriculum: Maximizing the Use of Target Language Literature". *Foreign Language Annals* 43 (2): 216-230. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1944-9720.2010.01075.X>.

BLOEMERT, Jasmijn, Amos PARAN, Ellen JANSEN and Wim VAN DE GRIFT. 2017. "Students' Perspective on the Benefits of EFL Literature Education". *The Language Learning Journal* 47 (3): 371-384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2017.1298149>.

BOUALI, Amina. 2021. "'Bloometizing' the EFL Literature Classroom through a Dialogic Model: A Barometer for Academic Change". *Arab World English Journal* 12 (3): 186-200. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol12no3.13>.

CAMÚS FERRI, María del Mar, Marcos Jesús IGLESIAS MARTÍNEZ and Inés LOZANO CABEZAS. 2022. "Dialogic Learning as a Strategy for Reflection and Development of Communication in Initial Teacher Training". *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice* 22 (10): 156-167. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v22i10.5394>.

Council of Europe. 2020. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment - Companion Volume.* Council of Europe Publishing.

EDMONSON, Willis. 1997. "The Role of Literature in Foreign language Learning and Teaching: Some Valid Assumptions and Invalid Arguments". *AILA Review* 12: 42-55.

FERNÁNDEZ-FERNÁNDEZ, Raquel. 2020. "Using Dialogic Talks in EFL Primary Teacher Education: An Experience". *Revista Nebrija de Lingüística aplicada a la enseñanza de las lenguas* 14 (29): 148-159. <https://doi.org/10.26378/rnlael1429367>.

FERNÁNDEZ-FERNÁNDEZ, Raquel and Ana Virginia LOPEZ-FUENTES. 2024. "Developing Positive Attitudes towards the Use of Literature in the Bilingual Classroom: A Study with EFL Primary Teacher Education Undergraduates". *Revista de Educación* 1 (403). <https://doi.org/10.4438/1988-592X-RE-2024-403-606>.

FERNÁNDEZ-GONZÁLEZ, Sonia, Rosa GARVÍN FERNÁNDEZ and Víctor GONZÁLEZ MANZANERO. 2012. "Tertulias pedagógicas dialógicas: con el libro en la mano". *Revista Electrónica Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado* 15(4): 113-118.

FERNÁNDEZ-ORTUBE, Alazne, Iván HERNANDO-MORENO and Jesús MARAURI-CEBALLOS. 2021. "La influencia de las tertulias dialógicas en la universidad y funciones psicológicas de orden superior".

Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research 11 (2): 152-177. <https://doi.org/10.17583/remie.0.6182>.

Freire, Paulo. 2006. *Pedagogía del oprimido*. Siglo XXI Editores.

Geisler, Michael, Claire Kramsch, Scott McGinnis, Peter Patrikis, Mary Louise Pratt, Karin Ryding and Haun Saussy. 2007. "Foreign Languages and Higher Education. New Structures for a Changed World: MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages". *Profession:* 234-245.

Jones, Christian and Ronald Carter. 2012. "Literature and Language Awareness: Using Literature to Achieve CEFR Outcomes". *Journal of Second Language Teaching and Research* 1 (1): 69-82. <https://doi.org/10.5420/jsltr.01.01.3320>.

Laorden-Gutiérrez, Cristina and Mercedes Foncillas-Beamonte. 2021. "Tertulias pedagógicas dialógicas: dando voz al aprendizaje de los estudiantes en la educación superior". *Revista EDUCA UMCH* 17: 21-40. <https://doi.org/10.35756/educaumch.202117.152>.

Loza Aguirre, Miguel. 2004. "Tertulias literarias". *Cuadernos de Pedagogía* 34 (1): 66-69.

Lozano, Inés, Marcos Jesús Iglesias, Antonio Giner-Gomis and Luisa Aitana Sauleda. 2019. "Las tertulias dialógicas en la Educación Superior: Un estudio cualitativo en la formación inicial docente". In Roig-Vila, Rosabel (ed.) *Investigación e innovación en la Educación Superior. Nuevos contextos, nuevas ideas*. Graó: 261-271.

Mercer, Neil, Linda Hargreaves and Rocío García-Carrión. 2016. *Aprendizaje e interacciones en el aula.* Hipatia.

Pérez-Gutiérrez, Mikel, Marifa Salceda Mesa and José Manuel Castanedo Alonso. 2019. "Las tertulias curriculares dialógicas en el Grado de Magisterio de Educación Infantil en la Universidad de Cantabria". *Revista Infancia, Educación y Aprendizaje* 5 (2): 286-292.

Rosenblatt, Louise M. 1938. *Literature as Exploration*. Modern Language Association.

Ruiz-Eugenio, Laura, Marta Soler-Gallart, Sandra Racionero-Plaza and María Padrós 2023. "Dialogic Literary Gatherings: A Systematic Review of Evidence to Overcome Social and Educational Inequalities". *Educational Research Review* 39: 100534. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100534>.

Soler-Gallart, Marta. 2019. "Research on Dialogic Literary Gatherings". In Mercer, Neil, Rupert Wegerif and Louis Major (eds.) *The Routledge International Handbook of Research on Dialogic Education*. Routledge: 348-359. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429441677-29>.

Van, Truong Thi My. 2009. "The Relevance of Literary Analysis to Teaching Literature in the EFL Classroom". *English Teaching Forum* 47 (3): 2-9.

Appendix 1

Dialogic Talks - Questionnaire

Este cuestionario está dirigido al alumnado matriculado en las asignaturas Inglés I del Grado en Lenguas Modernas y Traducción, perteneciente a Universidad de Alcalá. El objetivo de este cuestionario es recoger datos para el proyecto de innovación "Evaluación de la puesta en práctica de tertulias dialógicas en contextos de aprendizaje de inglés como lengua extranjera en Educación Superior". Cumplimentarlo no le llevará más de 10 minutos, y la información que nos proporcionará es de vital importancia para nuestro trabajo que, más adelante, esperamos, podrá contribuir a mejorar la formación de nuestros estudiantes. ¡Muchas gracias por su colaboración!

He sido informado/a de mi participación en la investigación y doy mi consentimiento.

1. Your full name:
2. Date:
3. What year were you born?
4. What is your level of English?
5. How many literature books IN YOUR MOTHER TONGUE do you think you will read in 2023?
6. How many literature books IN ENGLISH do you think you will read in 2023?
7. Would you like to read more in English? If so, why don't you do it? Choose the strongest reason, in your view.
8. If you read literature in English, why do you do it? Choose the strongest reason.
   - For pleasure
   - To improve my vocabulary and reading skills
   - Because it is an assignment
   - Others:
9. While you were learning English at school and high school, did you work with literary texts? (Rate your level of agreement from 1 to 10)

Rate the following sentences from 1 to 10 according to your level of agreement:

1. I love the idea of working with literary texts in the classroom.
2. I think literature in English can be used even if you are not an advanced language learner.

67

3. I think that reading and discussing literature is an important activity in the classroom.
4. Reading literature in English is easy and doesn't take me much effort.
5. Literary language is useful for everyday communication.

Would you like to comment anything else about the use of literary texts in the English classroom?

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RHETORICAL STRUCTURES IN ENGLISH L1 AND L2 UNDERGRADUATE DISSERTATION INTRODUCTIONS

ANÁLISIS COMPARATIVO DE LAS ESTRUCTURAS RETÓRICAS EN LAS INTRODUCCIONES DE TRABAJOS DE FIN DE GRADO EN INGLÉS L1 Y L2

<https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202511384>

ISABEL PIZARRO
Universidad de Valladolid
isabel.pizarro@uva.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3152-5841>

LEONOR PÉREZ RUIZ
Universidad de Valladolid
leonor.perez@uva.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2750-4447>

Abstract

Undergraduate dissertations (UDs) are the final academic piece of work undertaken by undergraduate students and their purpose is to evaluate mastery of the skills acquired throughout the curriculum. They include an introduction that, among other rhetorical functions, sets the general style of the entire dissertation, presents the research context and objectives, and seeks to persuade the evaluation committee of its quality and, thus, its relevance in the academic context. Based on Swales's model (1990, 2004) for the analysis of research article introductions, we examine the rhetorical structure of UD introductions written by native and non-native speakers of English to establish whether there are differences in the rhetorical structure and the order of its moves and steps. The data analysed were retrieved from a comparable corpus of 40 introductions. Results indicate that non-native English speakers write shorter introductions with fewer steps and with a more linear rhetorical structure than their counterparts, and both groups fail to state the value of their research. Findings indicate that students require additional guidance in the writing of this academic genre.

Resumen

Los Trabajos Fin de Grado (TFG) son el trabajo académico final que realizan los estudiantes de grado y cuyo propósito es evaluar si se han alcanzado las competencias de la titulación. Incluyen una introducción que, entre otras funciones retóricas, establece el estilo general del documento, presenta el contexto y los objetivos de la investigación realizada, e intenta convencer al comité de evaluación de su calidad y, por tanto, de su relevancia en el contexto académico. Basándonos en el modelo de Swales (1990, 2004) para el análisis de introducciones de artículos de investigación, examinamos la estructura retórica de introducciones de los TFG escritas por hablantes nativos y no nativos de inglés para establecer si existen diferencias en la estructura retórica y el orden de sus movimientos y pasos. Los datos analizados se extrajeron de un corpus comparable de 40 introducciones. Los resultados indican que los hablantes no nativos escriben introducciones más breves, con menos pasos y con una estructura retórica más lineal que sus homólogos nativos de lengua inglesa, y ambos grupos omiten indicar la importancia de su investigación. Las conclusiones indican que los estudiantes necesitan orientación académica adicional para la redacción de este género académico.

Palabras clave: escritura académica, introducción del TFG, estructura retórica, hablantes nativos de inglés, hablantes no nativos de inglés.

1. Introduction

Success in higher education depends on the ability to write effective texts that conform to academic conventions. The undergraduate dissertation[1] (UD) is a crucial element in students' academic life, being the final requirement to obtain their university degree and marking the transition to professional life (Lillo-Fuentes and Venegas 2020: 4-5). Writing UDs is particularly demanding, especially for students in non-Anglophone universities that require UDs to be written in English, as is the case in some Spanish universities, particularly within the degree in English studies — an interdisciplinary area of study that encompasses the English language, its literature, linguistics, teaching and cultural contexts.

The introduction of the UD (UDI) is a key section, setting the context and rationale for the research and guiding the reader through the dissertation. Its purpose is to establish the research background, define the scope and outline the structure of

the work. For examiners, the UDI often shapes their first impression of the quality of the dissertation, serving as a presentation of the research carried out (Fitriyah 2020). Effective UDIs require genre knowledge, that is, an understanding of the conventions, structure and rhetorical strategies expected in academic writing (Tardy 2009; Driscoll et al. 2020).

The Create a Research Space (CARS) model (Swales 1990, 2004) was developed to analyse research article (RA) introductions. It is widely recognised as a valuable tool for understanding how writers establish a research territory, identify a niche and present their study. Although UDIs differ from RA introductions in authorship (novice vs. expert), audience (lecturers vs. academic peers) and purpose (academic assessment vs. scholarly research contribution), the two genres share similar rhetorical goals and organisational demands, making CARS a suitable approach for examining how undergraduates engage with academic conventions. Besides, there is a general consensus that the CARS model is a valid analytical tool (Hirano 2009: 240). It is important to note that the application of the CARS model in this study is descriptive rather than prescriptive, following Swales's original intent (1990, 2004) to characterise actual rhetorical practices instead of imposing prescriptive norms; thus, the introductions of Research Articles (RAIs) have been used as a point of reference for the closely related UDIs, without functioning as a rigid prescriptive standard.

Furthermore, comparing Spanish UDIs written in English with those of Anglophone students is essential to understanding both linguistic and cultural influences on academic writing. As English-medium instruction expands in non-Anglophone contexts, identifying challenges faced by writers for whom English is a foreign or additional language (L2) can inform targeted teaching strategies and support.

This study aims to compare the rhetorical structure of UDIs written by Spanish speakers of English (English L2) and US English speakers (English L1), using a corpus-based approach guided by Swales's (1990, 2004) CARS model. It also seeks to identify differences in the sequencing of rhetorical moves and steps and to explore the influence of linguistic and cultural factors on these patterns.

To address these aims, we briefly review the CARS model and relevant literature, describe our corpus and methodology, present our analysis of English L1 and L2 UDIs and discuss the pedagogical implications of our findings.

2. Literature Review

Swales's (1990, 2004) CARS model has been extensively adapted to examine the rhetorical structure of different academic genres and sub-genres that share core

rhetorical functions. Variations of this model result from the diverse data used in empirical and theoretical research (Árvay and Tankó 2004). Thus, numerous investigations have replicated or refined Swales's original proposal in various communicative events, including master's theses (Samraj 2002; Maher and Milligan 2019), PhD dissertations (Jara 2013; Soler-Monreal 2015; Kawase 2018), monographs (Álvarez and Velasco 2016) and RAIs within various disciplines like linguistics (Sheldon 2011; Lin 2014; Rahman et al. 2017), other humanities fields (Shim 2005; Acosta 2006), natural sciences (Samraj 2002; del Saz-Rubio 2011), social sciences (Soltani and Kuhi 2023), economics (Calle 2008), engineering (Joseph et al. 2014) or even variation across disciplines (Swales and Najjar 1987). These studies often cover one or a combination of disciplines, languages and particular linguistic features.

The question of whether the structure of non-English academic texts mirrors that of English L1 texts was raised by Sheldon (2011), among others, who found that English L1 writers target the international community, Spanish L1 writers address a smaller local audience, while L2 speakers of English seek acceptance in the international community. The challenges faced by Spanish scholars when writing in English for an international audience (Mur-Dueñas and Lorés 2009; Pérez-Llantada et al. 2011) and the difficulties experienced by L2 students when writing academic genres (Bunton 2002; Cheung 2012) have also been analysed.

A number of these and other academic texts, authored by novice L1 and L2 writers, are part of the Undergraduate Macro-Genre Graduation Project (UMGGP) (Venegas et al. 2016). They share an academic register, target specialised audiences and are evaluative instruments for degree accreditation (Thompson 2013; Lee and Casal 2014). Previous cross-linguistic research on UMGGP texts, including evaluative texts written by graduate students, shows how L2 students' writing often differ from the Swales format. These variations reveal the lack of a standardised form and significant alterations in sections and organisation. Uymaz (2017) examined English L2 master's thesis introductions in literature and English language teaching written by Turkish students, finding that they commonly omit essential sections like the problem statement, the significance of the study or the literature review; additionally, these introductions fail to identify a gap in previous knowledge.

Similar results have been found in related cross-cultural studies of Spanish/English L1/L2 academic written production. Lee and Casal (2014) investigated the results and discussion sections of engineering master's theses written by English L1 and Spanish L1 students, revealing that variation in the use of metadiscoursal resources is influenced by the writers' distinct lingua-cultural contexts. Gil-Salom et al. (2008) examined Spanish L1 PhD introductions (PhDIs) in computing,

demonstrating a greater number of steps and sub-steps in different cyclical patterns than those found in English PhDIs. They suggested that complex patterns arise from the characteristics of the specific field and the candidates' need to demonstrate familiarity. Also, Soler-Monreal et al. (2011) conducted a cross-linguistic study comparing the use of rhetorical strategies by English L1 and Spanish L1 doctoral candidates. They observed that English introductions to PhD theses tend to be more complex in structure, typically following the M1-M2-M3 model, whereas Spanish introductions do not always include M2. This indicates that English-speaking candidates prioritise identifying a research gap before presenting their own work, while Spanish candidates emphasise describing their field of study.

Providing a consistent and precise account of the main characteristics of UDs is complicated by the fact that requirements vary not only across countries but also among departments within the same university. In general, however, a UD follows a structure broadly aligned with the conventions of academic research writing. They are generally expected to demonstrate original research, critical thinking and effective scholarly communication.

Although UDs are important in the university curriculum, research on this genre is relatively scarce in the literature and mainly monolingual. One reason may be the lack of comparable corpora of English L1 and L2 UDs, or the absence of prior descriptions of L1 UDs suitable for contrasting with L2 writing features. Flores and Quiñonez (2021) analysed the rhetorical structure of Spanish L1 UDIs in mechanical engineering, revealing significant deviations in the use of steps from conventional PhDIs, which Arias (2018) attributed to the applied nature of the field. Velasco and Álvarez (2019) analysed Spanish L1 UD abstracts across scientific and humanities disciplines, noting that the latter tend to focus on descriptive and contextual information, rather than on methodology, results or discussion. Finally, Venegas et al. (2016) proposed a rhetorical model for UDs based on a multi-discipline Spanish corpus, observing a consistent rhetorical structure in introductions across disciplines.

3. Materials and Methodology

3.1. Materials: Corpus Description

Our study is based on a small specialised corpus of UDs compiled within the framework of a research project aimed at analysing and comparing the rhetorical structure used by English L1 and Spanish L2 speakers of English in their UDs. It is an academic, genre-specific, monolingual, comparable, synchronic and topic-specific corpus, as it includes UDs written in English by L1 and L2 speakers

between 2015 and 2020. Its texts cover various fields related to English studies, namely applied linguistics and grammar, literature, cultural studies and the study of English as a foreign language (EFL). They have been evenly selected, with 50% corresponding to literature and cultural studies fields and 50% corresponding to applied linguistics, grammar and EFL, thereby reducing the risk of bias in the rhetorical patterns observed. All the UDs are rhetorically structured, containing at least an introduction, a body and a conclusion. They were uploaded to an open repository and are related to the aforementioned disciplines; as such, they are written under similar conditions and are therefore comparable (Moreno 2008: 35).

Based on the stated criteria, 100 texts were randomly selected from US and Spanish universities that offer free access to full-text dissertations. The inclusion of dissertations from US universities in the corpus was primarily motivated by the predominance and global influence of American English in academic publishing and higher education. The selected US universities include the University of Arizona, the Ohio State University, the University of Michigan, the College of William & Mary, Texas A&M University, the University of Utah, the University of Florida, Brown University, the University of Vermont and Brandeis University; and the Spanish universities are Universidad de Valladolid, Universidad de Salamanca, Universidad de Oviedo, Universidad de Granada, Universidad de Zaragoza, Universidad de la Rioja, Universidad de la Coruña, Universidad de la Laguna, Universidad de Málaga and Universidad de Alicante.

To avoid source bias, a maximum of three UDs were downloaded from each university repository, specifically the first three that met the inclusion criteria specified above. Finally, due to the nature of the genre studied, this is a multi-author corpus. Since we were unable to contact the authors, we used the students' names and affiliations to infer their first language, thereby maximising the likelihood of including native speakers in both groups. Thus, following Luzón (2018), we only included UDs authored by students with Anglophone names in the L1 English subcorpus and by students with Spanish names in the English L2 subcorpus. We assumed that the US students were native English speakers and that the Spanish students were proficient in EFL, as expected upon completing a degree in English studies. It was not considered necessary to anonymise the corpus, as all the texts included in the two subcorpora are publicly available through institutional repositories and written for academic assessment. No personal or sensitive data were included, and the analysis focused on rhetorical patterns, not on individual authors. This follows standard practice in corpus-based discourse studies.

Once the texts were downloaded, we manually deleted the sections that would introduce noise into our analysis, i.e. reference lists, annexes, acknowledgements

74

and any information related to the evaluation committees. Then, the introductory sections were extracted after having been identified by means of their own transparent headings, that is, *Introduction*. Therefore, the corpus unit for this specific study is the text corresponding to the UDIs. The comparable corpus is composed of two subcorpora: (1) English L1 texts, and (2) English L2 texts written by Spanish speakers, each comprising a total of 50 texts and 72479 and 34962 words, respectively.

Although it is a small corpus, the choice of texts and number of words meet the criteria for qualitative and quantitative representativeness for the task at hand. The quantitative representativeness was calculated a posteriori using the ReCor computer application (Seghiri 2014). Quantitative representativeness refers to the process of ensuring that a corpus's minimum size is sufficient for representation by establishing a threshold with an algorithm (N-Cor) (Seghiri 2017). ReCor analyses each subcorpus and generates two representativeness graphs. To produce these graphs, ReCor was run independently on the two UDI subcorpora. According to the ReCor data (Figures 1 and 2), the L1 subcorpus achieves representativeness with approximately 13 texts and 17000 words, while the L2 does so with 8 texts and 8000 words. In each figure, Graph A (*Estudio gráfico A*) shows the number of documents (*nº de documentos*) on the x-axis, and Graph B (*Estudio gráfico B*) shows the number of tokens (tokens), while both y-axes display lexical variation across the corpus. Blue lines reflect alphabetical order (*orden alfábetico*) and red lines indicate a random order (*orden aleatorio*).

75
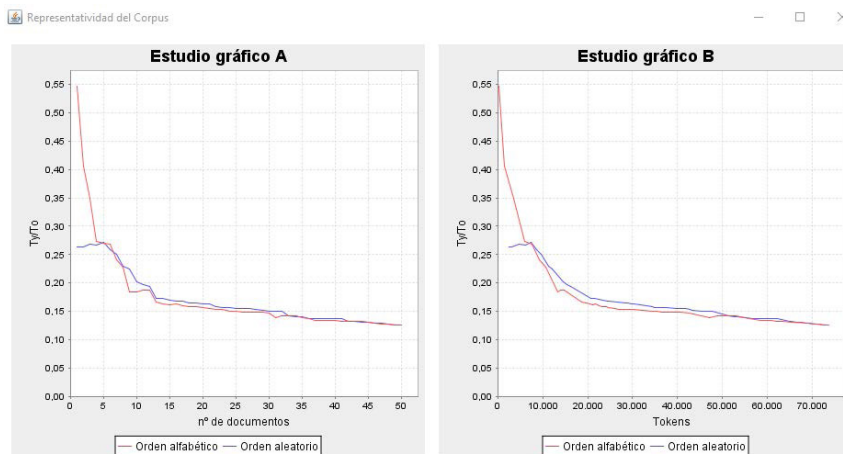
Figure 1. Representativeness: L1 (ReCor data)
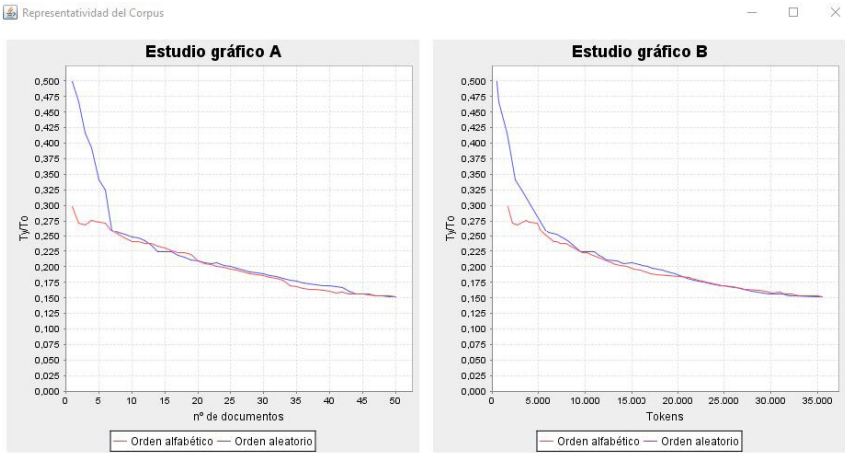
Figure 2. Representativeness: L2 (ReCor data)

Given ReCor results and the labour-intensive nature of manual rhetorical analyses, we decided to use 20 samples from each UDI subcorpus, which meets the representativeness requirements set by ReCor. Furthermore, a set of 20 random samples is a common standard for contrastive rhetorical studies. Table 1 presents quantitative information for both subcorpora.

Subcorpora	No. of texts	UD words	UD min.-max.	UDI words	UDI min.-max.	UDI/UD ratio
English L1	20	247525	4016-27554	19958	264-2198	0.08
English L2	20	170956	2785-18665	10253	208-977	0.06
Total	**40**	**418481**		**30211**		**0.07**

Table 1. Corpus quantitative data

3.2. Methodology

We applied Swales's (1990, 2004) CARS model due to its robustness in analysing academic genres like UDs, focusing on rhetorical moves central to academic discourse. The model's structure —contextualising research, justifying relevance and articulating contributions— aligns with the communicative aims of UDs, even in narrower pedagogical contexts such as undergraduate writing. The model also facilitates cross-cultural analysis, revealing how structural deviations in undergraduate texts may reflect developmental stages or cultural influences. This offers pedagogical insights for guiding novice writers. We modified CARS

model Move 1 (M1) to better reflect the specifics of UDIs and their field of study, since different disciplines adopt distinct conventions for writing introductions. Most studies propose move structures that tend to accommodate the scientific or technical disciplines, which differ from those used in the humanities (Rahman et al. 2017: 71). Furthermore, although there are similarities in the macrostructure of UDIs and RAIs, they are different genres, produced and delivered in different contexts, and with different tenors due to the authors' expertise and writer-reader relationships (Parkinson 2017). Also, UD writers are novice researchers writing for their university lecturers, whereas RA writers are experts writing for their peers.

First, a manual top-down pilot analysis was carried out on a randomly selected corpus sample of five texts to establish the rhetorical structure of the UDIs. The texts were annotated using a move-based labelling protocol, and subsequently shared and cross-checked by both researchers via a cloud-based folder. Then, both researchers independently tagged the corpus, manually identifying its moves and steps. The results were compared to reach inter-coder agreement. As functional elements may lack distinct boundaries such as punctuation, this was a complex and labour-intensive task with occasionally divergent results. In instances where a segment of text could potentially be categorised under two distinct steps, it was assigned to the step that demonstrated greater dominance or comprised a higher number of sentences. When discrepancies arose between coders, a language informant was consulted to review the case and reach a consensus, thereby establishing inter-rater reliability (Kanoksilapatham 2005; Biber et al. 2007), which refers to the measures taken to ensure a high level of agreement between the researchers responsible for tagging the corpus.

Once the comparable corpus was tagged, we retrieved data from it. First, we created separate subcorpora for each move to obtain frequency data on the number of moves and steps used by English L1 and L2 speakers. Then, we analysed the frequencies of the different rhetorical components. Finally, the sequence of moves was analysed by manually transcribing the tags in their order of appearance within each corpus file. We grouped the results and compared them with the prototypical M1-M2-M3 CARS linear sequence to determine the preferred order and possible move patterns in the L1 and L2 subcorpora.

4. Results and Discussion

Our analysis shows the complexities and distinctive rhetorical strategies used by English L1 and L2 writers. We first present the results of our pilot analysis, followed by a discussion of the sequence of moves, and conclude with a detailed contrastive analysis subdivided into the three rhetorical moves.

4.1. Pilot Analysis

The pilot analysis, grounded in a rigorous application of the CARS framework, revealed a complex structure comprising three principal moves and 18 steps (see Table 2).

Moves	Steps
M1 Establishing a territory	S1 Claiming centrality and/or S2 Making topic generalisation(s) and/or S3 Reviewing items of previous research S4 Contextualising - Personal experience/opinion S5 Contextualising - Statement without evidence
M2 Establishing the niche	S1A Counter claiming in the previous research or raising a question about it S1B Indicating a gap S1C Question raising S1D Adding to what is known S2 Presenting positive justification S3 Implicit inconsistencies preluding a gap
M3 Occupying the niche	S1 Announcing present research descriptively and/or purposively S2 Presenting RQs or hypotheses S3 Definitional clarifications S4 Summarising methods S5 Announcing principal outcomes S6 Stating the value of the present research S7 Outlining the structure of the paper

Table 2. UDI rhetorical structure (English studies)

We added two steps to M1 because we observed that, while students employed Swales's steps to establish their territory, they also contextualised their work by reflecting on personal experiences when selecting the topic (S4), and by making a statement that was not specifically supported by previous research (S5), as shown in the examples below:

> *Excerpt 1.* M1-S4. The main reason why I have chosen this topic is because multimodality was studied on a subject named English Language VII in the last course of English Studies at the University of Alicante, and it really caught my attention since it was very useful for me and I could improve my communication in oral presentations. L2#015

> *Excerpt 2.* M1-S5. […] T.S. Eliot's works, deemed outlandish at first publication, are now revered for joining an unprecedented knowledge of canon and tradition with divergent lyrical form. Through the radical ways in which these writers approached their work, they were able to destabilise the form of the traditional novel and create within literature the senses of questioning and self-awareness that seized the West in the early 20th century. L1#021

78

4.2. Sequence of Moves

This section compares the overall number and distribution of rhetorical moves across the two subcorpora. The English L1 subcorpus exhibited a more complex rhetorical structure, with a higher total number of moves (135) compared to the L2 subcorpus (117) (Table 3). This complexity aligns with previous research on PhDs, where Soler-Monreal et al. (2011) found a larger disparity in their analysis of PhDIs in English and Spanish, with 145 moves in the English L1 dataset and 50 in the English L2 texts. This confirms that native-English-speaking writers tend to elaborate more extensively and employ a broader range of rhetorical strategies.

Move	L1 subcorpus no. (%)	L2 subcorpus no. (%)
M1	47/135 (35)	45/117 (39)
M2	25/135 (19)	13/117 (11)
M3	63/135 (47)	59/117 (51)
Total	135 (100)	117 (100)

Table 3. Move occurrences: L1 and L2 subcorpora

M1 and M3 show high frequencies in both the L1 and L2 subcorpora, with M3 being the most common in both. These findings are consistent with previous studies focusing on novice L1 and L2 academic writing (Sheldon 2011; Soler-Monreal et al. 2011; Uymaz 2017). This highlights a shared recognition of the need to establish context and describe the research undertaken, corroborating established cross-linguistic patterns in academic writing.

The number of moves per text varies significantly, ranging from 4 to 12 in English L1 UDIs and from 3 to 11 in L2 texts. Again, Soler-Monreal et al. (2011) found greater variation in their corpus, with the English L1 introductions ranging from 3 to 26 and the Spanish L1 from 2 to 9. This suggests that students acknowledge the importance of providing ample data and effectively articulating the specifics of their investigations.

As Table 4 shows, both subcorpora consistently employ M1 and M3 (100%), demonstrating students' recognition of the importance of providing sufficient data to support their research and describing the investigation undertaken in line with other cross-linguistic studies (Soler-Monreal 2015). M2 is present at lower frequencies, with English L1 speakers using it in 70% of the UDIs, compared to 35% for English L2 writers. This marked disparity in the frequency and realisation of M2 —particularly its underrepresentation among L2 writers— reveals a critical challenge for novice academic writers operating in a second language. L2 students often bypass the niche-establishing move, transitioning directly from background

79

to research description. This suggests both a transfer of L1 rhetorical habits and a lack of familiarity or confidence in engaging with prior literature.

Move	English L1 no. (%)	English L2 no. (%)
M1	20/20 (100)	20/20 (100)
M2	14/20 (70)	7/20 (35)
M3	20/20 (100)	20/20 (100)

Table 4. Move frequencies: L1 and L2 subcorpora

These findings contradict the model proposed by Venegas et al. (2016) for UDIs, which claims that M2 is prototypical for both linguistics and literature UDs. The absence of M2 in our corpus is likely related to novice writers' difficulty in identifying weaknesses in previous literature and posing questions that require answers. Although the literature on UDIs emphasises the necessity of M2, M2 is more prevalent in English texts than in other languages (Frederickson and Swales 1994). This M2 omission among Spanish learners of English suggests a transfer of L1 patterns into L2 writing. Furthermore, in non-competitive research communities, where students aim to meet the expectations of their supervisors and committee members (Soler-Monreal et al. 2011), M2 is often deemed unnecessary (Kwan 2006). The introduction should include specific moves that ensure a smooth transition of ideas throughout the section and serve the important purpose of engaging readers' interest (Suryani et al. 2015). However, deviations exist in the sequencing of moves among students compared to proficient users of academic English.

Following del Saz-Rubio (2011), Table 5 presents the move structures in the English L1 and L2 subcorpora, providing further insight into students' rhetorical awareness. Approximately 25% of the L1 samples strictly follow the canonical M1-M2-M3 sequence, reflecting a conventional approach, while this pattern is absent in the L2 subcorpus, where no examples of the strict prototypical CARS model are found. However, contrastive studies examining novice writing across various disciplines yielded different results. For instance, Soler-Monreal et al. (2011) found that 30% of the Spanish L1 introductions followed Swales's archetypal model, while none of the English L1 PhDIs did. Additionally, Ono's (2017: 485) study on literature PhDIs written by English L1 and Japanese L1 candidates reported that although the M1-M2-M3 rhetorical structure was preferred, it often varied depending on the subject matter, regardless of the language.

This deviation from the prototypical model could be attributed to the same factors that Hirano found in her research, namely "cross-linguistic/cross-cultural reasons" (2009: 244). Furthermore, considering that we are analysing texts written by undergraduates, it is possible that their supervisors did not require adherence to this structure.

	English L1 subcorpus			English L2 subcorpus		
	Move sequence	No. texts	%	Move sequence	No. texts	%
Preferred CARS model	M1-M2-M3	5	25	M1-M2-M3	0	0
CARS linear structure without M2	M1-M3	5	25	M1-M3	9	45
CARS linear structure with cyclicity	M1-M2-M1-M3	2	10	M1-M2-M1-M3	1	5
	M1-M2-M1-M2-M3	1	5	M1-M2-M1-M2-M1-M3	1	5
				M1-M3-M2-M3	1	5
CARS linear structure with cyclicity, without M2	M1-M3-M1-M3	1	5.0	M1-M3-M1-M3	3	15.0
No specific pattern with cyclicity	M1-M3- M2-M1- M2-M1- M3	1	5.0	M1-M2-M1-M3-M1-M2-M3-M1-M3	1	5.0
	M1-M3- M1-M3- M2-M3	1	5.0	M2-M1-M2-M1-M2-M3	1	5.0
	M1-M2-M3-M2-M3	1	5.0	M3-M1-M3	1	5.0
	M1-M2-M1-M3- M2-M3	1	5.0	M3-M1-M2-M3	1	5.0
	M3-M1-M2-M1-M3	1	5.0	M3-M2-M1-M3-M2-M3	1	
	M1-M2-M3-M2-M3-M1-M2-M3	1	5.0			
Total		**20**	**100**		**20**	**100**

Table 5. Move sequences: L1 and L2 subcorpora

A closer look at Table 5 reveals a significant correspondence between the UDIs and the general CARS progression in a linear sequence, with 50% of L1 and 45% of L2 samples adhering either to the strict linear structure M1-M2-M3 or to a variant that preserves the sequential order but omits M2, i.e. the M1-M3 sequence.

Most English L1 (95%) and English L2 (80%) students begin their UDIs with M1, indicating adherence to the conventional practice of establishing the research field under discussion. Additionally, all introductions conclude with M3, reflecting that these novice writers recognise the importance of concluding their introductions with a description of the research being conducted. These findings align with those obtained by Bunton (2002) and Soler-Monreal et al. (2011) for PhDIs, and with those of Lin (2014) for RAIs.

The remaining CARS structures (15% L1 and 15% L2) follow a cycling configuration, as defined by Lin (2014) and Swales (1990). Most introductions are cyclical (50% L1 and 55% L2), which is generally consistent with previous findings by Futász (2006), Lin (2014), Kawase (2018) and Soler-Monreal et al. (2011) on RAIs in literature and linguistics, linguistics PhDIs and related areas. Cyclicity involves the repetition of one (2/L1, 4/L2), two (5/L1, 6/L2) or three moves (3/L1, 1/L2). As in Lin's (2014) work, two-move repetition is the most frequent pattern, with M1-M3 cyclicity occurring most often (3/L1, 5/L2), followed by M1-M2 (1/L1, 2/L2) and M1-M2-M3 (3/L1, 0/L2). Our results differ from those of Bunton (2002), who observed that M1-M2 was the most common sequence and M1-M2-M3 the least common, and with Swales's (1990) findings, who linked cyclicity mainly to M1 and M2.

Several factors can explain move recurrence. Swales (1990: 158) suggests that the probability of a cycling configuration increases with the length of the introduction; additionally, certain disciplines, particularly the social sciences, tend to exhibit more cyclicity. Soler-Monreal et al. (2011: 6) propose that students may use cyclicity to demonstrate their reading and research efforts to their supervisors and committee members. Jara (2013: 84), in his study of PhDIs, suggests that these phenomena may arise from the absence of restrictions in the introductory section, the need for a detailed explanation of the research problem, or, what seems more applicable in our case, the inexperience of students as academic writers.

Structures with no specific pattern represent 30% of both subcorpora, with none exceeding 5%. Furthermore, these patterns range from three-move to nine-move patterns, with recycling configurations.

4.3. Move Analysis

This section provides a detailed analysis of the three moves, focusing on a comparative study between English L1 and L2 subcorpora.

4.3.1. *Establishing a Research Territory (M1)*

Although M1 was present in all samples from both subcorpora, we observed differences in the use of its constituent steps when comparing the English L1 and L2 subcorpora. We modified this move by adding two steps to Swales's original model (S4 and S5, see Table 2). Table 6 shows the M1 results with the percentages of occurrences of each step.

In the L1 subcorpus, we found a recurrent use of S3-*Reviewing items of previous research* (75%), which indicates that most native-English-speaking writers chose to refer to previous studies to anchor their own research. Over 50% of UDs

82

use S2-*Making topic generalisation* (55%), while 50% contextualise the topics with statements lacking supporting evidence (S5). The remaining steps are less frequently used.

In the L2 subcorpus, students use M1 to open the UD introduction section, with S2-*Making topic generalisation* being their preferred step (50%). It is noteworthy that one of the added steps, S5 (*Contextualising - Statement without evidence*), appears in 45% of dissertations. Whenever L2 students use S5, they do not review the previous research (S3); thus, they make claims unsupported by specific research, probably due to a limited familiarity with academic conventions or difficulty accessing documented sources.

Subcorpora	M1-S1 No. (%)	M1-S2 No. (%)	M1-S3 No. (%)	M1-S4 No. (%)	M1-S5 No. (%)
English L1	6/20 (30)	11/20 (55)	15/20 (75)	5/20 (25)	10/20 (50)
English L2	5/20 (25)	10/20 (50)	7/20 (35)	3/20 (15)	9/20 (45)

Table 6. M1 steps: Contrastive analysis

The most relevant difference between the L1 and L2 subcorpora is observed in S3, which indicates a lower importance of this step among L2 undergraduates (35%) compared to L1 students (75%). This seems to be caused by the added difficulty of researching and reading in a second language, even for advanced learners of English, compared to English L1 speakers. Both English L1 and L2 students use S2 and S5 at similar frequencies. The presence of S5, indicating a lack of citation of other authors' work, suggests that students in both groups have not yet fully mastered citation conventions and are still novice writers rather than expert scholars. The added steps (S4, S5) appear with comparable frequencies across both subcorpora.

4.3.2. *Establishing the Niche (M2)*

English L1 writers used five distinct steps to establish the niche of their introductions (Table 7). Of the 14 UDs that include M2, nine (64%) chose to give a positive justification for the selected topic (S2), with the second most common option being the raising of a question (S1-C, 43%), followed by indicating a gap in research or knowledge (S1-B) and counterclaiming previous research (S1-A), which were used in 29% of UDs.

We have already noted that most UDIs written by English L2 learners omit M2, which serves to connect the broader research area (M1) with the specific focus of their study (M3). Only 35% of these texts include M2, primarily by indicating a gap (S1B, 86%). This may be because students perceive this step as the simplest way to establish a niche, given that it apparently requires less

authority and experience than other steps that demand comprehensive knowledge of previous literature (S1A, S1C, S1D, S3) and confidence in the argumentative strategies (S1A, S2, S3). Notably, there is an absence of S2-*Presenting positive justification* and S3-*Implicit inconsistencies preluding gap,* as these steps require sound arguments (S2) and thorough familiarity with previous research (S3). The absence of M2 should not be interpreted as a flaw, but rather as a genre-specific adaptation reflecting the UDI function as an academic evaluation instead of a contribution to a competitive research community, that is, it constitutes a specific characteristic of UDIs.

Subcorpora	M2 no. (%)	M2-S1 A no. (%)	M2-S1 B no. (%)	M2-S1 C no. (%)	M2-S1 D no. (%)	M2-S2 no. (%)	M2-S3 no. (%)
English L1	14/20 (70)	4/20 (20)	4/20 (20)	6/20 (30)	2/20 (10)	9/20 (45)	
English L1		4/14 (29)	4/14 (29)	6/14 (43)	2/14 (14)	9/14 (64)	
English L2	7/20 (35)	1/20 (5)	6/20 (30)		1/20 (5)		
English L2		1/7 (14)	6/7 (86)		1/7 (14)		

Table 7. M2 Steps: Contrastive analysis
Note. M2 is used in 14 L1 files and 7 L2 files.

The contrastive analysis reveals that S3-*Implicit inconsistencies preluding gap* was not used in any introduction, as its inherent difficulty poses a challenge for novice writers regardless of whether they are L1 or L2 users of English. In contrast, the preferred strategy in the L1 corpus was S2, with 64% of the L1 introductions establishing a niche by providing a positive justification for the chosen line of study. Interestingly, this strategy was not used in any L2 introduction. Within M2, a relevant percentage (86%) of English L2 students employed the S1B-*Indicating a gap* strategy, while the use of other steps was rare or non-existent. Although the reasons for this pattern are not entirely clear, it may be suggested that L2 writers adopt this approach to avoid "direct confrontation with a particular researcher" and pursue "a more secure and potentially practical endeavour" (Árvay and Tankó 2004: 85).

4.3.3. *Occupying the Niche (M3)*

M3 rhetorical structure includes seven steps to narrate how to occupy the niche, which English L1 undergraduates used to varying extents (see Table 8). Most of them chose to present a research question or hypothesis (S2, 75%) and summarise their methods (S4, 65%), with a similarly high percentage introducing the research (S1, 65%). Fewer included paper structure details (S7, 40%) or defined terms for

reader clarification (S3, 30%), while only a small number discussed main outcomes (S5, 20%) or emphasised the importance of their research (S6, 20%). Álvarez et al. (2016) agree that the primary difficulties in M3 arise from insufficient information on the study's approach, expected results and limitations.

Subcorpora	M3-S1 no. (%)	M3-S2 no. (%)	M3-S3 no. (%)	M3-S4 no. (%)	M3-S5 no. (%)	M3-S6 no. (%)	M3-S7 no. (%)
English L1	13/20 (65)	15/20 (75)	6 /20 (30)	13/20 (65)	4/20 (25)	4/20 (20)	8/20 (40)
English L2	17/20 (85)	5 /20(25)	3/20 (15)	10/20 (50)	2/20 (10)	2/20 (10)	12/20 (60)

Table 8. M3 steps: Contrastive analysis

In the L2 subcorpus, 85% of students preferred to announce their research descriptively and/or purposively (S1). This high frequency results from the fact that this is the simplest way to present their research in a context, as most writers omitted M2. The next most common steps were S7-*Outlining the structure of the paper* (60%) and S4-*Summarising methods* (50%). Explicit hypotheses or research questions (S2, 25%) and clarifying definitions of the concepts used (S3, 15%) were infrequent, reflecting the limited inclusion of these elements by English L2 writers. Surprisingly, both announcing principal outcomes (S5) and stating the value of the present research (S6) were rare (10%), which may be attributed to a lack of understanding regarding the expectations for UDIs, the low importance given by students to appraising their work, or the absence of a final reflection that would allow students to summarise key findings and positively evaluate their research.

The most unexpected finding in the comparison between the L1 and L2 subcorpora is the low frequency of steps S6 and S5. This finding suggests that students tend to avoid engaging in complex discussions or self-evaluations highlighting salient aspects of their own work. Instead, they prefer alternative strategies, such as describing their work (S1), formulating a hypothesis or research questions (S2) or discussing the methods used (S4). Both subcorpora showed a clear preference for these steps, although with certain differences. English L1 undergraduates preferred S2, while English L2 undergraduates tended to use S1. A possible explanation for the low frequencies of S6 and S5 is that the writers are students rather than established authors accustomed to promoting their own work. Finally, it should be noted that English L2 students used step S7-*Outlining the structure of the paper* more frequently (60%) than their L1 counterparts (45%), likely because this step is quite standard in terms of content and language, making it easier to write.

85

5. Conclusion

Using Swales's (1990, 2004) CARS model, this study conducted a contrastive analysis of UDIs written by English L1 and L2 speakers to determine whether there are differences in their rhetorical structure patterns in comparison to the established RAI standards, since this is the genre described in the literature that comes closest to the one under analysis.

Regarding the rhetorical structure of the UDIs, our findings shed light on how English L1 and L2 undergraduates structure their texts. Although most UDIs conform to Swales's move and step model for RAIs, their sequence and distribution vary considerably between the two subcorpora:

- Complexity and sequence. UDIs written by L1 students show a more complex organisation of the information presented, exhibiting a close affinity with the M1-M2-M3 sequence of the CARS model. In contrast, this model is not reflected in English L2 UDIs, which may be due to cross-linguistic and/or cross-cultural factors (Hirano 2009), or simply not being required by supervisors.

- Adherence to general structure. Nearly 50% of the texts in both subcorpora follow the general linear sequence, although with some deviations (M1-M2-M3 or M1-M3) and/or cyclicity. This recurrence of moves can be attributed to the inexperience of these untrained writers.

- Omission of M2. M2 is frequently omitted, especially in L2 UDIs. This tendency may be linked to the nature of the genre: UDs belong to non-competitive research communities (Soler-Monreal et al. 2011), where students may not feel compelled to identify research gaps.

- Step-specific preferences. When we examined each move independently, we found that in M1, English L1 writers prefer to anchor their research with references to previous studies, whereas English L2 writers tend to make unsupported generalisations. In M2, about 70% of L1 writers use this move to provide positive justifications, while only 35% of L2 students do so, often opting instead to indicate a knowledge gap and avoiding direct references to other scholars or explicit explanations of their choices. Finally, when stating where their research fits in (M3), English L1 writers commonly present research questions or hypotheses, while L2 writers describe their own research without formulating specific research questions or hypotheses. In neither group did the students specify their main findings or evaluate their study.

The main implication of these findings is that novice writers, especially L2 learners, need further extensive supervised reading and explicit instruction in

writing UDs, particularly their introductions and the rhetorical patterning of these texts. Although formal rhetorical knowledge may be considered *simplistic genre knowledge*, as opposed to *nuanced genre knowledge* (Driscoll et al. 2020), it remains fundamental for acquiring the other three dimensions of genre knowledge (Tardy 2009). Without such guidance, students might adopt the simplest approach to demonstrate to their supervisors and evaluation committee members that they can complete their UDs, resulting in UDIs that do not fully conform to the rhetorical standards of the genre. This view aligns with John's (2011: 65) recommendations for genre-based writing instruction, advocating that L2 students should start with genre analysis, understanding structure, relationships and contexts before moving on to critique. Developing specific teaching materials for L2 UD writing would contribute to improving academic guidance in this task.

Another important point concerns the need to distinguish between a non-standard yet acceptable use of the rhetorical structure of UDIs and a "local use" characteristic of English L2 writers. This issue was raised by Lee and Chen (2009) when discussing whether novice writers should use their "local flavour" or adopt "expert-like writing". We agree with them that academic writing should aim for "international intelligibility and maximum acceptability" (Lee and Chen 2009: 292). Accordingly, the L1-L2 variations identified in our description of the rhetorical structure of UDIs may be considered acceptable, provided they do not compromise the intelligibility and acceptability of UDs in their respective discourse communities. These differences underscore the importance of developing genre awareness in academic writing instruction, recognising genres as flexible and evolving, rather than fixed and prescriptive.

Our research faces certain methodological limitations. In corpus-based studies, representativeness and availability are always challenges, and the use of larger corpora would allow for more fine-grained analyses and more reliable extrapolation. Additionally, cultural and other contextual factors play an important role in shaping how rhetorical structures are used across different linguistic communities. Moreover, the inherent diversity among L2 learners poses a challenge to the generalisation of findings. Future research could further explore field variation within English studies UDIs to deepen the understanding of rhetorical structures in undergraduate dissertations. Similarly, comparing Spanish UDIs written in English with those written in Spanish by students of Hispanic studies would offer another valuable area of research. All these questions indicate the need for further research on this topic, as well as other linguistic aspects, such as grammatical, phraseological and lexical features of UDIs.

87

Author Contributions

This article is the result of a joint effort by both authors. All stages of the study —design, theoretical framework, qualitative analysis, drafting and revision of the manuscript— were carried out in collaboration. The only tasks undertaken individually were the compilation and initial annotation of the subcorpora: Isabel Pizarro Sánchez was responsible for the English L2 subcorpus, while Leonor Pérez-Ruiz compiled and annotated the English L1 subcorpus. Subsequently, the annotations were collaboratively reviewed and discussed to achieve interrater reliability.

Acknowledgements

88

Notes

1. While undergraduate students in Spain are required to complete an undergraduate dissertation (*Trabajo Fin de Grado*, TFG) as an integral component of their degree programme, in the United States, such a requirement is often associated specifically with graduating with honours. This culminating project is variously termed across US higher education institutions: it is referred to as an honors thesis at the University of Arizona and the University of Utah, undergraduate thesis at the Ohio State University, thesis at the University of Michigan, and honors project at the College of William & Mary, to name a few.

Works cited

Acosta, Otilia. 2006. "Análisis de introducciones de artículos de investigación publicados en la Revista *Núcleo* 1985-2003". *Núcleo* 18 (23): 9-30.

Álvarez, Manuela and Erlantz Velasco. 2016. "Primeros pasos en la construcción de conocimiento nuevo por estudiantes universitarios de grado: la introducción de monografías". *RAEL: Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada* 15 (1): 109-128.

Arias, Fidias. 2018. "Metodología para la valoración de resultados en Trabajos Finales de Grado (TFG) de áreas tecnológicas". *REDU. Revista de Docencia Universitaria* 6 (2): 177-191. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4995/redu.2018.10189>.

Árvay, Anett and Ggyula Tankó. 2004. "A Contrastive Analysis of English and Hungarian Theoretical Research Article Introductions". *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 42 (1): 71-100.

Biber, Douglas, Ulla Connor and Thomas Upton. (eds.) 2007. *Discourse on the Move: Using Corpus Analysis to Describe Discourse Structure*. John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/scl.28>.

Bunton, David. 2002. "Generic Moves in Ph.D. Thesis Introductions". In Flowerdew, John (ed.) *Academic Discourse.* Longman: 57-75.

Calle, Cristina. 2008. "Estructura retórica en las introducciones de textos económicos". In Monroy, Rafael and Aquilino Sánchez (eds.) *25 años de lingüística en España*. *Hitos y retos*. Universidad de Murcia: 479-487.

Cheung, Yin. 2012. "Understanding the Writing of Thesis Introductions: An Exploratory Study". *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 46: 744-749. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.191>.

Del Saz-Rubio, Milagros. 2011. "A Pragmatic Approach to the Macro-Structure and Metadiscoursal Features of Research Article Introductions in the Field of Agricultural Sciences". *English for Specific Purposes* 30 (4): 258-271. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2011.03.002>.

Driscoll, Dana, Joseph Paszek, Gwen Gorzelsky, Carol Hayes and Edmund Jones. 2020. "Genre Knowledge and Writing Development: Results from the Writing Transfer Project". *Written Communication* 37 (1): 69-103. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088319882313>.

Fitriyah, Ulil. 2020. "Rhetorical Moves in Thesis Introduction Written by English Major Students". *Paradigm: Journal of Language and Literary Studies* 3 (2): 119-132. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18860/prdg.v3i2.10229>.

Flores, María Dolores and José Quiñonez. 2021. "Trabajos de fin de grado de ingeniería: estructura, estilo y movidas retóricas". *Revista Educación en Ingeniería* 16 (31): 79-88. <https://doi.org/10.26507/rei.v16n31.1163>.

Frederickson, Kristin and John Swales. 1994. "Competition and Discourse Community: Introductions from Nysvenska Studier". In Gunnarsson, Britt-Louise, Perr Linell and Bengt Nordberg (eds.) *Text and Talk in Professional Contexts*. ASLA: 9-22.

Futász, Réka. 2006. "Analysis of Theoretical Research Article Introductions Written by Undergraduate Students: A Genre-Based Approach". *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 53 (2): 97-116. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1556/ALing.53.2006.2-3.1>.

Gil-Salom, Luz, Carmen Soler-Monreal and María Carbonell-Olivares. 2008. "The Move-Step Structure of the Introductory Sections of Spanish PhD Theses". *Revista Española de Lingüística Aplicada* 21: 85-106.

Hirano, Eliana. 2009. "Research Article Introductions in English for Specific Purposes: A Comparison Between Brazilian Portuguese and English". *English for Specific Purposes* 28 (4): 240-250. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2009.02.001>.

Jara, Iván. 2013. "Descripción funcional de introducciones de tesis doctorales en las disciplinas de química y lingüística". *Onomázein* 28: 72-87. <https://doi.org/10.7764/onomazein.28.05>.

Johns, Ann. 2011. "The Future of Genre in L2 Writing: Fundamental, but Contested, Instructional Decisions". *Journal of Second Language Writing* 20 (1): 56-68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2010.12.003>.

Joseph, Renu, Jason Lim and Arifah Nor. 2014. "Communicative Moves in Forestry Research Introductions: Implications for the Design of Learning Materials". *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 134: 53-69. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.04.224>.

Kanoksilapatham, Budsaba. 2005. "Rhetorical Structure of Biochemistry Research Articles". *English for Specific Purposes* 24 (3): 269-292. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2004.08.003>.

89

Kawase, Tomoyuki. 2018. "Rhetorical Structure of the Introductions of Applied Linguistics PhD Theses". *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 31: 18-27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2017.12.005>.

Kwan, Becky. 2006. "The Schematic Structure of Literature Reviews in Doctoral Theses of Applied Linguistics". *English for Specific Purposes* 25 (1): 30-55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2005.06.001>.

Lee, David and Sylvia Chen. 2009. "Making a Bigger Deal of Smaller Words: Function Words and Other Key Items in Research Writing by Chinese Learners". *Journal of Second Language Writing* 18 (4): 281-296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2009.05.004>.

Lee, Joseph and Elliott Casal. 2014. "Metadiscourse in Results and Discussion Chapters: A Cross-Linguistic Analysis of English and Spanish Thesis Writers in Engineering". *System* 46: 39-54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.07.009>.

Lillo-Fuentes, Fernando and René Venegas. 2020. "Relación entre calidad de escritura y rasgos lingüístico-discursivos en las introducciones de los trabajos finales de grado de ingeniería civil informática". *Linguamática* 12 (1): 3-13.

Lin, Ling. 2014. "Innovations in Structuring Article Introductions: The Case of Applied Linguistics". *Ibérica* 28: 129-153.

Luzón, María José. 2018. "Variation in Academic Writing Practices: The Case of Reporting Verbs in English-Medium Research Articles". *Ibérica* 36: 171-194.

Maher, Paschal and Simon Milligan. 2019. "Teaching Master Thesis Writing to Engineers: Insights from Corpus and Genre Analysis of Introductions". *English for Specific Purposes* 55: 40-55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2019.05.001>.

Moreno, Ana. 2008. "The Importance of Comparable Corpora in Cross-Cultural Studies". In Connor, Ulla, Ed Nagelhout and William Rozycki (eds.) *Contrastive Rhetoric: Reaching to Intercultural Rhetoric*. John Benjamins: 25-41. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/pbns.169.04mor>.

Mur-Dueñas, Pilar and Rosa Lorés. 2009. "Responding to Spanish Academics' Needs to Write in English: From Research to the Implementation of Academic Writing Workshops". In Caballero, Rosario and María Jesús Pinar (eds.) *Modos y formas de comunicación*. Universidad Castilla-La Mancha: 501-510.

Ono, Masumi. 2017. "Move-Step Structures of Literature Ph. D. Theses in the Japanese and UK Higher Education". *Journal of Writing Research* 8 (3): 469-491.

Parkinson, Jean. 2017. "The Student Laboratory Report Genre: A Genre Analysis". *English for Specific Purposes* 45: 1-13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2016.08.001>.

Pérez-Llantada, Carmen, Ramon Plo and Gibson Ferguson. 2011. "You Don't Say What You Know, Only What You Can: The Perception and Practices of Senior Spanish Academics Regarding Research Dissemination in English". *English for Specific Purposes* 30: 18-30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2010.05.001>.

Rahman, Mizanur, Saadiyah Darus and Zaini Amir. 2017. "Rhetorical Structure of Introduction in Applied Linguistics Research Articles". *Educare* 9 (2): 69-84.

Samraj, Betty. 2002. "Introductions in Research Articles: Variations Across Disciplines". *English for Specific Purposes* 21 (1): 1-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(00)00023-5>.

Seghiri, Miriam. 2014. "Too Big or Not Too Big: Establishing the Minimum Size for a Legal Ad Hoc Corpus". *HERMES - Journal of Language and Communication in Business* 27 (53): 85-98. <https://doi.org/10.7146/hjlcb.v27i53.20981>.

Seghiri, Miriam. 2017. "Metodología de elaboración de un glosario bilingüe y bidireccional

(inglés-español/español-inglés) basado en corpus para la traducción de manuales de instrucciones de televisores". *Babel* 63 (1): 43-64. <https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.63.1.04seg>.

SHELDON, Elena. 2011. "Rhetorical Differences in RA Introductions Written by English L1 and L2 and Castilian Spanish L1 Writers". *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 10 (4): 238-251. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2011.08.004>.

SHIM, Eunsook. 2005. "Introductions in Research Papers: Genre Analysis of Academic Writing". *English Teaching* 60 (4): 399-422.

SOLER-MONREAL, Carmen. 2015. "Announcing One's Work in PhD Theses in Computer Science: A Comparison of Move 3 in Literature Reviews Written in English L1, English L2 and Spanish L1". *English for Specific Purposes* 40: 27-41. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2015.07.004>.

SOLER-MONREAL, Carmen, María CARBONELL-OLIVARES and Luz GIL-SALOM. 2011. "A Contrastive Study of the Rhetorical Organization of English and Spanish PhD Thesis Introductions". *English for Specific Purposes* 30 (1): 4-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2010.04.005>.

SOLTANI, Kimia and Davud KUHI. 2023. "Contributing Factors to Move Recycling in Research Articles: Perceptions of Social Science Researchers and Genre Analysts". *ESP Today* 11 (1): 160-181. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18485/esptoday.2023.11.1.8>.

SURYANI, Ina, Yaacob AIZAN and Noor AZIZ. 2015. "Introduction Sections of Research Articles with High and Low Citation Indices". *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 23 (4): 1139-1152.

SWALES, John. 1990. *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge U.P.

SWALES, John. 2004. *Research Genres*. Cambridge U.P. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524827>.

SWALES, John and Hazem NAJJAR. 1987. "The Writing of Research Article Introductions". *Written Communication* 4 (2): 175-191.

TARDY, Christine. 2009. *Building Genre Knowledge*. Parlor Press.

THOMPSON, Paul. 2013. "Thesis and Dissertation Writing". In Paltridge, Brian and Sue Starfield (eds.) *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes*. Wiley-Blackwell: 283-299. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781118339855.ch15>.

UYMAZ, Eren. 2017. "An Investigation of the Similarities and Differences between English Literature and English Language Teaching Master's Theses in Terms of Swales' Cars Model". *People* 3 (2): 552-562. <http://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2017.32.552562>.

VELASCO, Erlantz and Manuela ÁLVAREZ. 2019. "El resumen de trabajos fin de grado: diferencias discursivas según áreas disciplinares". *Traslaciones* 6 (11): 160-177.

VENEGAS, René, Sofía ZAMORA and Amparo GALDAMES. 2016. "Hacia un modelo retórico-discursivo del macrogénero Trabajo Final de Grado en Licenciatura". *Revista Signos* 49: 247-279. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-09342016000400012>.

91

POSTMODERN GRIEF: WITNESSING ILLNESS IN AMY HEMPEL'S "IN THE CEMETERY WHERE AL JOLSON IS BURIED" AND LORRIE MOORE'S "PEOPLE LIKE THAT ARE THE ONLY PEOPLE HERE: CANONICAL BABBLING IN PEED ONK"

EL DUELO POSMODERNO: PRESENCIAR LA ENFERMEDAD EN "IN THE CEMETERY WHERE AL JOLSON IS BURIED" DE AMY HEMPEL Y "PEOPLE LIKE THAT ARE THE ONLY PEOPLE HERE: CANONICAL BABBLING IN PEED ONK"

<https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202510995Z>

LAURA DE LA PARRA FERNÁNDEZ
Universidad Complutense de Madrid
lauraparrafernandez@ucm.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0658-9576>

Abstract

This article analyses two short stories, Amy Hempel's "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried" (1983) and Lorrie Moore's "People Like That Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk" (1997), where two female narrators portray their grief for the illness of a loved one as pathographies (Hawkins 1999). "People Like That Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk" recounts the stay of a mother in the pediatric oncology ward while her months-old baby undergoes cancer treatment. In "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried", the unnamed first-person narrator explores her guilt at the coming death of a terminally ill close friend. Through a postmodern use of irony, both stories posit the impossibility of sharing grief in a world without room for illness or care for precarious bodies. By looking at how the narrators grapple with encountering the dying Other and caregiver's guilt, I argue that these two stories posit the impossibility of articulating pain and grief in current neoliberal society through the construction of an explicitly postmodern, artificial and ironic narrative, which is undermined by the stories' resistance to narrative closure and certainty, demanding a form of "ethical witnessing" (Gilmore and Marshall 2019) from the reader.

Keywords: illness narratives, grief, witnessing, short story, Amy Hempel, Lorrie Moore.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza dos relatos cortos, "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried" (1983), de Amy Hempel, y "People Like That Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk" (1997), de Lorrie Moore, donde las narradoras narran la experiencia de ser testigos de la enfermedad de un ser querido como patografías (Hawkins 1999). "People Like That Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk" cuenta la estancia de una madre en la sala de oncología pediátrica durante el tratamiento contra el cáncer de su bebé de pocos meses. En "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried", la narradora explora su sentimiento de culpa ante la muerte inminente de una amiga enferma terminal. Mediante un uso posmoderno de la ironía, ambos relatos plantean la imposibilidad de articular el dolor en un mundo sin espacio para la enfermedad y los cuidados para los cuerpos precarios. Mediante el análisis de cómo las narradoras lidian con el encuentro con el Otro moribundo y la culpa del cuidador, se argumenta que estas dos historias plantean la imposibilidad de articular el dolor y el duelo en la sociedad neoliberal actual a través de la construcción de una narrativa explícitamente posmoderna, artificial e irónica, que se ve socavada por la resistencia de las historias al cierre narrativo y a la certeza, exigiendo una forma de "testimonio ético" (Gilmore y Marshall 2019) al lector.

Palabras clave: narrativas de la enfermedad, duelo, testimonio, relato corto, Amy Hempel, Lorrie Moore.

1. Introduction

In her seminal work, *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry argues that bodily pain is an experience that is impossible to convey, hence the alleged "unsayable" nature of it in literary works (1985: 16). Although many scholars have contested this claim, the representability and intelligibility of pain remain uncertain. For instance, Javier Moscoso sees pain as an experience that is collectively and culturally endowed with meaning, that is, how pain is represented is mediated by culturally accepted ways of assessing harm and suffering (2012: 8). Similarly, Joanna Bourke claims that the experience of pain is collectively constructed as a "type of event" that "participates in the constitution of our sense of self and other" (2014: 5). In other words, the event of sharing the pain in the encounter with the Other is the recognition of another's pain. If such recognition fails, it is implied that certain instances of pain are less recognised —and therefore more difficult to articulate— than others. Thus, "pain demands a witness", in Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall's words (2019: 40), to make meaning out of it. Bereavement pain, that is, the pain that

one feels for a dying or dead other, is often pathologised or 'objectified' if it is not expressed in a clinically predictable way (Corr 2019: 406) and shortly 'accepted'. Particularly, being an informal caregiver, an experience that is becoming more and more common in an aging society where access to long-term healthcare is complex and dependent upon economic factors, carries a type of emotional labour whose psychological impact often goes unrecognised and remains understudied.[1] Bearing ethical witness to this unrecognised pain entails bearing witness to the socially "unspeakable" beyond "ready-made scripts" (Gilmore and Marshall 2019: 8). This article thus operates under the premise that literature can be a medium to enact such ethical witnessing and recognition of the effects upon the subject of bereavement after informal caregiving.

In this article, I examine the representation of bearing witness to the pain of others and I also examine grief, in two short stories: Amy Hempel's "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried" (1983) and Lorrie Moore's "People Like That Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk" (1997), which recount the experiences of caring —or not— for an ill loved one. I read these witness stories as pathographies, understood by Anne Hunsaker Hawkins as illness narratives where there is "the need to communicate a painful, disorienting, and isolating experience" (1999: 10), given that both stories are claimed to be loosely autobiographical.[2] Amy Hempel's "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried" was first published in 1983 in the *TriQuarterly* journal, then reprinted in Hempel's first short story collection, *Reasons to Live* (1985). In the story, the unnamed first-person narrator explores her guilt at the coming death of a terminally ill close friend. The story problematises Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief, dismantling the possibility that grief can be completely overcome.[3] Lorrie Moore's "People Like That Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk" was first published in the *New Yorker* in 1997 and included in her 1998 award-winning collection *Birds of America*. The story recounts a mother's stay in the pediatric oncology ward while her months-old baby underwent cancer treatment. Presenting them as Mother, Baby and Father, the Mother/narrator willingly "takes notes" to pay for Baby's treatment (Moore 1998a: 219). The two are among the most anthologised short stories in contemporary American literature to date, although both remain underexamined from a scholarly point of view and have not been compared so far.

This article will look at Hempel's and Moore's representation of an encounter with 'the Other in pain' and the dying Other as a form of "ethical witnessing" (Gilmore and Marshall 2019: 62) and a means of care in itself. As Leigh Gilmore argues, when reading a self-representation of pain, "[a]n ethical response requires readers to recognize the impact of pain on individual lives, the histories and social contexts that condition the author's experience, and our own position in relation

to these contingencies" (2015: 106). Caring for a terminally or critically ill loved one constitutes an act of bearing witness to someone's pain, as well as facing the effect of that pain on one's own subjectivity.[4] Therefore, this study delves into how these two stories deal with caring for the Other-in-pain, considering these stories as pathographies in themselves (Hawkins 1999). To do so, I will first look at the attempts to bear witness to the pain of an Other, drawing on Paul Ricoeur (1992) and Kelly Oliver (2001) to explain why a full articulation of this pain is unattainable and what possibilities may be afforded to bear ethical witness. Then, given the possible classification of both stories as postmodern due to their decentering of universal truth and emphasis on subjective experience, I will examine the uses of a postmodern refusal of certainty and closure, as well as the use of irony and pastiche, following Linda Hutcheon's take on postmodernism as political (1989). I will argue that these two short stories present the articulation of pain —both the pain of oneself and of others— as something that remains silenced in neoliberal societies, and which demands an ethical engagement with the Other.

2. Witnessing the Pain of Others

Anne Husaker Hawkins argues that "[u]nderlying the differing purposes of pathographies is a common motive — the need to communicate a painful, disorienting, and isolating experience" (1999: 10). This way, it can be inferred that the telling of this experience re-orients it, in Sara Ahmed's sense (2006), out into the public, addressed to an Other. In this line, Thomas Couser explains that "[b]odily dysfunction may stimulate what I call autopathography —autobiographical narrative of illness or disability— by heightening one's awareness of one's mortality, threatening one's sense of identity, and disrupting the apparent plot of one's life" (1997: 5). As we will see in the two stories analysed, the experience of caring for an ill loved one also propels a similar narrative *telos*, putting the narrators' sense of self at stake.

"In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried" is believed to be the first story Amy Hempel ever wrote and was published while undertaking a creative writing workshop with Gordon Lish, Raymond Carver's minimalist mentor (Hempel 2003). The story recounts a nameless first-person narrator's experience of attending to her terminally ill best friend shortly before she dies, and her guilt at not being able to accompany her the way she thinks her friend deserves — it takes her two months to visit her in the hospital, and she eventually leaves before she passes away.[5] Throughout the account, the narrator not only fears her friend's death but ponders her own mortality in a fragmented account that often omits relevant details to understand the narrator's feelings toward her dying

96

friend. Lorrie Moore's narrator in "People Like That Are the Only People Here" records in the third person the treatment of her newly born baby's treatment of Wilms' tumor from the point of view of the Mother. As a writer and teacher, the experience of her son's illness completely dismantles any conception the narrator had about fiction: "A beginning, an end: there seems to be neither... What is the story?" (Moore 1998a: 212). As Arthur Frank has argued, the experience of illness impacts narrative expectations about one's own identity and demands "a new kind of narrative", since it disrupts and interrupts the "coherent sense of life's sequence" (1995: 58, 59). This perception of illness as an unexpected interruption may be linked to the way that death is regarded in the West.

In his seminal work, *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Philippe Ariès contends that death has become something "shameful and forbidden" (1974: 85) in contemporary Western society, since, in post-industrial, secular societies, "life is always happy or should always seem to be so" (Ariès 1974: 87)[6]. In this sense, the short story seems the perfect medium to explore an experience paradoxically considered to be outside of the range of 'normalcy' —witnessing death or a close-to-death experience— as these events provoke a break with temporality. As Michael Trussler affirms, "[s]uspending continuity, the short story intimates that the impulse to mold time into a sequential narrative is often incommensurate with our experience of temporality" (1996: 558). That is, rather than following chronological, linear time, the short story remains focused on "the abrupt, the sporadic", circumstances that preclude the interpretation and reintegration of said circumstances into the life of the characters (558). Instead, the short story allows for an exploration of out-of-the-ordinary situations that cannot be understood or integrated into "biographical time" (558), without any need for contextualisation or knowledge of how the characters are impacted by the event in the long term, unlike in the novel. In fact, both protagonists remain unnamed in the stories, which provides overall anonymity into the glimpse of an otherwise life-changing event.

In the stories, being close to death is presented as a disrupting experience, not only for the patient but also for the carer, whose identity merges with that of the ill person and is temporarily shattered. In a scene in "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried", the narrator recounts her growing fears of identification with her friend, as she returns from a walk on the beach in front of the hospital and finds that a second bed has been placed in the room for her so that she can stay longer. Tellingly, she identifies this second bed with a coffin, revealing her fear that she will die when her friend dies: "There was a second bed in the room when I got back to it! For two beats I didn't get it. Then it hit me like an open coffin. She wants every minute, I thought. She wants my life" (Hempel 2007: 35-36).

97

Readers do not only learn of the narrator's fear of death, which is articulated through empty spaces such as the bed-coffin, but subsequently are made aware that she was afraid of diving, flying and snakes, and that it was her ill friend who would usually encourage her to overcome those fears (Hempel 2007: 34). In a way, not only is her friend dying, but a part of the narrator will also die with her — the part that would encourage her to challenge her fears. Now her friend is the one who is afraid "and [the narrator] is not going to try to talk her out of it. She is right to be afraid" (34). Their roles have been reversed, but not entirely so, for the narrator is unable to help her overcome the fear of death, as she also suffers from it. After a nurse administers her friend an injection, there is yet another instance of identification between the narrator and her ill friend: "The injection made us both sleepy. We slept. // I dreamed she was a decorator, come to furnish my house" (37). This scene depicts a "mirroring encounter", which, according to Paul Ricoeur, enacts the "'self' without a 'oneself'" (1992: 47) —a self "furnished" by an Other— thus prompting "the esteem of *the other as a oneself* and the esteem of *oneself as an other*" (194, emphasis in original). As Ricoeur explains, narrative identity carries with it the responsibility of enunciation. The term "responsibility", for Ricoeur, combines the meanings of "counting on" and "being held accountable for", which is derived from being held "*accountable* for [one's own] actions before another" (165, emphasis in original) and therefore emerges in the act of telling the story. In the case of Hempel's pathography, the speaker's shattered narrative identity emerges when she tries to come to terms with leaving her friend when she was close to death, as though by rejecting the friend (the signifier) she was rejecting death (the signified). She leaves, feeling "weak and small and failed" (Hempel 2007: 38), but relieved. The narrator then goes out, has dinner, and goes for a drink by herself: she achieves a disidentification from her friend's ill body by enjoying her body through sensual pleasures, and never comes back. The story, then, becomes the narrator's attempt at 'taking accountability' for the fact that her friend could not 'count on' her: "So I hadn't dared to look any closer. But now I'm doing it — and hoping I will live through it" (Hempel 2007: 31). The act of telling the story is imbued with an ethical stance on the recognition of the inconsistency of the self, which is always at stake in the narrative, and which goes back to the time when her identity fractured. As Gilmore and Marshall affirm, "to bear witness means to always be conscious of how an account might be or is being received" (2019: 8). Hempel's narrator is aware that she will be judged for leaving her friend alone when terminally ill, and takes responsibility for it.

As Kelly Oliver argues, subjectivity is "intersubjective and dialogic": it emerges from the tension of being "response-able" to an Other, who in turn affects one's own subjectivity without the two being fully capable of understanding each other (2001: 5). Bearing witness, thus, emerges from enacting this response to an Other,

one where the speaker comes to terms with their differences, but also with how the Other affects them (Oliver 2001: 6). In the text, this process is delayed until the narrator dares to tell her friend's story. Yet, for her, the moment seems to be stuck in an ever-repetitive present: "I noted these gestures as they happened, not in any retrospect — though I don't know why looking back should show us more than looking *at*" (Hempel 2007: 39, emphasis in original). Looking back and looking at indeed produce two different types of fiction — in "looking back", we rely on our memories to reconstruct our past, whereas in "looking at", the difference between the narrator's experience and her friend's remains inarticulable in the different instances where she tries to give an account of it. Thus, the possibility of bearing ethical witness emerges in the recognition of this "self opened onto otherness itself" (Oliver 2001: 134). Emphasising the artificiality of the narration, the narrator constantly alters the events that she is recounting: "It is just possible I will say I stayed the night. // And who is there that can say that I did not?" (Hempel 2007: 39). The narrator is aware that only she is accountable for what she tells, for her friend is no longer alive to contest her version of the events, but she does not appear wholly reliable. While the narrator seems unable to bear witness to the pain of her friend when she is alive, she offers a glimpse into her vulnerability by acknowledging "the effects of the past on the future" (Oliver 2001: 134), that is, living with the fact that she failed to care for her friend until her death, even if she cannot tell this in a straightforward manner. Thus, the narrator provides a form of ethical witnessing precisely by taking accountability for what she did not do and making room for uncertainty rather than trying to tell her friend's story, since the only person who could do so is unable to do so anymore.

In "People Like That Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk", the diagnosis of the main character's Baby also breaks down preconceived notions of the self, as the Mother tries to identify herself to her baby's illness: "Perhaps [the blood clot] belongs to someone else... Perhaps it is something menstrual, something belonging to the Mother or to the Baby-sitter" (Moore 1998a: 212). She then insists that "[i]t must have been *her* kidney" in the scan (215, emphasis in original), blaming herself for being "unmotherly" on several occasions (216), that is, for not fitting an idealised and marketised definition of the 'good mother'.[7] As Nancy Fraser asserts, neoliberal socioeconomic policies have brought about a so-called 'crisis of care' (2016), whereby care work that used to be taken for granted and performed by women completely without compensation is now at risk due to the rise of precarious conditions surrounding care work itself, but also to the impossibility of willingly or unwillingly caring for an ill relative because of work demands. Besides, women are disproportionately expected to and often take up caregiving roles at a personal and professional cost (Revenson et al. 2016). This "contradiction of capital and care" (Fraser 2016: 99) is enacted

99

in Moore's pathography through capitalised healthcare, to be bought as if it were a commodity — upon receiving a diagnosis, the Father wonders, "What if we can't pay?" (Moore 1998a: 220). In neoliberal times, care is not a right accessible to everyone, but a marketable product to be afforded by a few. This form of privatised care relies on and affects the family's well-being. Since there is no support allocated by the state, "[j]obs have been quit, marriages hacked up, accounts ravaged" (Moore 1998a: 31). Therefore, health is something to be bought and sold, regulated by the market, and self-governed.

The solution they find is that the Mother takes notes to make money from the story (Moore 1998a: 219), revealing the commodification of stories about the pain of others. But how? The Mother struggles to think about how to tell such a story: "I write fiction. This isn't fiction" (222). When the husband suggests that she write non-fiction, she retorts, "Even the whole memoir thing annoys me", to which the husband responds, "Well, make things up, but pretend they are real" (222). This conversation addresses what Leigh Gilmore has called the rise of the 'neoconfessional' genre (2010), which was brought about by the 'memoir boom' (Rak 2013) of the 1990s and early 2000s. The genre, Gilmore explains, follows a predictable pattern of the "redemption narrative" where "a narrator [...] overcomes adversity" (2010: 657). These memoirs contribute to the homogenization of experience, as they fix the ideological message that every hardship must be endured and overcome, erasing structural differences and difficulties (662). In this sense, "truthfulness" is judged upon "structures of identificatory desire", that is, sentimental and ideological truths preemptively acknowledged by the audience (661). Therefore, what the Father is asking Mother to write is not an account of events as they happened, but a neat story that sells and conveys the reader's expectations about "actual children in a children's hospital" (Moore 1998a: 228). Writing becomes a sort of care work, not only in the material need for money to pay for the treatment, but also in the search for an ethical account of her son's illness, who cannot speak for himself, even though the Mother is told that she will be the one to suffer the most through the treatment (217). The narrator contrasts the cold, unemotional way that the Doctors use to talk to the parents —"That's doctor's talk" (216)— with the "canonical babbling" (217) used to address babies. These are both "incomplete, meaningless sounds" (Ratekin 2007: 4) that do not account for the disconcerting experience of her Baby suffering from cancer. However, there is no way to describe what the Mother and the Baby go through, it is "unsayable" (Moore 1998a: 237), exceeds narrative structures and traditional stories of illness, leaving *Oprah* "in the dust" (Moore 1998a: 242). Coincidentally, Gilmore credits *Oprah* for popularising the 'neoconfessional' memoir (2010: 662-663), that is, for creating redemption narratives ready for quick consumption. How can the Mother bear witness to the Baby's pain if the

Baby lacks words himself? Perhaps recognising the limits of empathy, rather than trying to provide a sentimental story, is one way to do it. The stories the Mother hears in the hospital about other children are "like blows" to her (Moore 1998a: 243). Contrary to popular belief, it is impossible to find solace in a common tragedy. The third-person narrator turns out to be, in fact, the Mother, who, through the use of the third person, distances herself from the events to create this artificial account. Since the narrator knows from experience that empathy is impossible, she ironically turns to the financial profit that she will supposedly make with her story, knowing that what she has provided is not what the reader may expect. In a metafictional rhetorical question, she wonders, "There are the notes. Now where is the money?" (Moore 1998a: 251). This seemingly distancing ironic question demands accountability from the reader. What do we do with an Other's pain? How do we respond to it? Why are we watching it? The narrator's demand thus ponders the ethics of the uncritical consumption of narratives about the pain of an Other, and how bearing witness entails responding to a "justice-seeking project" (Gilmore and Marshall 2019: 11), in other words, acting upon it.

3. Postmodern Expressions of Grief and Death

As critic Fredric Jameson has argued (1984), the advent of late capitalism brought about what he calls a 'postmodern aesthetic', characterised by the blurring between high-brow and low-brow art, consumerism and the merging of genres and pastiche. In this sense, Jameson ponders the possibility of "truths" within the general "falsehood" or artificiality of postmodern aesthetics (1984: 88), while Linda Hutcheon claims that decentering so-called "universal truths" by subverting an expected response can serve to critique such expectations (1989: 154), enabling new forms of truth. Other relevant elements found in postmodern aesthetics is "waning of affect" (Jameson 1984: 61), a lack of boundaries between outside and inside, and a merger between signifier and signified (Jameson 1984: 61-64). This "waning of affect", or "flat affect", has been theorised by Lauren Berlant as a form of non-expression, or underperformance, of feeling and emotion in response to a refusal to engage with a given moment or event involving an Other (2015: 193), precisely in order to refuse the overperformed emotion that may be expected in a reified site of trauma or inflicted pain. Thus, particularly in a narrative expected to be overly emotional, such refusal can become ethical and political.

Both the first-person (Hempel) and third-person (Moore) narrators are detached from feeling. In the case of "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried", the setting is presented with an aura of unreality and fakeness. The setting is compared to a TV show about doctors: "We call this place the Marcus Welby Hospital. It's

the white one with the palm trees under the opening credits of all those shows. A Hollywood hospital, though in fact it is several miles west" (Hempel 2007: 30). The characters are given stereotypical names: "the Good Doctor", "the Bad Doctor" (32), and even the narrator is a character: "She introduces me to a nurse as the Best Friend" (30). The hospital is located in an idyllic setting: "Off camera, there is a beach across the street" (30). Just like in a medical TV show, life goes on despite horrible things constantly happening. However, the camera in the room signals the possibility of being watched by a moral entity (God? The reader?) who will judge this pastiche situation beyond superficiality, just as well as it might be read as the consumption on TV of simplified illness narratives. Similarly, in "People Like That Are the Only People Here", characters are identified by their role as well: Mother, Father, Baby, Radiologist, Surgeon, Oncologist, Anesthesiologist; and the pediatric oncology ward is nicknamed "Peed Onk". Pamela Schaff and Johanna Shapiro relate the caricatured characters and ironic narrative with the impossibility of rendering an accurate depiction of reality: "Not only does narrative fail, but the fictional and dramatic renditions of Peed Onk are colorless and clumsy copies of a horrifying reality" (2006: 6). These caricatures flatten the affective tone of the texts and generate spaces that preclude relationality with the reader, in a rhetorical way.

According to Jameson, a notable element of postmodernism is "pastiche", which is, "like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in dead language" (1984: 65), which, by reusing or mimicking another genre out of context, empties it of meaning. However, for Linda Hutcheon, pastiche may take on the form of political criticism by "foreground[ing] the *politics* of representation" (1989: 94, emphasis in original). The pastiche of the hospital melodrama works in both stories as a way of setting forth and immediately subverting narrative expectations: firstly, it serves to critique the packaging of a commodified experience of pain, illness and death into a digestible, made-for-prime-time profitable product; and secondly, the refusal to follow the genre conventions underscores how these cultural products create single narrative expectations, such as tone and closure. The narrative is flat and unemotional, unlike what we might traditionally expect from the setting and the gender of the narrators; the structure of the text is fragmentary, not linear; neither text provides easy closure or relief. The fact that the narrator in "People Like That" comments on how she at least expects to get money from her account (Moore 1998a: 251) further reinforces this ironic reading against capitalist entertainment out of showcasing a homogenised experience of the pain of others. Likewise, in "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried", pastiche and intertextuality are also used to decry the rise of self-help as a way to continue fostering 'the promise of happiness' (Ahmed 2010). Significantly, self-help is also closely linked with the neoconfessional redemption memoir (Gilmore 2010:

663), which appears to provide easy answers to difficult questions about life. The narrator and her friend discuss Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's stages of grief, but the narrator leaves out Acceptance, while her friend jokes about the therapist having forgotten Resurrection:

> "I can't remember", she says. "What does Kübler-Ross say comes after Denial?"
>
> It seems to me Anger must be next. Then Bargaining, Depression, and so on and so forth. But I keep my guesses to myself.
>
> "The only thing is", she says, "is where is Resurrection? God knows, I want to do it by the book. But she left out Resurrection". (Hempel 2007: 31-32)

This ironic exchange points out the complicated experience of grief, which goes beyond the alleged linearity of Kübler-Ross's stages, especially when facing one's own death or the death of a loved one. As critics of Kübler-Ross's theory of grief state, grief cannot be oversimplified to regulate the neoliberal subject for optimal efficiency: one that is always productive and ready to consume (Cabanas and Illouz 2019: 145). Grief that deviates from these predictable stages becomes, in neoliberal times, pathologised, unproductive and non-functional (Corr 2019: 407), which explains why death remains unnamed in the two stories.

In "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried", the narrator tells her dying friend stories at her request: "'Tell me the things I won't mind forgetting', she said. 'Make it useless stuff or skip it'" (Hempel 2007: 29). Like a kind of end-of-life Scheherazade, the narrator proceeds to deliver random facts about US pop culture and fake scientific data, to ease her mind. Some of these stories are true, and some are false, pointing at the artificiality of the story itself and at the unreliability of the narrator, as we saw above. When one of the stories, about a chimp who learned to talk with her hands, seems to take a sad turn, she changes the subject, so as not to cause distress to her friend. The narrator, however, will be the only one who remembers these things. Her lack of responsibility in the past deconstructs her authority as a narrator and enhances her unreliability: the narrator talks about her feeling of loss through absence, gaps and elisions, rather than directly. Her friend's death is omitted, narrated as "the morning she was moved to the cemetery, the one where Al Jolson is buried" (39). Eventually, we learn that the chimp who learned to talk with her hands had a baby and lost it. Through her hands, the chimp was able to express loss, "fluent now in the language of grief" (40). Like the narrator, the chimp still lacks the words to express her loss and can only do so tangentially through absences and textual gaps. Storytelling becomes a way to convey her grief when telling the truth fails, just like she did when her friend was still alive: "For her I would always have something else" (29). And so, she continues to look for words, discarding a definitive 'acceptance' of her friend's death.

In "People Like That", God is imagined as the manager of a Marshalls Field shop, a deliberate mimicry pointing to the lack of higher beliefs or meaning in postmodernity. This God tells the narrator that there is no way to predict the future and that no causation can be imposed onto reality (Moore 1998a: 220-221). This metafictional commentary explains the fragmented structure of the text, where narrative predictability is dismantled and does not serve to create order and meaning anymore. As Linda Hutcheon claims, "[r]eappropriating existing representations that are effective precisely because they are loaded with pre-existing meaning and putting them into new and ironic contexts" (1989: 45). In this case, postmodern irony undermines the logic of optimism that appears mandatory in Peed Onk as a 'coda' that always offers a more satisfactory ending for the "people like that" (Moore 1998a: 242-243). Instead, the text confronts the idea of a tightly-knit narrative, ending with the Baby being cured —for now— but closely monitored, and without any sense of restitution or self-improvement in any of the characters after what they have suffered. After they leave Peed Onk, the Mother does not want to see "any of these people again" (250), although the husband asks if she "does not feel better hearing about their lives" (249). This exchange may explain why restitution narratives have become so popular: they help us feel better about ourselves, while teaching us nothing about the pain of an Other nor moving us to act upon it, something that Moore's story critiques. Moore's character also ironically enacts what the reader may do after reading a difficult narrative about illness, death and grief: close the book and think about something else. Thus, at the metaliterary level, both stories challenge the idea of narrative closure as a way to provide the reader with comfort, unveiling the ideological tenets behind such structures, and instead demand ethical engagement from the reader through postmodern detachment and fragmentation, which may lead to embracing uncertainty.

4. Conclusion

Amy Hempel's "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried" and Lorrie Moore's "People Like That Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk" portray the struggle of facing and representing the pain of an ill loved one. Both stories resist linear accounts, closure and heroic renderings. This, in turn, can enable resistance to the reification and commodification of "regarding the pain of others" (Sontag 2003) that may homogenise the experience of illness as well as the caretaker's grief into a manufactured sentimental narrative. Thus, Hempel and Moore's pathographies, by engaging in the struggle to represent the pain of an

Other, reject pre-packaged narratives of pain, and demand responsibility from the reader, who must acknowledge that pain without identifying with it, for, as Susan Sontag claims, this proximity is a fantasy, and an eraser of difference (2003: 102). Instead, the two authors deploy postmodern elements such as pastiche, irony and lack of closure, to evince the impossibility of articulating grief in a neoliberal society that capitalises and profits from pain and illness.

In a way, Hempel's and Moore's 'structures of unfeeling' entrust the reader with sufficient space to choose how they may feel. Rather than providing straightforward, totalising answers, Hempel's and Moore's stories both deploy and critique the postmodern use of irony to evade confronting or engaging with difficult feelings, which have been commodified in contemporary culture. As Leigh Gilmore affirms, "[w]hen closure implies assent to a text's ideology, the failure of closure can represent resistance and productive engagement" (2015: 108). Addressing these uncomfortable questions through a narrative that challenges readerly expectations may allow us to recenter care as a need — one that demands support and resources, and whose provision should not fall solely on close relatives. Becoming ethical witnesses to an Other's pain, then, entails being responsible and "response-able" for it, as a collective and as individuals. By creating the space for doubt and possibility in the advent of grief, these texts enact a form of ethical witnessing, even if it is to point out the lack of such spaces in neoliberal times.

Further, Hempel and Moore can be seen as forerunners of the New Sincerity Movement,[8] where authors move away from postmodern irony —sometimes by parodying it— in an attempt to explain their feelings in an authentic manner, thereby "relinquish[ing] the self to the judgment of the other" (Kelly 2010: 145), in particular to the reader. The events of witnessing enacted in the texts thus have a twofold effect. First, Hempel and Moore go beyond stagnant, stereotyped narratives of illness and grief, complicating the possibility of creating such a narrative and questioning whether it is even ethical or desirable to attempt it. Then, they address and reshape the readers' own consciousness since they are compelled to take part in the remaking of the narrators' omissions and fabrications about witnessing someone in pain. The latter reflects on the readers' own shortcomings in seeing others and themselves when faced with the experience of illness and death. Hempel's and Moore's stories are dialogic, following Oliver's conception of subjectivity (2001: 5): they emerge in response to the address of an Other-in-pain, if only to account for the impossibility of fully recognising them without failing. At a time when illness narratives are at risk of becoming commodified and homogenised, the authors' postmodernist acceptance of this failure reveals their ethical stance.

105

Acknowledgement

Notes

1. See Schulz and Sherwood, who deem the experience of being an informal caregiver —i.e. a relative or friend who cares for an ill person, rather than a professional carer who is paid for their services— one of "chronic stress" (2008: 23). They also claim that caregiving constitutes "a major public health issue" (2008: 23), although effective policies remain to be put into practice.

2. See the interview to Amy Hempel by Jyotika Banga (2009) and the interview to Lorrie Moore by Dwight Garner (1998b). While they claim to draw from autobiographical materials, both authors insist that the writing of the experience is entirely fictional, thus further mediating between the actual experience of grief and the act of communication, which will be relevant to my argument.

3. Swiss-American psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross famously developed her groundbreaking theory of the five stages of grief in her 1969 book *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Family*. These stages refer to the five emotions that people suffering the loss of a loved person, as well as terminally ill patients, undergo: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Her theory was groundbreaking, given the modern medical focus on healing rather than on death and dying, and the gradual evolution of death into a taboo in the West during times of medical advances (Kübler-Ross 2014: 1-2). Although some researchers have criticised the perceived progressive linearity of the stages that leads clinicians to prescribe the stages and pathologise 'maladaptive' grief (Stroebe et al. 2017), Kübler-Ross's study paved the way for the study of grief and the provision of care for it. Indeed, in her later work (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 2005), she acknowledged that these stages were just a guiding example and should not be considered prescriptive. Recent studies have declared bereavement care a public health need (Lichtenthal et al. 2024).

4. See Sara Ahmed on her argument of emotions as mediations between "the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective" (2004: 26).

5. Several studies confirm that family or closely related caregivers often encounter feelings of guilt. See for instance Spillers et al. (2008) or Losada et al. (2018).

6. See Ahmed (2010) or Cabanas and Illouz (2019) on the capitalist manufacturing of happiness.

7. As Constantinou et al. suggest in their study (2021), Western mothers often report feeling guilt for not living up to current intensive mothering standards spread and promoted across the media.

8. See Adam Kelly on the New Sincerity movement (2024).

Works Cited

Aʜᴍᴇᴅ, Sara. 2004. "Collective Feelings Or, The Impressions Left by Others". *Theory Culture Society* 21 (2): 25-42.

Aʜᴍᴇᴅ, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke U.P.

Aʜᴍᴇᴅ, Sara. 2010. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke U.P.

Aʀɪᴇs, Philippe. 1974. *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Marion Boyars.

Bᴇʀʟᴀɴᴛ, Lauren. 2015. "Structures of Unfeeling: 'Mysterious Skin'". *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 28 (3): 191-213.

Bᴏᴜʀᴋᴇ, Joanna. 2014. *The Story of Pain: From Prayers to Painkillers*. Oxford U.P.

Cᴀʙᴀɴᴀs, Edgar and Eva Iʟʟᴏᴜᴢ. 2019. *Manufacturing Happy Citizens: How the Science and Industry of Happiness Control Our Lives*. Polity Press.

Cᴏɴsᴛᴀɴᴛɪɴᴏᴜ Georgia, Sharon Vᴀʀᴇʟᴀ and Beryl Bᴜᴄᴋʙy. 2021. "Reviewing the Experiences of Maternal Guilt - the 'Motherhood Myth' Influence". *Health Care Women International* 42 (4-6): 852-876.

Cᴏʀʀ, Charles A. 2019. "The 'Five Stages' in Coping with Dying and Bereavement: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Some Alternatives". *Mortality* 24 (4): 405-417.

Cᴏᴜsᴇʀ, G. Thomas. 1997. *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Fʀᴀɴᴋ, Arthur. 1995. *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics*. University of Chicago Press.

Fʀᴀsᴇʀ, Nancy. 2016. "Contradictions of Capital and Care". *New Left Review* (100): 99-117.

Gɪʟᴍᴏʀᴇ, Leigh. 2010. "American Neoconfessional: Memoir, Self-Help, and Redemption on Oprah's Couch". *Biography* 33 (4): 657-679.

Gɪʟᴍᴏʀᴇ, Leigh. 2015. "Covering Pain: Memoirs and Sequential Reading as an Ethical Practice". *Biography* 38 (1): 104-117.

Gɪʟᴍᴏʀᴇ, Leigh, and Elizabeth Mᴀʀsʜᴀʟʟ. 2019. *Witnessing Girlhood: Toward an Intersectional Tradition of Life Writing*. Fordham U.P.

Hᴀᴡᴋɪɴs, Anne Hunsaker. 1999. *Reconstructing Illness: Studies in Pathography*. Purdue U.P.

Hᴇᴍᴘᴇʟ, Amy. 2003. "The Art of Fiction No. 176". Conducted by Paul Winner. *The Paris Review* 166 (Summer). <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/227/the-art-of-fiction-no-176-amy-hempel> Accessed January 27, 2025.

Hᴇᴍᴘᴇʟ, Amy. 2007. "In the Cemetery Where Al Jonson Is Buried". In *The Collected Stories of Amy Hempel*. Scribner: 29-40.

Hᴇᴍᴘᴇʟ, Amy. 2009. "15 Questions with Amy Hempel". Conducted by Jyotika Banga. *The Harvard Crimson* (22 October). <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2009/10/22/ah-fm-well-here/>. Accessed January 27, 2025.

107

Hutcheon, Linda. 1989. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. Routledge.

Jameson, Fredric. 1984. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism". *New Left Review* 146: 53-92.

Kelly, Adam. 2010. "David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction". In Hering, David (ed.) *Consider David Foster Wallace: New Critical Essays*. Sideshow Media Group Press: 131-146.

Kelly, Adam. 2024. *New Sincerity: American Fiction in the Neoliberal Age*. Stanford U.P.

Kübler-Ross, Elizabeth. 2014. *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Family.* Scribner.

Kübler-Ross, Elizabeth and David Kessler. 2005. *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss*. Scribner.

Lichtenthal, Wendy G., Kailey E. Roberts, Leigh A. Donovan, Lauren J. Breen, Samar M. Aoun and Stephen R. Connor. 2024. "Investing in Bereavement Care as a Public Health Priority". *The Lancet Public Health* 9 (4): 270-274.

Losada, Andrés, María Márquez-González, Carlos Vara-García, Laura Gallego-Alberto, Rosa Romero-Moreno and Karl Pillemer. 2018. "Ambivalence and Guilt Feelings: Two Relevant Variables for Understanding Caregivers' Depressive Symptomatology". *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy* 25: 59-64.

Moore, Lorrie. 1998a. "People Like That Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk". In *Birds of America*. Faber and Faber: 212-250.

Moore, Lorrie. 1998b. "Moore's Better Blues". Conducted by Dwight Garner. *Salon* (27 October). <https://www.salon.com/1998/10/27/cov_27int/>. Accessed January 27, 2025.

Moscoso, Javier. 2012. *Pain: A Cultural History*. Trans. S. Thomas and P. House. Palgrave Macmillan.

Oliver, Kelly. 2001. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. University of Minnesota Press.

Rak, Julie. 2013. *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market*. Wilfrid Laurier U.P.

Ratekin, Tom. 2007. "Fictional Symptoms in Lorrie Moore's 'People Like That Are the Only People Here'". *International Journal of Zizek Studies* 1 (4): 1-17.

Revenson, Tracy, Konstadina Griva, Aleksandra Luszczynska, Val Morrison, Efharis Panagopoulou, Noa Vilchinsky and Mariët Hagedoorn. 2016. "Gender and Caregiving: The Costs of Caregiving for Women". In *Caregiving in the Illness Context*. Palgrave Macmillan: 48-63.

Ricoeur, Paul. 1992. *Oneself as Another*. Trans. K. Blamey. The University of Chicago Press.

Scarry, Elaine. 1985. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford U.P.

Schaff, Pamela and Johanna Shapiro. 2006. "The Limits of Narrative and Culture: Reflections on Lorrie Moore's 'People Like That Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk'". *Journal of Medical Humanities* 27 (1): 1-17.

Schulz, Richard and Paula Sherwood. 2008. "Physical and Mental Health Effects of Family Caregiving". *American Journal of Nursing* 108 (9): 23-27.

Sontag, Susan. 2003. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Picador.

Spillers, Rachel L., David K Wellisch, Youngmee Kim, Alex Matthews and Frank Baker. 2008. "Family Caregivers and Guilt in the Context of Cancer Care". *Psychosomatics* 49 (6): 511-519.

108

Stroebe, Margaret, Henk Schut and Kathrin Boerner. 2017. "Cautioning Health-Care Professionals". *Omega* 74 (4): 455-473.

Trussler, Michael. 1996. "Suspended Narratives: The Short Story and Temporality". *Studies in Short Fiction* 33 (4): 557-577.

109

THE WORLDWIDE 'COCOON': 'ALT [C]LIT' NARRATIVES AND POSTHUMAN (INTER) CONNECTIVITY

LA 'CRISÁLIDA' MUNDIAL: LAS NARRATIVAS DE LA 'ALT [C]LIT' Y LA (INTER)CONECTIVIDAD POSTHUMANA

VANESA MENÉNDEZ CUESTA
Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (Japan)
menendez@apu.ac.jp
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0602-3364>

Abstract

This article explores notions of womanhood and youth through new paradigms that stimulate the proliferation of novel posthuman identities and subjectivities. The Internet becomes the juncture where these material and virtual realities exist. Understanding communication as a continual flux of digital data that constantly crosses the boundaries in and out of the World Wide Web, I set out to examine how contemporary writing and literary forms, in particular the poetry of 'Alt [C]Lit' authors such as Ana Carrete, Sarah Jean Alexander and Mira Gonzalez, are redefined by mediated new technologies, such as social media, and how this influence also converges with making visible new epistemologies about identity, gender and human relations nowadays.

Keywords: interface, interconnectivity, gender studies, posthumanism, North American poetry.

Resumen

Este artículo busca explorar nociones de feminidad y juventud a través de nuevos paradigmas que estimulan la proliferación de nuevas identidades y subjetividades post-humanas. Internet se convierte en la coyuntura en la que estas realidades tanto materiales como virtuales existen. Entendiendo la comunicación como un continuo flujo de datos digitales que constantemente cruza los límites dentro y fuera de la red informática mundial, me gustaría proponer cómo la escritura y las

111

formas literarias contemporáneas, en particular la poesía de las autoras 'Alt [C] Lit' como Ana Carrete, Sarah Jean Alexander, y Mira Gonzalez es definida por la influencia de nuevas tecnologías mediadoras, como las redes sociales, y cómo este hecho confluye con la visibilización de nuevas epistemologías sobre identidad, el género y las relaciones humanas hoy en día.

Palabras clave: interfaz, interconectividad, estudios de género, post-humanismo, poesía norteamericana.

1. Introduction

In the American TV sitcom *Broad City,* the episode "The Worldwide Bloodstream" shows protagonists Abbi and Ilana spending a whole day inside their apartment, so absorbed by their computers that they do not realise how much time they have spent doing this activity. The different sequences of this first scene parody the amount of time people usually spend in front of either their computers or mobile phone screens, procrastinating by endlessly browsing gossip websites, watching viral videos, searching through mobile dating apps, and so forth. After a while, both Abbi and Ilana return to reality after their phone alarms sound. They are shocked to realise that they are still together in the same room: in other words, they became so immersed in the Internet that they did not remember that so much time had passed, sharing the same space inside the darkness of their living room. After such a shocking moment of awareness, Ilana exclaims, "We were so tapped into the worldwide bloodstream, we fell into the literal Matrix" (Glazer and Jacobson 2015). This quote refers to the title of the episode, "The Worldwide Bloodstream": the creators of the series, by the using the word "bloodstream", instead of the more common expression "Web", suggests an anatomical-biological connection to the virtual, through which we navigate digitally and get mentally trapped as a form of dissociation from our materially corporeal existence, as if the World Wide Web sucks our lives dry like an immaterial vampire-like entity.

Using concepts from cultural anthropology and cyberfeminist theory, such as Remedios Zafra's *(dis)connected room* (2012) and *netianas* (2005) and Paula Sibilia's *post-organic man* (2006), Gilles Lipovetsky's *global screen* (2009) and the social problematics of *hikikomori*'s isolation, this study aims to expose how online 'Alt Lit' poetry reflects current trends in society and culture, particularly in the United States. Additionally, this research will explore how these social and cultural influences impact the production of literature and other artistic artifacts which cross the boundaries between the Cartesian dichotomies of the material and the virtual, the human and the artificial, the mind and the body and the like. Moreover, I would like to explore how these dichotomies blur their limits and

question the very notion of difference and binary systems. To do so, I will use an interdisciplinary and comparative approach in which the visual works of artists Tetsuya Ishida, Polly Nor and Laura Callaghan will be drawn into conversation with the poems from Alt Lit authors such as Sarah Jean Alexander, Ana Carrete and Mira Gonzalez. I have included these visual works as part of the online cultural background that inspires the poetic work of 'Alt [C]Lit' authors.

The works of Alt [C]Lit poets are an example of the paradoxical position of Millennials as a liminal generation lingering between the material reality and a virtual existence that both connects them to a world while isolating Millennials from it. Alt [C]Lit is a concept first used by Australian writer Emmie Rae in a 2014 article about the rise and fall of Alt Lit, a community of self-promoting writers and independent editors who wrote about Internet culture and literature during the early 2010s. As a result of numerous sexual-abuse scandals and accounts of sexist attitudes among prominent male figures of the community, female writers decided to split and form an independent community of only female writers, poets and editors, currently known as Alt [C]Lit. This article includes the poems of the most representative Alt [C]Lit poets such as Ana Carrete[1] (*Baby Babe,* 2012), Sarah Jean Alexander[2] (*Wildlives,* 2015) and Mira Gonzalez[3] (*I will never be beautiful enough to make us beautiful together*, 2013). Their work has been published in online and printed zines, such as *Shabby Doll House* (2012), founded and edited by Lucy K. Shaw[4] (*WAVES*, 2016) and Sarah Jean Alexander; and *Illuminati Girl Gang* (2011-2014), which was curated by Gabby Bess[5] (*Alone With Other People,* 2013), another poet associated with the Alt [C]Lit sphere. A close reading of their works of poetry will be employed in this paper to analyse, illustrate and problematise the paradox of isolated living in a hyper-connected society that relies heavily on both the immaterial and the ephemeral of the virtual.

2. A Room of Their Own: Interconnectivity and Isolation in Internet Communities

The room —either a living room or a bedroom— has become the nexus between that which is virtual and reality, connecting our private lives with the projection of our existence into the digital. As Zafra claims, the concept of a "connected room of one's own" theorises the impact of the 'screen' as the 'quintessential window' through which "the room oscillates between the double dimension of *space* and *place*" (2012: 480, emphasis in original), reminding us of Augé's concept of "non-places" (1996) as temporary intersectional spaces for anonymous human relations in constant movement. But Zafra goes a step further by suggesting that the 'room' conditions the formation of alternative and constantly updating subjectivities

outside the traditional social spectrum by creating "bonds of belonging" instead of excluding through "social networking". The room, according to Zafra, will be "a concrete place because it contains memories", where we can "build an identity" through "virtual routes and margins" (2012: 480) that make us stay connected and return to that particular online place.

An example of how enclosed domestic spaces, identity and online lives are radically intertwined is the figure of the *hikikomori*. In Japan, *hikikomori* often deal with their loneliness by opting out, like hermits, totally withdrawing into their rooms. A group of sociologists have argued that the existence of such isolated and anti-social people has been stimulated by the manifold ways in which online media technologies enable individuals to lead a normal life alone, "making it possible to live without going out" (Kato et al. 2017: 209), which makes isolation more feasible and accessible to anyone. It seems that Kato finds a reason to explain this phenomenon directly: the addiction produced by technology becomes a kind of soothing coping mechanism to face the emptiness created by real or imaginary social withdrawal. However, Japan is not the only nation that has developed this social problem due to the omnipresence of media technologies in our daily routines all over the world. According to a report from *YouGov*,[6] the sense of loneliness felt by US Millennials is rated as higher than previous generations: "[…] they have no acquaintances (25% of Millennials say this is the case), no friends (22%), no close friends (27%), and no best friends (30%)" (Ballard 2019). The study also states that there are a series of factors that contribute to this inability to bond with other people: one of these factors is "shyness (53%)" whereas a 27 percent of Millennials claim not to need friends at all or have "any hobbies or interests" to share with a particular community of friends (Ballard 2019). This has recently increased because of the social distancing imposed by most governments around the globe since the COVID-19 pandemic.

These new forms of social isolation were also depicted by Japanese artist Tetsuya Ishida (born in 1973, Yaizu) in an image described as follows by the Gagosian art gallery:

> The work depicts a young man —perhaps a likeness of the artist— seated at a computer. In place of a mouse, a disembodied finger attached to a black wire points toward a square hole in his desk, from which a minuscule staircase leads downward into darkness. The subject's spine has sprouted branches, which burst through his T-shirt, and he seems to be turning toward us as if to speak, with an expression that is part dismay, part resignation. (Gagosian 2022)

This image can be associated with that of the *hikikomori*, the one that *Broad City* also brilliantly depicts: the physical disintegration of the anatomical body, which is virtually absorbed by a liminal space, specifically the online realm. Like Ishida's

painting of a robot-man, a hybrid humanoid made up of ears morphed into a mobile phone while carrying on his shoulder a man dressed in white, working impassively on his computer (Ishida 1996). Therefore, the priority of the world going on behind our computer screens is what Lipovetsky described in *The Global Screen* as "screencracy", which is defined as "a flow of images that transforms the hypermodern individual into *Homo pantalicus* […]" (2009: 270, my translation).[7] As he argues, due to the technological shift the Internet has brought into our lives, "there is a will of the subjects to take over the screen and the tools of communication" (274, my translation).[8] Hence, the boundaries between material and virtual communication are 'decentralized' (273) and have been appropriated by users by becoming a by-product of individual expression.

Sibilia speaks about the *post-organic man* as the new humanistic ideal to transcend this fleshly prison-(cell), as Socrates once referred to the body in Plato's *Phaedo*, and how this new paradigm has replaced the concept of the hypermodern man. Finally, the soul —our subjectivity— has found a way to eliminate the burden of its bodily existence at least momentarily by employing the virtual. This is what Sibilia argues in the following extract: "As it happens in the 'angelic' tendencies of the cyberculture and tele-informatics, with their proposals of the immortal mind through artificial intelligence and the overcoming of the physical space through the virtualisation of the bodies in the data network […]" (2006: 118, my translation).[9] As she explains further, the quest for the hypermodern man is to search for the "ethereal and eternal 'essence'" by employing "artificial intelligence and biotechnologies" that contribute to "cut off life by separating it from the body" (118, my translation).[10] This is what Deleuze and Guattari defined as the "body without organs": "The BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the fantasy, significance, and subjectification as a whole" (2005: 151). This form of disembodying the mind —our subjectivity— from its fleshly carcass, responds to this accelerating form of identity formation online. The battle between the mind and body has intensified in recent years due to the proliferation of various technologies, including biological procedures and the expansion of the Web, through which this Cartesian dichotomy has been exploded to unimaginable limits: plastic surgery; Photoshop programs; Snapchat, Instagram and other app filters; and so on. As Sibilia puts it, the "technologies of the virtual and immortality" are affecting our "subjectivities and bodies" since the first ones have created a "new way of understanding and living the limits of space and time" (2006: 68, my translation).[11] Since time and space have been redefined by these innovative technologies, we are still reconfiguring our notions of being and living in the current times, which are determined by hectic, fast-paced developments which are surpassing, somehow, our human abilities to cope with reality.

115

3. Alt [C]Lit Poetry: The Netiana Paradox and Lyrical Virtuality

As described above, the traditional notions of positioning oneself in space and time have been dramatically challenged by the emergence of virtual realities, which proliferate the online sphere. This is what Sarah Jean Alexander (1988, Baltimore) melancholically proposes in the poem "You by way of me" (2015). The title of the poem suggests that a connection established between people is conditioned by our positions regarding others. Locating the body in both time and space is determined by the hypervisual, as stated in the following lines:

> If you look at the moon at midnight
> And I look at the moon at 7 PM,
>
> We will be on the opposite sides of the Atlantic
> Staring at the same spot in space. (2015: 32)

In the lines above, Alexander points out that the dematerialisation of bodies does not imply a disconnect with our position in space and time, but an expansive possibility for transgressing the very notions of subjectivity and engaging with others. The time zones stated in "at midnight" and "at 7 PM", which make two people "look at the moon", from "the opposite sides of the Atlantic" (32) are a clear allusion to the "abstraction of existence" that Lipovestky points out in *The Global Screen*, which originates from the "advanced process of derealization" at the same time that "a decorporalized and desensualized universe" (2009: 276, my translation)[12] is expanding as a result of how the body stops being a reference for reality and material existence. As Alexander suggests in her poem, people prefer interacting through a screen, a reference that is implied in the line "staring at the same spot in space" (2015: 32). This line acknowledges that one's presence online has become the epitome of existing: we are stared at, therefore we exist; as if Alexander twists into contemporary terms Descartes' famous lines. In the purest Cartesian sense, our subjectivities transcend our bodily existence in ground-breaking ways. But, at the same time, the voice of the poem is aware of how this can exponentially become a threat, as it follows:

> No one ever tells you to stare at the sun.
> That would be dangerous. It would hurt too much
>
> But if we are being honest with each other,
> Isn't this supposed to? (2015: 32)

At this point in the poem, Alexander seems to be reflecting on one of the primary effects that Alt Lit literature attempts to achieve through writing: showing how the Internet allows the artificial performativity of what A.D. Jameson calls 'New Sincerity', which consists of a simulated display of honesty on behalf of the author; honesty being understood as "the illusion of transparency, of direct communication [...] *by means of artifice*" (Jameson 2012). Considering that Alt Lit is a literary movement that originated in a highly artificial medium —that of the Internet— its authors long for the authenticity and naturality which is currently missing from social media, and actively react against the literary legacy of postmodern irony and cynicism.

In Alexander's poem, the "sun" stands as the metaphor for illuminating as a means of achieving truth, as Plato stated in his allegory of the cave: "The ascent for the upward journey of the soul into the region of the intelligible; then you will own what I surmise; since that is what you wish to be told. [...] In the world of knowledge, the last thing to be perceived and only with great difficulty is the essential Form of Goodness" (Plato 1941: 231). As Alexander also states in her poem, honesty, understood as one's truth, can "be (so) dangerous" for even others that "it would hurt too much" (2015: 32). This means that revealing our true, naked, honest selves can potentially harm others while this form of revelation of oneself inflicts pain on oneself. That is why our online persona is just an idealised projection of the self: the truth is always too ugly to be freely and openly revealed to others, because it may cause pain in an uncontrolled and unexpected way. According to Han, these new media and forms of communication "dismantle" the "relation with the different", since the processes of "virtualization and digitalization" make any real opposition "disappear eventually" (2017: 43, my translation).[13] With the Internet, mediated phantasies are closer to becoming our immediate reality.

In the chapbook *Internet Girls* (2014) by Ana Carrete (1988, San Diego), which was also published in the Alt [C]Lit magazine *illuminati girl gang* (vol. 4 2014), one can find the prototype of what Zafra called *Net(i)Ana(s)*. This is a generation of "posthuman and immaterial" women, an "alternative theoretical figuration of the Internet subject" that transgresses "the frontiers of gender, class and race" and "creates new questions on ways of being and relate to the online universe" (Zafra 2005: 23, my translation).[14] What Zafra tries to explain is that the virtual world has opened the door, at least theoretically, for exploring subjectivity and finding ways of subverting realities through the new languages available on the Net. These new forms of construction of the immaterial are directly connected to the production of the "immaterial", "desire", "meaning" and "affection and emotivity" according to Zafra (2005: 148). Similarly, at least in the first lines of this long poem in the form of a chapbook, these "internet girls" Carrete speaks about are similar to

117

the ones Zafra calls *netianas*, since both terms allude to the creation of affective
networks through the virtual medium:

> and hello hi internet
>
> girls
>
> come to mama
>
> haha just thought
>
> about deleting that
>
> and typing 'cum 2
>
> mama' instead but
>
> whoa that's dumb
>
> just kidding hey sup
>
> what is shaking
>
> internet girls [...] (Carrete 2014: 1)

118

What makes Carrete's poem so relevant for this analysis is that she acknowledges
that girls conform to a relevant group of participants in the online sphere. Also,
it is interesting to notice that the language employed is like that used in Internet
chat rooms or apps, which is evident in the use of informal terms: "hi", "mama",
"cum", "sup"; and exclamation words like "haha", which expresses laughter;
"whoa", which shows surprise; and "hey", which is used to draw someone's
attention. This kind of language is typical of conversations, which have now been
translated into digitised textual formats, through instant messaging conversations,
which attempt to reproduce discourse phonetically by these exclamations and try
to imitate spoken expressions. This creates a sense of spontaneity and improvisation
that is intensified using the apparent lack of content in sentences and the irrelevant
triviality depicted through them, mimicking a daily-life conversation. This artificial
display is directly connected to Jameson's claim on Alt Lit New Sincerity, which
depicts the poet as a real person in an artificial context such as the online one. At
the same time, the lines "hey sup/ what is shaking internet girls" (2014: 1) show
a need to connect with others, a need to reach out to someone like her in the
immense vastness of the World Wide Web: a group of girls bonding that reminds
one of the importance of human relations, even when these are transformed by the
mediation of the Internet in our daily lives, as well as in our intimate interactions.

It can be said that the "internet girls" that Carrete speaks about in her poem
have an identity of their own, which can be associated with or even included in
one of Zafra's *netianas*. This is because "the visual-digital" has become a "new

power location, connected to the body as an inscription field of socio-symbolic codes which converges with the machine" (Zafra 2005: 23, my translation).[15] Therefore, these digital media make gender a more complex construction which is mainly developed in an online context (2005: 22-23). According to Jaquet-Chiffelle and his group of researchers, contemporary identities are a complex topic to deal with since the proliferation of new subjectivities online has affected the way one perceives a subject: "On the Internet, it can be hard to know if the entity we are interacting with is of flesh and blood, or only digital. We are now facing a complex reality both in the 'real' world and in the information society. We have to deal with subjects acting behind masks" (2009: 78). For this very reason, their research on the *polymorphous* nature of contemporary identities is categorised into two main ones: "physical" and "virtual (or abstract)" entities (80). Also, Jaquet-Chiffelle's study points out the conceptualisation of the "mask" as role-playing through which "virtual persons" (82) perform and even develop an alternative identity parallel to their material presence.

How language is displayed by users on the Internet is also an important point to consider when one reads Carrete's works. In another of her self-published chapbooks, *Why Fi* (2014), there is the poem "404 NOT FOUND", which is full of Internet imagery, and perfectly poeticises the hybrid condition of the postmodern individual, a sort of prophecy turned into reality: the dystopian fantasy that Haraway wrote about in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, originally published in 1984. In Haraway's text, the cyborg identity is presented as a "creature in a postgender world" (2016: 8) that transgresses the thin boundary between human and animal and gracefully sneaks out of the "distinction between animal-human (organism) and machine" (11). Ethereal, invisible, cryptographic, the cyborg identity becomes an alternative future to the collapsing totalitarian-identity system we remain immersed in now. As Haraway argues, the "informatics of domination" is implicit in the transition from "an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system — from all work to all play, a deadly game" (28). This cyber-hybridisation of the organic with robotics is reminiscent of the paintings mentioned in the previous section by Ishida, whose work is full of examples of the mechanisation of human beings for the benefit of capitalistic exploitation and repression: workers are represented as isolated machines that repeat routines and working processes until exhaustion. In the poem "404 NOT FOUND", Carrete displays computing's dominion over Millennials' existence as how computers function, as it is shown at the beginning:

> open a tab and type loading
>
> turn airport off
>
> page fails

turn airport on

loading my love life on the internet

chemicals happening getting excited about the world

wide web that cocoons me

cosy warm wide web

long silky envelope (2014: 4)

The language employed mixes Internet terminology with lyricism to make the following statement: the boundary between the virtual world and the real one is becoming blurry. The pull of the online world is so strong that the average amount of time a person spends in front of a computer with Internet access has been increasing over the years. According to many reports, people use social media an average of "more than six hours a day", according to a report made by Hootsuite and We Are Social (Jiwani 2019). In this sense, one can remark on the extreme importance the Internet has on people's lives. The Internet's influence on our way of understanding the world and how we interact with it are closely connected at the same time. The title itself, "404 NOT FOUND", refers to an HTTP standard response code indicating that the client could not communicate with a given server. Still, the server could not find what was requested: it usually appears when a user attempts to follow a broken or dead link. This phenomenon is exactly what happens in the poem, which describes in detail many people's routines when getting in front of their computers or mobile devices: "opening a tab". A "tab" is a computer interface used for navigating web pages, and where you "type" a web address for "loading". But the speaker playfully types "loading", disabling the airport connection to have access to a wireless signal; nonetheless, the "page fails" (Carrete 2014: 4). Then, the poet describes the process of enabling the airport connection again, which is switching off the Internet connection. In this sense, the poem leads us toward a stream of consciousness in which the poetic voice reflects on Internet addiction as if it were a toxic verbosity of intimacy. This linguistic display of our intimacy is connected to how people feel comfortable making their personal lives public through various online media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter.

As Mira Gonzalez (1992, Los Angeles) co-authored *Selected Tweets* (2015) with Tao Lin, one of the big names in the Alt Lit scene, early social media was an unspoiled territory for experimenting with first-person narratives about one's life with the expectation, and even fear, of not being attractive enough to engage the audience: "I'm already confused as to what I'm supposed to tweet about. My life isn't interesting" (Gonzalez 2015: 2). This is supposed to be the first

120

tweet with which Gonzalez started her official Twitter account in February 2010. Nevertheless, she uses this first tweet as the introduction to her collection *Collected Tweets*. This example shows how the autobiographical and the use of social media as a literary medium converge to reinforce the display of New Sincerity in the Alt Lit movement.

This need for authenticity seems to be a nonsense motivation that fills the actual need to share whatever belongs to the real world and our personal lives across the World Wide Web, as it is stated in Carrete's poem: "loading my love life on the internet/ chemicals happening getting excited about the world" (2014: 4). Afterwards, the voice compares the Internet to a "cocoon", which can be interpreted as the comparison to a spider that weaves their webs to lure their victims, and then captures them by wrapping them with silk, forming a cocoon: "long silky envelope". This predatory and captivating effect the Internet has on the poet is compared to the effects that Stockholm syndrome has on its victims. This effect is reflected in the line "this short envelope that protects me from spam" (4). The protective "short envelope" embodies how the Internet makes her feel, and this is also described as "cosy warm". This image of the World Wide Web as a cocoon that traps you like the spider web catches its prey reminds one of "Stuck on You" (2015) by Polly Nor (1989, London), in which evil red tentacles reach out from a computer screen to rock a floating body that holds a phone in her hand, symbolising our emotional co-dependency with technology and that which is virtual. This shows the attraction that the Internet world exerts on people. "Spam" has some connotations apart from being the unsolicited emails people receive every day, like certain viruses or bacteria that are sexually transmitted through unprotected sexual practices. This can be deduced from the close position between the words "spam" and "babies" (Carrete 2014: 4), suggesting that the Internet somehow prevents people from having sex in the real world, mainly due to the wide access to pornographic content for free that controls libidinal impulses:

> long or in my case short envelope
>
> short envelope that protects me from spam
>
> and babies are us newsletters i don't have any
>
> babies someone make me unsubscribe
>
> these emails are making me want some
>
> turn airport on and land on my wait
>
> unbutton my tabs
>
> use cursive script on my stomach

turn airport on and off and on and off

and on again (Carrete 2014: 4)

The struggle between the real and the virtual is stated in "someone makes me unsubscribe/ these emails are making me want some" (4), followed by enabling the airport connection again and landing "on my wait". These lines seem to refer to people's tendency to be constantly distracted by their mobile phones while waiting for the bus or the train in the "non-places" that Augé mentions. Furthermore, the process of hybridisation between physical and virtual identity turns out to be interpreted as a metaphor for cyber-sex: "turn airport on and land on my wait/ unbutton my tabs/ use cursive script on my stomach" (Carrete 2014: 4). These two lines represent this struggle of constantly living offline and online, compared to the sexual desire of total union of two separate entities: the one between human and the online persona.

Following Zafra's ideas, the mediation of the screen as "an interface" that "liminally join(s) our bodies to online relations" and becomes the "'necessary' appendixes of our habitation in a connected world" (2015: 16). What seems more evident is that Haraway's vision of the hybridisation between the human and cyborg is made by the mediation of computer and mobile devices as platforms through which we are connected. This is what Zafra has described as a need for "participat[ing] in the space that it generates with its own vital experience, committing it in a space that symbolically identifies it, which it considers its own" (2015: 25). Furthermore, Carrete also seems to explore this sickening longing for the virtual to live in her poem "y2k" from *Baby Babe* (2012), in which the author expresses her concerns about the dystopian possibility of the disappearance of technology from our lives as a tragedy:

if computers stopped

working i would seriously

consider this

masochistic

ongoing desire

and replace

my eyes with marbles (2012: 49)

In this poem, two facts can be analysed: the first one is the possibility of a virtual apocalypse, in which "computers" would undergo another *Year 2000 Problem*

or *Millennium Bug*, also known as "y2k", which consisted of a computer bug associated with the inability of most computer software programs to distinguish between the year 1900 and the year 2000. Carrete employs this computer bug as a metaphor for understanding the emotional dependency that Millennials have on computers and the need to be constantly connected online: "if computers stopped/ working i would seriously/ consider this/ masochistic/ ongoing desire" (49). Carrete seems to establish a parallelism between a "masochistic ongoing desire" (49) and Internet addiction, a fact that is evident in the power dynamics established between Haraway's 'Informatic domination' and the gradual submission of people to it, since, as Braidotti stated, "technology" has become "a material and symbolic apparatus", "a semiotic and social agent among others" (1996: 348) in contemporary societies.

The poem ends with two interesting lines that bring to mind Zafra's concept of *ocularcentrism*: "and/ replace my eyes with marbles" (Carrete 2012: 49). Zafra defines *ocularcentrism* as the way of perceiving and knowing about the world through the domination of the eyes: the power of the visual to validate and interpret reality (2018: 45). As the "machines of *seeing*" allow the possibility of creating a "new form of power over subjects and bodies" (49, my translation),[16] this is actually what is displayed in our digital devices and diverse social media. Zafra names this "online culture", which is defined as "the cohabitation and construction of a *world* and *subjectivity* through the screens in a context of visual excess (image, information, data …)". This results in a new form of "*cognitive* or *informative capitalism*" (39, my translation)[17] that, according to Zafra, is what measures our social and digital interactions throughout the World Wide Web, and particularly evident, in social media networks.

In the poem, Carrete seems to notice the importance of the politics of seeing digital images, of being connected through the eyes to the screen of our devices to consume culture, which is also emphasised in the image included in this book that immediately follows the poem: a blank eye, no pupil with no iris, just a teardrop falling from the lacrimal duct. This conjures the image of Medusa turning her victims into stone, just as the blank screen turns our eyes into "marbles", unable to see outside the digital. Another popular online illustrator, Laura Callaghan [18](1991, Belfast), has portrayed Millennial culture through her colorful and detailed illustrations, like the one described above, in which a girl is surrounded by her laptop, mobile phone and other technological devices. Like Polly Noir's and Callaghan's illustrations, Carrete's image and poem emphasise the impact of technology on younger generations' lives to the point of becoming embodied, as it happens more radically in Ishida's work, as part of the body and the subjectivity, and conditioning how Millennials interact with their environment.

123

At this very moment, one can imagine how most Millennial poets populate the Internet as a horde of cyber-spiders, in a way reminiscent of Carrete's poetic image, who, 24 hours a day and all year long, non-stop, weave and spin their texts throughout the Net, hunting readers through their sticky web(s) like predators. At the advent of this digital revolution, Alt [C]Lit's writing has actively contributed to the posthuman strategies of interconnectivity that also influence new realities and epistemologies that result from the proliferation of new subjectivities. Therefore, one cannot still ignore the fact that the intricacies of the Big Web that constitute our immediate socio-cultural legacy make it more than evident that the Internet, and more concretely, online writing, is the legitimate heir(ess) and successor of those (wo)men who spun, weaved, knotted and embroidered their stories, their narratives, their experiences, their emotions into the loom of history, literature and the arts, in the liminal joint between the material and the immaterial.

4. Conclusion: Futurities

Traditional notions of positioning oneself in space and time have been dramatically challenged by the emergence of virtual realities populating the online sphere. With the Internet, mediated fantasies are closer to becoming our immediate reality. Since time and space have been redefined by diverse innovative technologies, we are still reconfiguring our notions of being, living and positioning ourselves in the world. These notions are determined by hectic, fast-paced developments and also surpass, somehow, our human abilities to cope with reality.

As discussed earlier, Alt [C]Lit poets have exposed their concerns as a part of the Millennial generation about the challenges of a society that relies on the virtual in almost every sphere of life. By providing their voices to express themselves in new ways: the simulation of the author's authentic self and honesty through the creation of an online persona, as it happens in Sarah Jean Alexander's poems; or by reproducing and adapting the language employed on social media platforms to experiment with new forms creating narratives about the self, as happens with Mira Gonzalez's tweets. All this poetry, particularly the work by Ana Carrete, exposes the yearning to belong to a community by employing the Internet and its possibilities for socialisation, but also denouncing the dangers behind relying too much on the virtual, as it makes us more dematerialised, displaced and disconnected than genuinely connected emotionally and physically.

Therefore, the use of poetic metaphors concerning Internet imagery has been analysed to describe how this use of the virtual, as a limit of the material and the immaterial, is affecting our notions of identity, for which Zafra's concept of *netianas* will be employed to explore how the Internet subject problematises not

only fixed categories of being, such as gender, class and race, but also re-configures posthuman immateriality. Conceiving the screen as a liminal interface that connects our corporeal materiality to the virtuality of human interactions, as Zafra claims, how mediation works will be presented as a key element to understand the Alt Lit poetry in the 'connected room(s)' that we all inhabit nowadays.

Notes

1. Born in 1986.

2. Born in 1987.

3. Born in 1992.

4. Born in 1987.

5. Born in 1992.

6. YouGov is an international research firm of data analysis on public opinion: <https://es.yougov.com/>

7. "[...] entre la pantalla tamaño sello y la megapantalla gigante circula sin cesar una flota de imágenes que transforma al individuo hipermoderno en Homo pantalicus e instaura una pantallocracia cuyo poder temen ya algunos".

8. "[...] una voluntad de los sujetos de reapropiarse de las pantallas y los instrumentos de comunicación".

9. "Como ocurre en las tendencias 'angélicas' de la cibercultura y la teleinformática, con sus propuestas de inmortalidad de la mente mediante la inteligencia artificial y de superación del espacio físico a través de la virtualización de los cuerpos en las redes de datos [...]".

10. "[...] proyectos como los de la inteligencia artificial y las biotecnologías revelan sus frágiles cimientos metafísicos, que cercenan la vida al separarla de una "esencia" etérea y eterna".

11. "Las subjetividades y los cuerpos contemporáneos se ven afectados por las tecnologías de la virtualidad y la inmortalidad, y por los nuevos modos que inauguran de entender y vivenciar los límites espaciotemporales que estas tecnologías inauguran" (emphasis in original).

12. "[...] se denuncia el crecimiento de una existencia abstracta, informatizada, sin vínculo humano tangible. Conforme el cuerpo deja de ser el asidero real de la vida, el horizonte que se perfila es el de un universo fantasma, un universo descorporeizado y desensualizado".

13. "También los nuevos medios y las nuevas técnicas de comunicación desmantelan cada vez más la relación con lo distinto. [...] La virtualización y la digitalización hacen que lo real que opone resistencia vaya desapareciendo cada vez más".

14. "NETIANA: sujeto posthumano e inmaterial que n(h)ace en Internet. Figuración teórica alternativa del sujeto en red. Ficción política que rebasa las fronteras de género, clase y raza y que sugiere nuevas preguntas sobre las formas de ser y de relacionarnos en el universo on line".

15. "En su deriva por el territorio Internet, esboza nuevas preguntas y desafíos feministas que se acercan a lo visualdigital como a una nueva localización del poder, al cuerpo conectado como a un campo de inscripción de códigos sociosimbólicos que converge cada vez más con la máquina [...]".

16. "[...] las máquinas de ver crean un nuevo mundo, mejor dicho, un nuevo poder sobre los sujetos y cuerpos en el mundo".

17. "Este escenario, al que llamaré cultura-red, viene definido por la convivencia y construcción de mundo y subjetividad a través de las pantallas en un contexto excedentario en lo visual (imagen, información, datos ...). Contexto caracterizado en un marco donde conviven formas de capitalismo cognitivo o informacional con otras formas de economía social que surgen desde la ciudadanía".

18. Laura Callaghan's website: <https://www.lauracallaghanillustration.com>.

Works cited

ALEXANDER, Sara Jean. 2015. *Wildlives*. Big Luck Books.

AUGÉ, Marc. 1996. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Trans. J. Howe. Verso.

BALLARD, Jamie. 2019. "Millennials Are the Loneliest Generation". *YouGov* (July 30). <https://today.yougov.com/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2019/07/30/loneliness-friendship-new-friends-poll-survey>. Accessed November 7, 2019.

BRAIDOTTI, Rosi. 1996. "Cyberfeminism with a Difference". *New Formations: A Journal of Culture, Theory & Politics* 29: 347-357.

CARRETE, Ana. 2012. *Baby Babe*. Civil Coping Mechanisms.

CARRETE, Ana. 2014. *Why Fi*. Self-Published.

DELEUZE, Gilles and Félix GUATTARI. 2005. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. B. Massumi. University of Minnesota Press.

GAGOSIAN. 2022. "'Untitled', by Tetsuya Ishida". *Instagram* (May 27). <https://www.instagram.com/p/CeDsn0kO9Cy/>

GLAZER, Ilana and Abbi JACOBSON. 2015. "*Broad City* - The Worldwide Bloodstream". Comedy Central. *YouTube* (February 12). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-_3QiG0Cmo&index=14&list=PLD7nPL1U-R5pl1nh9s1dQFy6zpTYll0r->. Accessed August 27, 2025.

GONZALEZ, Mila and Tao LIN. 2015. *Selected Tweets*. Short Flight/Long Drive Books.

HAN, Byung Chul. 2017. *La sociedad del cansancio*. Trans. A. Saratxaga Arregi y A. Ciria. Herder Editorial.

HARAWAY, Donna. 2016. *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Minnesota Press.

ISHIDA, Tetsuya. 1996. "Cell Phone Robot and Laptop Boy". *Artsy*. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/tetsuya-ishida-cell-phone-robot-and-laptop-boy>

JAMESON, A.D. 2012. "What we Talk about When we Talk about the New Sincerity, Part 1". *HTML GIANT* (June 4). <http://htmlgiant.com/haut-or-not/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-the-new-sincerity/>. Accessed October 9, 2018.

JAQUET-CHIFFELLE, David-Olivier, Emmanuel BENOIST, Rolf HAENNI, Florent WENGER and Harald

Jɪᴡᴀɴɪ, Saima. 2019. "More Than Six Hours of Our Day Is Spent Online - Digital 2019 Reports". *Digital Information World* (February 4). <https://www.digitalinformationworld.com/2019/02/internet-users-spend-more-than-a-quarter-of-their-lives-online.html>. Accessed September 4, 2025.

Kᴀᴛᴏ, Takahiro A., Naotaka Sʜɪɴꜰᴜᴋᴜ, Norman Sᴀʀᴛᴏʀɪᴜs and Shigenobu Kᴀɴʙᴀ. 2017. "Loneliness and Single-Person Households: Issues of *Kodokushi* and *Hikikomori* in Japan". In Okkels, Niels, Christina Blanner Kristiansen and Povl Munk-Jørgensen (eds.) *Mental Health and Illness in the City. Mental Health and Illness Worldwide*. Springer: 205-221. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2327-9_9>.

Lɪᴘᴏᴠᴇᴛsᴋʏ, Gilles. 2009. *La pantalla global: cultura mediática y cine en la era hipermoderna.* Trans. J. Serroy. Anagrama.

Nᴏʀ, Polly. 2015. "Stuck on You". *pollynor.com*. <https://www.pollynor.com/Stuck-On-You-By-Polly-Nor>.

Pʟᴀᴛᴏ. 1941. *The Republic of Plato*. Trans. F. Macdonald Cornford. Oxford U.P.

Rᴀᴇ, Emmie. 2014. "'Alt [C]Lit: What Remains of a Literary Subculture". *The Lifted Brow* (November 6). <https://theliftedbrowblog.wordpress.com/2014/11/05/alt-clit-what-remains-of-a-literary-subculture-by-emmie-rae/>. Accessed August 19, 2025.

Sɪʙɪʟɪᴀ, Paula. 2006. *El Hombre Postorgánico: cuerpo, subjetividad y tecnologías digitales.* Fonde de Cultura Económica.

Zᴀꜰʀᴀ, Remedios. 2005. *Netianas: N(h)acer mujer en Internet*. Desórdenes Biblioteca de Ensayo.

Zᴀꜰʀᴀ, Remedios. 2012. *A Connected Room of One's Own: (Cyber)Space and (Self)Management of the Self*. Fórcola Ediciones.

Zᴀꜰʀᴀ, Remedios. 2015. "Subject and Network: Potential and Political Limits of the (Un)Making of Bodies Online". *Cadernos Pagu* 44: 13-30. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-4449201500440013>.

Zᴀꜰʀᴀ, Remedios. 2018. *Ojos y capital*. Consonni.

Zᴡɪɴɢᴇʀʟʙᴇʀɢ. 2009. "Virtual Persons and Identities". In Rannenberg, Kai, Denis Royer and André Deuker (eds.) *The Future of Identity in the Information Society: Challenges and Opportunities*. Springer: 75-122. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-01820-6_3>.

127

ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN FICTION: OBJECT EARTH AS A LENS FOR THE PLANETARY AND THE GLOBAL IN SAMANTHA HARVEY'S *ORBITAL*

PERSPECTIVAS ECOCRÍTICAS EN LA FICCIÓN: EL OBJETO TIERRA COMO LENTE DE LO "PLANETARIO" Y LO "GLOBAL" EN *ORBITAL,* DE SAMANTHA HARVEY

CONSTANZA MONDO
University of Turin (Italy)
costanza.mondo@unito.it
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2236-4580>

Abstract

The numerous causes of climate change and the unintended scalar effects of human activity are increasingly highlighting the chasm between the workings of the planet and human actions, entangled in a complex web of causes and effects that seems to eschew a comprehensive view. This widening gap is posing challenges to human cognition and, as a result, to ecocritical fiction. This article aims to analyse how the fracture between the planetary and the global, discussed by Dipesh Chakrabarty, is rendered in fiction in Samantha Harvey's *Orbital* through the representation of object Earth. By interweaving Iovino and Oppermann's material ecocriticism with ecocritical scholarly reflections, I will show how the object Earth in the novel —apparently observed from the outside area of the International Space Station— thematises the difference between the planetary and the global, and how Harvey's narrative strategies attempt to capture climate change and the planet by circumventing the hurdle posed by scale.

Keywords: Samantha Harvey, the planetary and the global, material ecocriticism, ecocriticism, Anthropocene.

Resumen

Las numerosas causas del cambio climático y los efectos escalares accidentales de la actividad humana resaltan cada vez más la diferencia entre los mecanismos de

funcionamiento del planeta y las acciones humanas, en un entramado multifacético de causas y efectos que parece eludir una visión integral. Esta creciente diferencia está planteando desafíos a la cognición humana y, en consecuencia, también a la ficción ecocrítica. Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar cómo la fractura entre lo planetario y lo global, comentada por Dipesh Chakrabarty, se representa a nivel narrativo en *Orbital*, de Samantha Harvey, a través de la representación del objeto Tierra. Entretejiendo la ecocrítica material de Iovino y Oppermann con las reflexiones ecocríticas de varios académicos, mostraré cómo el objeto Tierra novelístico —observado desde el lugar aparentemente externo de la Estación Espacial Internacional— pone en primer plano la diferencia entre lo planetario y lo global, y cómo las estrategias narrativas de Harvey intentan captar el cambio climático y el planeta, sorteando el obstáculo de las magnitudes escalares.

Palabras clave: Samantha Harvey, lo planetario y lo global, ecocrítica material, ecocrítica, Antropoceno.

1. Introduction

In the field of ecocriticism, reflections on the partiality of human perspective and its biased sensorium have found concrete, multi-faceted expression in phrases such as "tree blindness" (Popkin 2017) —the widespread human tendency to overlook trees and fail to distinguish tree species— or "ocean deficiency" (Dobrin 2021: 9), ecocriticism's greater focus on land-locked perspectives rather than ocean-centred texts. After the 'green' and 'blue' turns,[1] Samantha Harvey's *Orbital* adds a 'planetary' edge to considerations on the ability of the senses to make meaning when confronted with the planetary scales of the Earth and climate change in the Anthropocene.

In his painting *The Astronomer* (1668), Johannes Vermeer captured human curiosity about the world in an image that conveys the limits and inadequacy of human perception when faced with global scales. This impression is rendered through a series of subtle pictorial elements, such as the model-like quality of the small globe perused by the astronomer, his squinting eyes, his lips parted in wonder as he tentatively touches the sphere, which seems to betray shyness rather than self-assuredness. Outside the visual arts, the fallibility of human perception in grasping the surrounding environment and conceptualising its complexity was a long-standing literary and narratological topic well before Vermeer's 17th-century painting. However, the issue of perspective is increasingly being framed by ecocriticism in the wider context of the Anthropocene and the practices of meaning-making in the face of climate change, whose extension and all-encompassing nature pose challenges to human situated cognition.

By employing the painting-related framework built by the author through transformative references to Velazquez's *Las Meninas* and other similar visual stimuli, this article aims to read Harvey's short novel (almost a novella) through the lens of material ecocriticism to examine the representation of the object Earth and the challenges it poses to human perception and fiction. As stated by Serenella Iovino, "Material ecocriticism is posthuman performativity in its narrative disclosure" (2012: 459), where "narrative" refers to nonhuman subjects' agency but could also pertain to the narrative sphere of fiction, a reading strengthened by the narratological discussions on literature in the Anthropocene by ecocritical scholars such as Adam Trexler (2015), Amitav Ghosh (2017) and Timothy Clark (2023). As will be demonstrated, in *Orbital*, the partiality of human perspective and the fallibility of the human sensorium are depicted through a prismatic literary representation and portrayed as a filter through which the planet may be contemplated. The narrative frame of the novel also reflects the narratological challenges posed by the representation of the Earth in literature by ending with three scenes belonging to the realms of the global and the planetary. Ultimately, these spheres become intertwined by the destructive action of a typhoon and are reconciled in a narrative gesture that draws attention to its own insufficiency, in line with narratological attempts to embrace the scalar heights of the Anthropocene and climate change.

An "Anthropocene book resistant to doom" (Harris 2023) and the 2024 Booker Prize winner, Samantha Harvey's *Orbital* (2023) focuses on humankind's sensory fallibility in relation to planet Earth, an object of observation "as intricate as a Fabergé egg" (Harris 2023). Centred around six astronauts on the International Space Station (ISS) —Nell, Shaun, Anton, Roman, Chien and Pietro— Harvey's work reconciles lyricism with scientific knowledge in a tentative narrative fabric that weaves an image of the Earth from a human perspective that has been removed from the planet's surface and placed in the emptiness of space. Harvey's Fabergé-like representation of the planet —which, in modernist fashion, becomes fragmented the closer one looks but succeeds in conveying a pleasant sense of intricacy and attention to detail from afar— resonates with another painterly representation of the globe, or rather a section of it, encompassed in another work of contemporary literature.

Fifteenth-century Venetian monk Fra Mauro's *Mappa Mundi* —one of the first maps to represent the Indian Ocean as open water not hemmed in by a southern land mass (Gurnah 2011a: 261)— is an important reflective fulcrum for Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah — a prominent writer on the Indian Ocean (Hofmeyr 2010: 723; Oruc 2022: 147). In Gurnah's short story "Mid Morning Moon", the map is incorporated in the story and could become what Lucinda Newns termed

a "narrative object" (2020: 128, emphasis in original), both because a story issues from it and because the map itself was partly drawn thanks to stories: "The Fra listened to what travellers had to say" (Gurnah 2011b: 27). The map struck Gurnah's literary imagination in its attempt at depicting an unknown world, at pushing geographical perspectives further and overcoming perspectival boundaries in what can be defined, in the writer's opinion, as an attempt at cosmopolitanism ante litteram: "a Venetian monk on the island of Murano in the Venice Lagoon studies a variety of Arab, Indian, and European sources and, without stirring from there, constructs a map of the world" (Gurnah 2011a: 261). As with Vermeer's astronomer, the product of this endeavour is a model, a sample-like representation of a planet that can never be sketched in its entirety, thus being zoomed in on through a detailed portion of the Indian Ocean, or being essentialised in a small globe, in Vermeer's case. Both instances show the visual and conceptual connections between literature, the representation of the world and cartography, stressing the challenges posed by scalar heights to human understanding — similar concern is explored in *Orbital*.

Introducing Samatha Harvey's latest novel through such visual stimuli is not an attempt to make the case for the already largely-advocated-for connection between visual arts and literature. Rather, considering a planetary turn in ecocriticism, it seeks to sow the first seeds of a fluid framework aimed at capturing the issue of human perspective on the Earth in the Anthropocene. *Orbital* is concerned with the dreams, feelings and memories of the six astronauts during a whole day of orbiting around the planet, which they contemplate through the orbits and which becomes a catalyst for their memories and thoughts about the meaning of home. Grounded in the environmental humanities, the framework I employ reads the novel's representation of the Earth through green, blue and material ecocriticism, as well as various forms of visual production, including paintings and photographs taken up by Harvey in the story. After exploring the object Earth in the novel through Velazquez's painting *Las Meninas* and Michael Collins's photograph of the blue marble, I will focus on other narrative strategies that bridge the global/planetary distinction by analysing the themes of gestation and water through philosopher Simone Regazzoni's thoughts. The final part will zoom in on a Category Five typhoon as a narrative element that closes the novel in a gesture of juxtaposition and connection of different scales.

The interdisciplinarity of this framework seems appropriate for this novel, which appears grounded in a visual, painting-like frame from the very beginning, when *Las Meninas* becomes the centre of reflections on the multiplicity of perceptions and focal points, whose ultimate meaning seems to be the contemplation of burgeoning possibilities and, therefore, the impossibility of reaching an unambiguous view. In

this paper, the fluidity of this painting-related framework is complemented by the ecocritical solidity of Timothy Clark's (2008; 2019; 2023), Timothy Morton's (2011; 2014) and Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2021) reflections. Whether embodied by Vermeer's astronomer, by Fra Mauro's map of the Indian Ocean or by Velazquez's masterpiece, the limitedness and naiveté of human attempts at overcoming the boundaries of perception and embracing global scales can be considered the pictorial expression of Chakrabarty's distinction between the global and the planetary. These terms entail the "coming together of the relatively short-term processes of human history and other much longer-term processes that belong to the history of the Earth system and of life on the planet" (Chakrabarty 2015: 50). It is precisely one of those 'rifts' in the conceptualisation of climate change —described as "fault lines on a seemingly continuous surface: we have to keep crossing or straddling them as we think or speak of climate change" (Chakrabarty 2015: 45)— that *Orbital* transplants into the narrative field of a novel set in space.

2. Anthropocene Perspectives: The Limits of Human Perception and the Narrative Boundaries of the Novel

In the Anthropocene, the gap between planetary and human temporalities is symbolised by two Greek terms referring to distinct temporal spheres: Chronos and Kairos (Northcott 2015: 107), whose difference follows the rift between the "epiphenomenal character of human history" and the deep history of life on Earth (Northcott 2015: 102). This clash is difficult to grasp in terms of perspective and, consequently, may go unacknowledged in a conceptual fold that conflates the life of the planet with that of the human species. Since it stems from a human-centred perspective, this impression can be traced in literature, even in contemporary texts that are not strictly ecocritical. This may be observed, for example, in the following passage in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Dottie* (1990):

> The landscapes were simple and uncomplicatedly benign, places where she would be able to sit silently on a log beside the path or atop a rock like a harmless and romantic innocent. They were places she could make-believe were made for her, anyone could, and where she could feel at one with everything. She had even been in such places, or perhaps it was truer to say that she had felt such moments, when the colours and the symmetry of objects had a rightness as if that was how they had always been since the very first times, and always will be. (Gurnah 2021: 242)

Published in 1990, Gurnah's novel is not concerned with ecocriticism, and the planetary/global distinction is not among the themes it explores. Precisely for these reasons, it is interesting to find this impression elicited by a landscape with aesthetic and spiritual traits which, Chakrabarty would say, becomes a screening

device of mutuality that hides the richness and vitality of the histories of geology and life from human cognition (2021: 188). This view seems in line with Val Plumwood's suspicion of landscape concepts as a frame between the viewer and the land which creates distance and encourages idealist approaches towards the land (2006: 123). Indeed, as Chakrabarty clarifies:

> Mutuality arises for a single human being who faces what surrounds her or him from within the solitariness of her or his singular human life and who experiences the surroundings not only as rising up to meet her gaze but also […] as stable. For it is the stability of the landscape that allows for the experience to be repeated. (2021: 188-189)

Like the human perspective, literature also struggles to adjust to planetary temporal and physical scales. As Bonneuil points out, creating a conceptual narrative about the Anthropocene necessarily entails, among other things, "selecting a focus and a 'framing' that highlights some actors and phenomena while leaving others in the shadows" (2015: 17). In this case, the chosen focus of *Orbital*, namely the perspective of the six astronauts on the ISS, seems to portray the planet as an object so as to capture the environmental issues it contains, while also problematising its status as ultimate object, a 'thing' encompassing all nonhuman and human life we are familiar with. Possessing a planetary history that also includes human history, the object Earth appears as the quintessential "storied matter" (Iovino and Oppermann 2014a: 1), where "matter" comprises both human and nonhuman life, in a gesture that aligns with Jane Bennett's appeal to "*raise the status of the materiality of which we are composed*" (2010: 12, emphasis in original).

In one passage of the novel, the object Earth seems to lack solidity: "From out there it doesn't have the appearance of a solid thing, its surface is fluid and lustrous" (Harvey 2024a: 68). Even in the opening scene, the fluid materiality of the planet clashes with the solidity of a series of smaller objects, abandoned in disarray after the party thrown by the six astronauts to celebrate a team of fellow astronauts' departure for the moon: "Four blue balloons are buoyed on the circulating air […]. There's a smear of chocolate on a pair of scissors and a small felt moon on a piece of string, tied to the handles of the foldable table" (Harvey 2024a: 1). This series of objects, made even more real in their materiality by their vivid descriptions, is thus juxtaposed to a planet characterised by fluid or fuzzily incorporeal traits: "Outside the earth reels away in a *mass of moonglow*, *peeling backward* as they forge towards its *edgeless edge*; the *tufts* of *cloud* across the Pacific brighten the nocturnal ocean to cobalt" (Harvey 2024a: 1, emphasis added). Yet this juxtaposition highlights similarities as it shows differences, eventually bringing both the party-related objects and the planet under the same category of matter.

This nature of matter, of its 'object-ness' that entails uniqueness as much as equalising enmeshment in a wider agential network, is explored in the novel through other narrative devices. Indeed, a reconciliation between object-oriented ontology and ecocriticism is fostered by the narrative choice to include as part of the plot some lists made by Chien, a Japanese astronaut, as well as structuring long paratactical sentences stringing together series of items — possible further instances of the "Latour Litanies" that Morton maintains are important to object-oriented ontology (2011: 173). Taking a glass of water as an example, Morton maintains that objects are irreducible and that they withdraw, no matter the effort at embracing them holistically:

> even if I could exhaust every single aspect of the glass of water (melting it, smashing it, evaporating it, shooting its silicon atoms around a particle accelerator, writing a story about it, pretending it's a glass of liquid gold, ignoring it), *it would still withdraw*. Even if *every other object* in the entire universe were to exhaust every single aspect of the glass, it would still withdraw. (2011: 166, emphasis in original)

In the same way, in *Orbital*, object Earth withdraws from the astronauts' cognitive attempts at comprehending it in ways that are unambiguous for each of them, let alone for humankind.

135

2.1. Visual Stimuli in Orbital: The Meaning of Paintings and Photographs

In Harvey's novel, the emphasis on the inevitable partiality and incompleteness of human perspective may be said to emerge from the reference to Velazquez's painting *Las Meninas*. Indeed, *Las Meninas* could be used as a pictorial/conceptual key to read and situate the object Earth in this novel. That the artwork poses challenges to perception and focalisation through its dizzying games of mirrors is testified, for example, by the fact that French philosopher Michel Foucault dedicated an essay to the masterpiece and its "subtle system of feints" (2007: 3). Experimenting with ekphrasis, Harvey depicts the famous artwork through the thoughts of one of the astronauts, who first spoke to his future wife in high school during a lesson on Velazquez's work of art. Years later, his wife gave him a postcard of the painting, which he now contemplates while on the ISS: "he finds himself staring at it, at all of the possibilities of subject and perspective that his wife wrote out on its reverse. The king, the queen, the maids, the girl, the mirror, the artist. […] There's the lingering sense of an unfinished dream, something wild in his thoughts" (Harvey 2024a: 7).

Although this work of art becomes archetypical in the novel because it is introduced in the first pages, it is by no means the only occasion on which a mirroring/mirrored self is continuously centred and de-centred. The picture of the Earth taken by Apollo astronaut Michael Collins —"the only human being

not in that photograph" (Harvey 2024a: 43)— prompts two dreams in Anton, a Russian cosmonaut. In the first dream, he is looking at the photograph and enters it, taking on Collins's perspective. In the second, Anton adopts the perspective of the planet: "he saw his voice, or *was* his voice — standing on the very surface of the earth looking out into space and to the moon […] he was shouting up at his wife who was now behind the lens of the camera somewhere on or near this distant moon" (44, emphasis in original). Part photographer, part object being photographed, Anton seems to experience the considerable difference stemming from which position one occupies with respect to the flimsy filter of a camera lens. Anton's dreams call to mind Michael Collins's photo of the 'blue marble', evoked by the phrasing "a blue half-sphere hanging in all blackness and bearing mankind" (42-43), as well as by the expressions "blue pull of the earth" (32) and "glass marble in blackest space" (128). Again, what makes the photo akin to *Las Meninas* is a matter of multiple perspectives contradicting each other to the point of questioning the very objectivity of reality and the existence of an unambiguous perspective at all:

> What of all the people on the other side of the earth that the camera can't see, and everybody in the southern hemisphere which is in night and gulped up by the darkness of space? Are they in the photograph? In truth, nobody is in that photograph, nobody can be seen. […] The strongest, most deducible proof of life in the photograph is the photographer himself […] the more enchanting thing about Collins's image is that, in the moment of taking the photograph, he is really the *only* human presence it contains. (Harvey 2024a: 43, emphasis in original)

This iconic photo was discussed by both Dipesh Chakrabarty and Timothy Clark. The former maintained that, together with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, it helped show the world's oneness (Chakrabarty 2021: 17), thus putting an end to what Timothy Clark would consider an externality (2008: 48). Instead, Clark places emphasis on the disruption of scale effected by the photo, "whose initial force is to dislocate given frames of meaning-making and scale" (2023: 31). Precisely like Velazquez's masterpiece, the photo is about perspective, how viewers position themselves in terms of an object and what meanings are drawn from those stances. A review pointed out that the contrast between the picture by Collins and the painting by Velazquez is considerable (Ferris 2023), while it seems to me that they are both a product of their time and embody themes such as the illusion of representation, the flimsiness of images and the instability of perspective. Thematising this in very different guises —a 17th-century oil painting and a 1960s photograph— only testifies to the enduring power of these themes and the constantly morphing shapes with which they impose themselves on our attention.

136

In Joshua Ferris's review of *Orbital*, the author states that Harvey's novel is like Collins's picture, because it fails to reflect the world, even though it contains it (Ferris 2023). Acute in its perception of a wider connection between the visual stimuli in the story and the narrative fabric of the novel, the text nonetheless reveals that any form of representation is invariably an act of partial failure and partial fulfilment. When Timothy Clark says of Collins's photo that "The Earth is both an object *in* the picture, but also the frame and the ground of picturability" (2023: 34, emphasis in original), he is describing the situation in which Harvey's fictional characters find themselves: trying to make sense of the Earth and comprehend it as a whole without being able to escape the 'terrestriality' of their human perspective, cognitive faculties and language. Clark's concept of terrestriality —"the elusiveness, intellectual difficulty and counter-intuitive nature of day-to-day life when trying to think the Anthropocene" (2023: 39)— could be paired with Chakrabarty's principle of the 'global' but does not refer to it, although, in my opinion, it participates in its construction. In the novel, there are many examples showing how perspective is flawed and how representations of reality fail to capture a single meaning to be pinned down, being forcefully opened and ripped apart to encompass a series of possibilities, perspectives and, most of all, absences. As a matter of fact, every description seems to have the ultimate goal of foregrounding what is not there. Harvey could have chosen a painting to illustrate the partiality of representation with ekphrastic tones, as well as to show that the theme of multifocal perspective has a continuity that can be traced in more contemporary guises, such as Collins's photo, which eludes us precisely because they are more contemporary. In other words, it could also testify to the flaws of a human perspective that succeeds in apprehending just what is past and historical, while failing to draw the same meaning from the present.

Employing a multi-faceted painting as a frame of reference for the novel reveals that the "literary uncertainty" (Serpell 2008: 223) stemming from various perspectives is as important as narrative uncertainty, which seems to be Harvey's way of accommodating the planetary/global conflict within the limited space of a novel — which, due to its brevity, should rather be defined as a novella. At the end of the story, Pietro comes across Shaun's postcard of Velazquez's painting and glibly provides his point of view in a statement that feels like a revelation in its epiphanic brevity and low-key spontaneity: "It's the dog. […] To answer your wife's question, the subject of the painting is the dog" (Harvey 2024a: 104). The Anthropos-centred perspective of the postcard is turned on its head in a rhetorical torsion that is also narrative, in that the multiple perspectives in the work are presented at the very beginning of the novel, only to be annihilated by an additional point of view towards the end of the story. Thus, the novel itself breaks

137

down and erases its literary and narrative premises in a gesture that is metafictional as well as profoundly ecocritical.

Such torsion occurs throughout the novel and often on the cue of visual elements, such as the photograph of Chien's mother. Albeit apparently centred on a woman looking at the sky, the photo reveals more possibilities of meaning the more Chien mulls over it and zooms in on its details. Depicting simply her mother looking at the sky as a seagull passes by, the photo carries on its side the caption "Moon Landing Day, 1969". As Chien muses, her mother's expression could be conveying various messages to her, such as warning her daughter against the downsides of 'progress' or the risks of competing with men in a man-centred world. By her own admission, however, of all these possible meanings, Chien chooses "the most ill-formed, the least-credible, and she took it even though it might not have been what her mother meant" (Harvey 2024a: 61), namely: "look at those men landing on the moon, look at what's possible given desire and belief and opportunity, and you have all of those if you want them, if they can do it you can do it, and by *it* I mean anything. Anything" (Harvey 2024a: 61, emphasis in original). Exactly as happens with Velazquez's painting, even though the listing of burgeoning possibilities does nothing but underline the lack of a definite answer and the volatility of arbitrarily imparted meanings, even when the necessity of going through those semantic possibilities is stressed.

2.2. Addressing the Human Dimensions: Waterscapes, Gestation and the Typhoon

After showing Harvey's awareness of the chasm between the planetary and the global, and the way in which she uses *Las Meninas* as a narrative framework to underline the partiality of human perspective, it remains to be asked what other narrative and literary strategies the novel puts forward to adapt perspective to Anthropocene scenarios and climate-change scales. One such solution is the thematic conflation of gestation and space, bringing together microcosm and macrocosm, the act of being born into the world and an extra-terrestrial sphere that opens many more possible worlds. This connection has also been discussed by philosopher Simone Regazzoni in relation to a scene in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where a cosmic foetus in an amniotic sac faces the surface of the Earth, in an evocative mirroring gesture heightened by the water in the sac and the ocean-shrouded surface of the globe. Numerous elements scattered throughout the plot elicit this association, such as the fact that the astronauts' missions on the ISS last around 9 months, or that the planet Earth is called 'Mother' right before introducing the news of Chien's own mother's death. However, even more noteworthy is Roman's comment that the sensation of *déjà-vu* experienced by

138

the astronauts during spacewalks "was caused by untapped memories of being in the womb" (Harvey 2024a: 71). Incidentally, this furthers a connection already featured in Harvey's *The Western Wind* (2018), where the "great orb" of the belly of a pregnant woman was compared to "one of those planets up above rolling heavily past" (Harvey 2019: 25).

Akin to the gestation metaphor is the theme of water and waterscapes, introduced by Pietro and Nell's exchange about their scuba-diving experiences and Pietro's friendship with a fisherman: "An astronaut and a fisherman. What a collision of worlds" (Harvey 2024a: 38). A clash is indeed perceptible between outer space and oceans, with Pietro and Nell's enthusiastic comments on the "colour, the creatures, the coral, the sounds" (Harvey 2024a: 57) resembling oceanographer Sylvia Earle's when she stresses the differences between the two dimensions:

> In space, astronauts are alone, aside from human companions who might have come along, and flora and fauna deliberately or inadvertently associated with the spacecraft. In the sea, there is no such thing as 'alone'. Walking along the sea-floor, the abundance and diversity of life is dazzling. Red swimming crabs, small fish illuminated by rows of glowing lights, rays longer than I, hovering like giant butterflies; tall spirals of bamboo coral that shimmer with blue, luminescent fire when I brush against them… (1986: 71)

Thus, it is surprising that Harvey depicts astronauts as "sailors on a ship on a deep, dark unswimmable sea" (Harvey 2024a: 9). Yet the aforementioned association between motherhood and space might bridge the space-sea gap through the fluidity of the amniotic sac and its fluid potential for life. As Regazzoni points out, in ancient Greek the word *kuma* has the double meaning of "wave" and "foetus", and is linked to the verb *kuein*, which means "to be pregnant" (2022: 174). Involving gestation, space and water, the transformation which the six astronauts undergo in space is a slow process of attuning bodies to an alien environment which makes their legs shrink, affects their hearts and impairs their cells. This transformation is similar to that discussed by Morin, who stresses how metamorphosis is common in the animal world but affects human beings, too, since they are aquatic creatures in the motherly womb and become terrestrial when they are born (Morin 2016).

The pressing issue of the climate crisis, which one would expect to play a prominent role in a novel set in space and concerned with the astronauts' view of their home planet from the outside, surfaces from casual remarks made by the characters, usually in relation to their memories. Thus, global warming is evoked by the observation that cicadas do not know when it is time for them to die because of the unseasonally warm weather (Harvey 2024a: 22); rising sea-levels are represented by the ocean getting nearer to Chien's mother's garden (23); weather disruption

139

is epitomised by Pietro's remark that there is still no rain in Italy even though it is early October (36); and the spectre of fires materialises in the blazing Amazon rainforest (55). Yet all these environmental issues are cast aside by —or possibly culminate in— a massive typhoon that ravages the Philippines and not only plays a role in the story, but it also seems to be a narrative strategy to bridge the distance between Chronos and Kairos.

Many ecocritical reflections have been spurred by the partiality of perspective in the Anthropocene — that of humans and, therefore, also of literature. Oftentimes, a way of carrying out ecocritical enquiries has been to choose a single moment as an epitome to draw inferences from, in a condensing gesture. For instance, Dobrin suggested identifying the objectiveness of the ocean by "theoretically freezing the moment of perception and analysis in a snapshot glimpse in time and scale" (2021: 148); whereas Cooppan chose to read the fluidity and circulatory nature of the Indian Ocean through a case study which can turn into "an anchor, a point where various methodological currents can be momentarily stilled into one line of inquiry" (2022: 172). On similar grounds, Timothy Clark has rejected the emphasis on ecocriticism's early focus on the local, which "may in fact be only a freeze-frame version of a dynamic, long-term process" (2019: 39). The same 'freezing gesture' is attempted in *Orbital* through its brevity, its few characters and the focus on their thoughts and memories. Thus, the novel eschews an exclusive focus on the dimension of the local through the intersection of planetary scales and temporalities with human measurements. It thus effects a combination of micro- and macro-perspectives that coalesce around frozen moments, thereby bringing about a similar narrative effect to that discussed by Timothy Morton with respect to a passage by Homer: "In the *Iliad* the final battle freezes for many lines while the narrator admires depictions of non-martial life on Achilles' shield. It gets us stoned (petrified), transporting us out of a narrative to linger on a frozen image, like 'Bullet Time' in *The Matrix*" (2011: 170).

Indeed, such frozen temporality opening onto scalar levels but producing extremely situated effects is embodied by the typhoon that ravages the Philippines and which the astronauts are told to capture in photographs from their unique location on the ISS. Nonetheless, pinning down the condensed elementality of the typhoon proves to be an evanescent and ultimately unfeasible action: "their long lenses against the glass, shutters stuttering, seeing only the eastern arm of the storm so far, off to starboard where it wraps itself against the earth's horizon in flocks of spun grey" (Harvey 2024a: 23). Just one part of it at a time can be captured, in an apparently objective depiction that is never comprehensive. As J.M. Coetzee muses in *Age of Iron*, pictures are not about what they show: "No longer does the picture show who were in the garden frame that day, but who were not there" (2018: 111).

However, the essentialising drive of Harvey's novel turns narrative elements not into symbols, but rather situating samples for wider reflections, in a way that lends support to the comparison between her and Virginia Woolf (Wood 2015), whose *Mrs Dalloway* she read twice (Harvey 2024b). While the characters are proxies for humankind and the planet epitomises home, the typhoon that strikes the Philippines becomes the narrative catalyst of climate change, literally the umbilical cord that unites the astronauts and the Earth, the global and the planetary, the terrestrial and the 'improbable' as intended by Amitav Ghosh. As the storm develops and picks up strength, the descriptions of the typhoon vary, and one of the most interesting compares the natural disaster to an expression on the planet's face: "It doesn't look from here anything like anger. More like defiance, strength, vivacity, the bulge-eyed tongue-out warrior face worn in the *haka*" (Harvey 2024a: 56, emphasis in original). Therefore, the typhoon might also become an "expression" of the planet's "narrative agency" — involving vitality and creativity as discussed by Oppermann (2014: 30). In the face of the typhoon and the planetary forces expressed by it, the frailty of the human body in space is portrayed through the evocation of the long-standing simile/metaphor of the leaf (Harvey 2024a: 21), which counts among its oldest proponents Homer in the *Iliad* —"The generation of men is just like that of leaves" (Homer 1987: 96)— and, in the youth-related image of the "leaves which the flowery season of spring brings forth", Mimnermus (1999: 83).

2.3. The Different Temporalities of the Globe and the Planet

The typhoon lays bare the clash between the global and the planetary as outlined by Chakrabarty, in a way that is redolent of W.J.T. Mitchell's analysis of the different words used to refer to the world. The first two words the scholar examines are precisely 'globe' and 'planet'. One of the meanings of globe, argues Mitchell, indicates a geometric and measurable construction in terms of physical space or quantities that can be mapped or calculated, including geographical regions, topographies and routes (2015: 95). Thus, the globe is a 'construction' designed for calculations, measurements and borders. On the other hand, the term 'planet' comes from the ancient Greek term used to indicate wandering stars and planets as opposed to fixed stars (97). According to Mitchell, when the globe is observed within the wider frame of reference of astronomy, it becomes "the wanderer through space" and "'a grain of sand' or a fragile island in the Sea of Time and Space" (97), radically re-framed. In *Orbital*, Mitchell's distinction between globe and planet, as well as Chakrabarty's theory of the global and the planetary, become invested with relevant ecocritical potential in passages where human and Earth times are disentangled. For instance, Harvey highlights the inevitable disconnection between the rhythm of the seasons and the passing of time on the

ISS: "now it's spring and in half an hour it's autumn and your body clock's blitzed and your senses have slowed" (Harvey 2024a: 66).

Yet the culmination is reached in the chapter "Orbit 13", when the whole history of the Earth is related from the Big Bang to the present day in a single cosmic year, in whose timeline the emergence of humankind happens just half a day before midnight on 31 December. Interestingly, while the deep history of the planet is narrated according to a precise chronological order that sees bacterial life coming before the atmosphere and the dinosaurs, the closing second of the cosmic year becomes chaotic, and any order of succession is inverted in a dizzying, jumbled-up list — the ultimate "Latour litany": "Kosovo, teabags, W.B. Yeats, dark matter, jeans, the stock exchange, the Arab Spring, Virginia Woolf, Alberto Giacometti, Usain Bolt, Johnny Cash" (Harvey 2024a: 113). While it is true that the description of the closing second lasts a good third of the description of the whole cosmic year, the lack of chronological order could underline its ultimate insignificance, in that mankind can lay claim to only the tiniest fragment of deep history. Hence, the difference between Chronos, "the extensive time of mere succession" (Szerszynski 2015: 178), and Kairos, "the intensive time of singularities and qualities" (Szerszynski 2015: 178).

It is exactly this chasm that causes the idea of home to cave in under its sheer size and temporal coordinates, to the point that it "has imploded — grown so big, so distended and full, that it's caved in on itself" (Harvey 2024a: 12). The use of a typhoon as a material bond between space and Earth, the astronauts and the other humans, as the link between local and global, small and big, allows the novel to force the narrative structure to accommodate temporalities and scales that do not belong to humans, and to encompass both the planetary and the terrestriality of the global. Therefore, the extraordinariness and narrative meaning of the Category Five typhoon in Harvey's novel is reminiscent of the tornado "twisting like a whiplash" (Ghosh 2020: 272) that approaches some characters in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*, an experience based on Ghosh's close call with a tornado in Delhi, which passed right over him: "What would I make of such a scene were I to come across it in a novel written by someone else? […] Surely only a writer whose imaginative resources were utterly depleted would fall back on a situation of such extreme improbability?" (Ghosh 2017: 16).

In the Anthropocene —an era which "will be defined precisely by events that appear, by our current standards of normalcy, highly improbable" (Ghosh 2017: 24)— Ghosh's reflections on the limits of the realist novel and the necessity to adapt the novel form to embrace the improbable and the eclectic are echoed by Harvey's musings on the "elastic form of the novel" (Harvey 2023). Elastic, indeed, is the ending of the novel, which juxtaposes a scene taking place on the

142

Earth, in the extremely situated context of the Philippines —where a group of people have sought shelter from the typhoon in a church and are hoping that its walls will withstand the pressure of the floods— and another set in outer space, which vibrates with music and light thrown forth not just by planet Earth, but by a myriad of planets and stars: "Its light is an ensemble of a trillion things which rally and unify for a few short moments before falling back into the rin-tin-tin and jumbled tumbling of static galactic woodwind rainforest trance of a wild and lilting world" (Harvey 2024a: 136). It is in this ending that Mitchell's globe begins to wander in space as a single dot and morphs into a planet.

3. Conclusion: The Planet and the Novel

Samantha Harvey specified that, although the astronauts are the heartbeat of the novel, they are not the lens of the novel, but just part of the whole image (Harvey 2023). As a matter of fact, far from being an objective filter, the human perspective and sensorium appear variable, giving back a different image of the earth and the surrounding environment depending on their positioning and level of attention. While reflecting on the different conceptions of the planet that Nell and Shaun have —nature-created vs artist-created, where the artist is God— Nell recalls a stroll in a wood she had taken as a child with her father: "there was a full-size tree that they almost walked straight past until they realised it was man-made, it was a sculpture made from tens of thousands of sticks glued together, woven to form the appearance of knots and bark and boles and branches" (Harvey 2024a: 45). In this passage, as in the scene of Trimalchio's illusion-riddled feast in Petronius's *Satyricon*, nature is broken down to its components and then reassembled to look like its original shape, in a knowledge heightened by the disassembling and the re-assembling process:

> We seized our spoons […] and cracked the eggs which were made of creamy grain. I was almost about to throw away my portion, thinking a peachick had already formed, when I heard a veteran diner say: 'This is bound to hold something good', and poking my finger through the grain I found a most juicy ortolan rolled up in spiced egg-yolk. (Petronius 2018: 31)

It thus happens that this reassembled natural materiality becomes a long-standing simulacrum of nature that tricks Nell's senses as it did Trimalchio's guests, who sink their teeth into a confection that only imitates peahens' eggs and rather combines spiced yolk, creamy grain and ortolan birds to underline the fineness of Trimalchio's taste and his wealth. Yet the opposite situating process also gains meaning in the Anthropocene, namely when agency-filled nonhuman subjects are overlooked and then noticed with a start the moment they manifest their vitality.

143

This reversed perspective is evoked at the beginning of a short essay by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen with words that bring to mind Amitav Ghosh's in the very first chapter of *The Great Derangement*, thereby showing that the surprising quality of vitality is a common theme among ecocritical scholars and writers:

> A rock jumps. Every hiker has had the experience. The quiet woods or sweep of desert is empty and still when a snake that seemed a twig writhes, a skink that was bark scurries, leaves wriggle with insectile activity. This world coming to animal life reveals the elemental vibrancy already within green pine, arid sand, vagrant mist, and plodding hiker alike. (Cohen 2014: ix)

Mistaking reassembled natural elements for nature and mistaking matter's vitality for inertness are two perceptual mistakes that alert us to the fallibility of human perspective when it comes to understanding the world, even when that perspective is the only one accessible to humans. Both processes are at work in the novel, when object Earth is broken down into a myriad of different meanings for the astronauts and releases a multitude of memories. Hence, it becomes difficult to reassemble a neat image of the planet and what it becomes for humans in the Anthropocene. At the same time, the notion of an inert planet lacking agency is undermined by the vitality of the globe, which also finds expression through the typhoon.

144

After breaking down the narrative elements and literary topics in *Orbital* and attempting to reassemble them in a cohesive single structure, one notices that figuring out what the novel ultimately represents is elusive. Harvey's text presents a multiplicity of perspectives and none in particular, thereby effecting at the metanarrative level the same de-centring process of Velazquez's painting, Collins's photo and the photo of Chien's mother. Even pinning down the representation of the six astronauts proves harder than expected. Indeed, they are simultaneously conduits for the whole of humanity, for different peoples, for varied human and historical backgrounds; they are portrayed as a single body, as a family and even as a single collective being (Harris 2023) — all of which does nothing but further the novel's wider reflection on scale. As for the planet, the Earth is alternatively described as a colourful ensemble of lights and a seamless space divided by man-made borders; its desertedness hinting at its prehistorical appearance is soon discarded by the acknowledgement that politics is shaping its surface. The planet seems uninhabited by day and, at night, thriving with life suggested by artificial lighting: among it, the "lights of fishing boats off the coast of Malaysia" (Harvey 2024a: 40) that mirror the lighting from illegal fishing in the Bay of Bengal whose glow can be seen from outer space (Ghosh and Lobo 2017). The novel is about numerous topics —the ambivalence of human progress, the moon landing, the passing of time, the transience of life, the bodily metamorphosis induced by space— and about none in particular, as exemplified

not only by the trope of the dizzying *mise en abyme* in Velazquez's painting, but by the ending, which displays, in scalar fashion, a group of people in the typhoon-struck Philippines, the astronauts on the ISS and a cosmic harmony. Thus, three perspectives —the global, the human-centred and the planetary— are evoked in quick succession and reconciled only in the awareness of their irreconcilability.

Harvey has described her novel as "nature writing about the beauty of space" (Harvey 2023), which duly positions it within the latest ecocritical production. Picking up Amitav Ghosh's challenge to accommodate climate change and the Anthropocene in the narrative form of the novel, *Orbital* belongs to a series of recent ecocritical attempts at reconciling deep time and human time, alongside Ghosh's own *Gun Island* (2019) and Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing* (2018). When aligned with material ecocriticism, the novel and its narrative strategies bring new life to narratological debates and questions of literary framing of climate change — a path already laid in the 1990s (Clark 2023: 190-191). This debate has been recently rejuvenated by Timothy Morton's observation of the affinity between the relationality intrinsic to poetry and the relationships between things as and in figurative language that ecocriticism explores (2014: 269), and Hubert Zapf's discussion on the device of the metaphor as a link between biosemiotics, biology and literature (2014: 53). As I have tried to demonstrate, the novel responds to the challenge of adapting narratives to the varying scales of the Anthropocene through devices including a fluid ekphrastic framework that destabilises the unambiguity of human perspective, a connection between gestation and space and the employment of a typhoon observed from space as a bond between the situated experience of humans on Earth, the astronauts on the ISS and climate change. Addressing Chakrabarty's distinction between global and planetary, the novel could be seen as an example of a planetary turn in ecocriticism, which, paired with material ecocriticism, would represent another stage of its decentralising movement from the anthropoi to the nonhuman, from land-locked perspectives to ocean-centred analyses, from sentient life to the value of storied matter.

145

Notes

1. Here, the 'green turn' refers to the increasing development of reflections on ecocritical themes in the humanities and other disciplines; similarly, the 'blue turn' can be construed as the recent developments of blue ecocriticism, a branch concerned with bodies of fresh and saltwater, and their effects on literature and the humanities.

Works Cited

Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke U.P.

Bonneuil, Christophe. 2015. "The Geological Turn: Narratives of the Anthropocene". In Hamilton, Clive, Christophe Bonneuil and François Gemenne (eds.): 17-31.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2015. "The Anthropocene and the Convergence of Histories". In Hamilton, Clive, Christophe Bonneuil and François Gemenne (eds.): 44-56.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2021. *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. The University of Chicago Press.

Clark, Timothy. 2008. "Towards a Deconstructive Environmental Criticism". *Oxford Literary Review* 30 (1): 45-68. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44030769>.

Clark, Timothy. 2019. *The Value of Ecocriticism*. Cambridge U.P.

Clark, Timothy. 2023. *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Coetzee, J.M. 2018. *Age of Iron*. Penguin.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. 2014. "Foreword: *Storied Matter*". In Iovino, Serenella and Serpil Oppermann (eds.) *Material Ecocriticism*. Indiana U.P.: ix-xii.

Cooppan, Vilashini. 2022. "Object Orientations and Circulatory Form in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*". *Comparative Literature* 74 (2): 171-185. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00104124-9594813>.

Dobrin, Sidney I. 2021. *Blue Ecocriticism and the Oceanic Imperative*. Routledge.

Earle, Sylvia A. 1986. "Sea and Space: Frontiers for Exploration - An Introduction". *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 76 (1): 68-72. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24536631>.

Ferris, Joshua. 2023. "It's Harder to See the World's Problems From 250 Miles Up". *The New York Times* (December 5). <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/05/books/review/orbital-samantha-harvey.html>. Accessed October 24, 2024.

Foucault, Michel. 2007. *The Order of Things*. Routledge.

Ghosh, Amitav. 2017. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago U.P.

Ghosh, Amitav. 2020. *Gun Island*. John Murray.

Ghosh, Amitav and Aaron Savio Lobo. 2017. "Bay of Bengal: Depleted Fish Stocks and Huge Dead Zone Signal Tipping Point". *The Guardian* (January 31). <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jan/31/bay-bengal-depleted-fish-stocks-pollution-climate-change-migration>. Accessed October 24, 2024.

Gurnah, Abdulrazak. (1990) 2021. *Dottie*. Bloomsbury.

Gurnah, Abdulrazak. 2011a. "The Urge to Nowhere: Wicomb and Cosmopolitanism". *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 12 (3-4): 261-275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2011.586828>.

Gurnah, Abdulrazak. 2011b. "Mid Morning Moon". *Wasafiri* 26 (2): 25-29.

Hamilton, Clive, Christophe Bonneuil and François Gemenne. (eds.) 2015. *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch*. Routledge.

Harris, Alexandra. 2023. "Orbital by Samantha Harvey Review - The Astronaut's View". *The Guardian* (November 16). <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/nov/16/orbital-by-samantha-harvey-review-the-astronauts-view>. Accessed October 24, 2024.

Harvey, Samantha. 2019. *The Western Wind*. Vintage.

Harvey, Samantha. 2023. "Samantha Harvey: 'I Like Alien as Much as Anybody Else. But I See this Novel as Space Pastoral'". Interview by Anthony Cummins. *The Guardian* (October 28). <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/oct/28/samantha-harvey-orbital-i-like-alien-as-much-as-anybody-else-but-i-see-this-novel-as-space-pastoral>. Accessed October 24, 2024.

Harvey, Samantha. 2024a. *Orbital*. Vintage.

Harvey, Samantha. 2024b. "Samantha Harvey Interview: 'I Wanted to Write a Space Pastoral'". *The Booker Prizes* (August 15). <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/features/samantha-harvey-interview-orbital>. Accessed October 24, 2024.

Hofmeyr, Isabel. 2010. "Universalizing the Indian Ocean". *PMLA* 125 (3): 721-729. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25704470>.

Homer. 1987. *The Iliad*. Trans. M. Hammond. Penguin Books.

Iovino, Serenella. 2012. "Stories from the Thick of Things: Introducing Material Ecocriticism". *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 19 (3): 449-460. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44087130>.

Iovino, Serenella and Serpil Oppermann. 2014a. "Introduction: *Stories Come to Matter*". In Iovino, Serenella and Serpil Oppermann (eds.): 1-17.

Iovino, Serenella and Serpil Oppermann. (eds.) 2014b. *Material Ecocriticism*. Indiana U.P.

Mimnermus. 1999. "Fragments". In Gerber, Douglas E. (ed. and transl.) *Greek Elegiac Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC*. Harvard U.P.: 83.

Mitchell, W.J.T. 2015. *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture and Media Aesthetics*. The University of Chicago Press.

Morin, Edgar. 2016. "'Metamorfosi' - Intervista a Edgar Morin". Fondazione MessinA. *YouTube* (October 3). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSalvi22BE4&t=732s>. Accessed October 24, 2024.

Morton, Timothy. 2011. "Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology". *Qui Parle* 19 (2): 163-190. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/431001>.

Morton, Timothy. 2014. "The Liminal Space between Things: *Epiphany and the Physical*". In Iovino, Serenella and Serpil Oppermann (eds.): 269-279.

Newns, Lucinda. 2020. *Domestic Intersections in Contemporary Migration Fiction: Homing the Metropole*. Routledge.

Northcott, Michael. 2015. "Eschatology in the Anthropocene: From the *Chronos* of Deep Time to the *Kairos* of the Age of Humans". In Hamilton, Clive, Christophe Bonneuil and François Gemenne (eds.): 100-111.

Oppermann, Serpil. 2014. "From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism: *Creative Materiality and Narrative Agency*". In Iovino, Serenella and Serpil Oppermann (eds.): 21-36.

147

Oruc, Firat. 2022. "Thalassological Worldmaking and Literary Circularities in the Indian Ocean". *Comparative Literature* 74 (2): 147-155. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00104124-9594787>.

Petronius. 2018. *The Satyricon*. Trans. A.S. Kline. Poetry in Translation.

Plumwood, Val. 2006. "The Concept of a Cultural Landscape: Nature, Culture and Agency in the Land". *Ethics and the Environment* 11 (2): 115-150. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40339126>.

Popkin, Gabriel. 2017. "Cure Yourself of Tree Blindness". *The New York Times* (August 26). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/26/opinion/sunday/cure-yourself-of-tree-blindness.html>. Accessed October 24, 2024.

Regazzoni, Simone. 2022. *Oceano: Filosofia del pianeta*. Ponte alle Grazie.

Serpell, Namwali C. 2008. "Mutual Exclusion, Oscillation, and Ethical Projection in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *The Turn of the Screw*". *Narrative* 16 (3): 223-255. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30219606>.

Szerszynski, Bronislaw. 2015. "Commission on Planetary Ages Decision CC87966424/49: The Onomatophore of the Anthropocene". In Hamilton, Clive, Christophe Bonneuil and François Gemenne (eds.): 177-183.

Trexler, Adam. 2015. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. University of Virginia Press.

Wood, Gaby. 2015. "Why Great Novels Don't Get Noticed Now". *The Telegraph* (March 14). <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/11470185/Why-great-novels-dont-get-noticed-now.html>. Accessed October 24, 2024.

Zapf, Huber. 2014. "Creative Matter and Creative Mind: *Cultural Ecology and Literary Creativity*". In Iovino, Serenella and Serpil Oppermann (eds.): 51-66.

148

'SAIDS' AND 'NOT-SAIDS' IN IFEMELU'S BLOGGING: A HOOKSIAN-MACHEREYIAN APPROACH TO CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH*

«LO QUE SE DICE» Y «LO QUE NO SE DICE» EN EL BLOG DE IFEMELU: UN ENFOQUE HOOKSIANO-MACHEREYIANO DE *AMERICANAH,* DE CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE

<https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202511061>

MARYAMOSSADAT MOUSAVI
University of Isfahan, Iran
maryammousavi62@fgn.ui.ac.ir
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1556-9681>

PYEAAM ABBASI
University of Isfahan, Iran
abbasi@fgn.ui.ac.ir
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4264-5873>

HOSSEIN PIRNAJMUDDIN
University of Isfahan, Iran
pirnajmuddin@fgn.ui.ac.ir
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8349-2626>

Abstract

This article focuses on Ifemelu's blog posts in Chimamanda Adichie's third novel, *Americanah* (2013), as seen through bell hooks's (1989) concept of 'talking back' in conjunction with Pierre Macherey's (1966) notion of 'disparate text' or 'symptomatic' reading to shed some light on the construction of the racialised condition of Black female immigrant subjectivity in America. It is argued that Ifemelu's writing blog posts as a way of talking back to white supremacy leads to the (re)definition of Black female consciousness and autonomy. Drawing on the notion of the 'not-said' explicated by Macherey, the article then addresses the articulate silences in blog posts, trying to make the lacunae of the narrative speak, to picture a reverse racial narrative, and to reveal ideological gaps between racial minorities. Through a symptomatic reading, this article attempts to explain how the aesthetic silences, absences and the not-said in Ifemelu's blog posts reflect the conflict between hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses in the context of

the struggle for social justice and racial equality in the United States. The study concludes that Ifemelu's blog posts present a revealing picture of the Black female experience in America and illustrate the workings of racial injustice with their saids and not-saids.

Keywords: Chimamanda Adichie, *Americanah*, bell hooks, talking back, Pierre Macherey, symptomatic reading.

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en las entradas del blog de Ifemelu en la tercera novela de Chimamanda Adichie, *Americanah* (2013), a la luz del concepto de 'respuesta' de bell hooks (1989), junto con la noción de 'texto dispar' o lectura 'sintomática' de Pierre Macherey (1966), para arrojar algo de luz sobre la construcción de la condición racializada de la subjetividad de las mujeres negras inmigrantes en Estados Unidos. Se argumenta que las entradas del blog de Ifemelu, como forma de responder a la supremacía blanca, conducen a la (re)definición de la conciencia y la autonomía de las mujeres negras. Basándose en la noción de 'lo no dicho' de Macherey, el artículo aborda los silencios articulados en las entradas del blog, tratando de hacer hablar a las lagunas de la narrativa, de imaginar una narrativa racial inversa y de revelar las brechas ideológicas entre las minorías raciales. A través de una lectura sintomática, este artículo intenta explicar cómo los silencios estéticos, las ausencias y lo no dicho en las entradas del blog de Ifemelu reflejan el conflicto entre los discursos hegemónicos y contra-hegemónicos en el contexto de la lucha por la justicia social y la igualdad racial en Estados Unidos. El estudio concluye que las entradas del blog de Ifemelu presentan una imagen reveladora de la experiencia de las mujeres negras en Estados Unidos e ilustran el funcionamiento de la injusticia racial a través de lo que dicen y lo que no dicen.

Palabras clave: Chimamanda Adichie, *Americanah*, bell hooks, responder, Pierre Macherey, lectura sintomática.

1. Introduction

The current study attempts to critically unmask Ifemelu's textual speeches and silences in her blog posts in Chimamanda Adichie's third novel, *Americanah* (2013). It aims to demonstrate how the novel's protagonist is ideologically motivated to articulate Black indignation over racial prejudice and cultural stereotyping in America. It draws on bell hooks's (1989) postcolonial theory of 'talking back' and the 1966 post-structuralist Marxist theory of decentered, 'disparate' or uneven

text to demonstrate how Ifemelu limns the contours of white racism and how it could be contested. Likewise, we examine how Ifemelu utilises blogging as a strategy for survival and as a means of challenging the one-dimensional and stereotypical image of African immigrants in racialised America in particular. The study contends that, through blogging, understood as an act of outright rebellion against the white power structure, Ifemelu can offer a viable alternative to challenge dominant Western ideologies and epistemologies concerning race and gender and create space for imagining new trajectories of racial justice. The way her blogging channels female Black voice and, by implication, the failure of Western ideology will be explored under hooks's postcolonial theory of talking back and Macherey's notion of disparate text.

This article also aims to reveal the symbolic meanings embedded in the more implicit, unspoken parts of Ifemelu's blog posts. Silences and absences are frequent in literary works. Decoding them in various modes gives rise to a variety of fresh interpretations. However, they do not easily yield to analytical frameworks due to their free-floating and implicit nature. This study delves into the silences of Adichie's novel through the perspective of Macherey's theory of disparate text to present the concealed realities of Ifemelu's blog posts. What is silenced can be as meaningful as what is voiced. The not-said alludes to the sociopolitical and racial tensions of Black female immigrants in the United States, which Ifemelu attempts to articulate in a disguised form in her blog posts. In putting words to these tensions, she brings to light an unconscious discourse, and a clear picture of racialised America can be attained by revealing its concealed ideological agenda. In her attempt to depict the dominant racial ideologies, Ifemelu in her blog posts constructs a suggestive vision entailing an aesthetic blend of conscious and unconscious discourses behind the ideological struggle. Along with disclosing the unjust social problems facing Black immigrants, Ifemelu tends to elucidate in her blog posts how racial inequities and inequalities in America give birth to the appearance of the not-said, which, in turn, reveals her aspiration for racial justice. The present study aims to delve deeply into the unspoken, muted or hidden layers of the text to bring to light the power of the political unconscious and how the critique of ideological stances and manipulative maneuvers is embodied in terms of latent materials and not-saids.

Americanah deals with the immigrant experience in America and Great Britain through the Nigerian perspective. The story follows Ifemelu and Obinze, secondary school sweethearts, in Lagos, who go off to university together in Nsukka but then decide to leave Nigeria after a series of university strikes threaten their education. Ifemelu migrates to America to study in Philadelphia on a university scholarship, where her observations about race, gender and class as a non-American Black

151

woman become perfect materials for her anonymous blog. Ifemelu struggles in America, experiencing a number of unsatisfying relationships and jobs, but she then gains financial stability, and eventually develops a positive self-image that enables her to reject her own habits of pretense and even stop faking an acquired American accent and straightening her hair with relaxers. On the other hand, Obinze, being denied a visa to the US following the World Trade Center terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, travels on his mother's visa as her research assistant to Great Britain, where he resides as an undocumented immigrant after his permit expires. Having overstayed his visa in London, Obinze gets a job on the National Insurance card of Vincent Obi, a Nigerian immigrant, in exchange for thirty-five percent of his earnings. Obinze is arrested on the day of his sham marriage that he hoped would grant him citizenship and is then deported to Nigeria. After a thirteen-year residence in America, Ifemelu decides to close her blog and return to Lagos. She initially finds a job as a features editor in *Zoe* magazine and then returns to blogging. Ifemelu eventually reunites with her first love, Obinze, now a successful 'big man', who has accumulated a vast amount of wealth, living with his wife, Kosi, and their two-year-old daughter, Buchi, in a large house in the residential area of Lekki, the home of the wealthy in Lagos.

152

As will be further discussed, the blog posts are a narration of growth in the face of violent, racist institutions and systems of thought and are stimulated by Ifemelu's self-acceptance process amid racial oppression and discrimination. The blog offers a dynamic and vital space for Ifemelu to mature and find her voice against racist silencing of Black female voices which has inflicted restrictions and confinements on female being and expression. In Adichie's third novel, racial violent ideologies act as the means of repression for the protagonist; hence, the expansion of critical horizons and development of independence of action, thought and expression in an assertive manner demands an investigation of the sway of Western values on her life as a Black immigrant and her aim to eliminate those values. With a pervasive tone of humor in her blog posts, the female protagonist attempts to challenge a victimising view of those who experience racial discrimination, while strengthening intimacy and building trust within American and non-American Blacks in America.

Based on the French post-structuralist Marxist literary scholar Pierre Macherey's critical discussions of 'symptomatic' reading, the present study concentrates on the significance of the unsaid in Ifemelu's blog posts in pursuit of a new humanity and a new world order. The concept of symptomatic reading, as Geoffrey Wall (translator of Macherey's 1978 *A Theory of Literary Production*) states, enables one "to identify those gaps and silences, contradictions and absences, which deform the text and reveal the repressed presence of those ideological materials which are transformed in the labour of literary production" (1978: viii). Macherey's

approach, in fact, oscillates between the different polarizations of 'telling' (*diegesis*) and 'showing' (*mimesis*). There is in Althusser's 1971 jargon an 'internal distanciation', between what a text aims to articulate and what a text actually articulates. To shed light on the meaning of a text, it is essential to transcend it and comprehend the meaning of its "unconscious", namely in Macherey's expression, "what the work is *compelled* to say in order to say what it *wants* to say" (1978: 94, emphasis in original). The association of a text with the historical and ideological terms of its production is disclosed in its unconscious. The meanings of Ifemelu's blog posts are not only articulated in the conscious discourse but also silenced in the unconscious discourse, hence requiring a detailed investigation that accounts for the discrepancy between what is articulated and what is silenced.

2. The Covert and Overt Technologised Multiplicity of Voices in Ifemelu's Blogging

An integral component of Adichie's third novel is Ifemelu's anonymous blog, initially called "Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America", later altered to "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black". In her blog posts, the novel's protagonist freely lays out her views on race and racism. The blog is not only a channel that facilitates Ifemelu's communication of her experiences of institutional racism in the United States, but it also develops into a significant medium in constructing a protective online community whose audience exchange their observations in the comment sections. The blog is also influential in "deliberately defamiliarizing American habits of responding to race, describing each as strange and artificial" (Levine 2015: 594) and, thus, it is part of Ifemelu's ambition with her 'saids' and 'not-saids' to transform the stereotypical, pejorative narrative on African-American migration in America. The launching of a blog coincides with Ifemelu's breakup with her white boyfriend, Curt, signifying a heightened sense of racial consciousness and reflection. The blog can be regarded as a milestone in the protagonist's life, displaying how Ifemelu perceives herself and how she aspires to exhibit herself to the outside world. By launching her blog, Ifemelu overlooks the imperfections, the rage, the irritations that unjust or oppressive circumstances can produce and admits herself as a Black female person without idealising Blackness or demonising whiteness.

Having identified some of the repressive methods that have often existed to impose silence on racial matters in America, Ifemelu aims for a multiplicity of discourses on race, gender and class, whether explicit or implicit. This is compatible with Adichie's

153

aim as a writer, avoiding telling a single story in her novels. The novelist has claimed that the single story "creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (2009). Adichie's protagonist uses the potential of social media "to break with the stereotypes, simplistic definitions, and traditional roles created and imposed by Western culture, as well as enabling diasporic subjects to express their own experiences, perspectives on history, stories and voices that would otherwise remain unheard" (Duce 2021: 244). Through a multiplicity of authentic narratives in her blog posts, Ifemelu strives to reconstruct and rehabilitate Black community in America, deepen their sense of belonging, and propagate a common interest that knows no color, race, gender or socio-economic status.

In fact, Ifemelu develops modern versions of hooks's theory and Macherey's concept of the unsaid, uncannily using technologies as ways of speaking out and filtering what she talks about in the 21st century. Technologies are particularly useful for women to articulately or inarticulately verbalise their experiences, thoughts, actions and feelings and counteract gender discrimination. Technologies make it easy for Ifemelu to adopt a self-reflective stance, gain a better understanding of reality, and not to depend solely on her own knowledge. "Given that the capitalist apparatus of the Internet, while offering the illusion of connection, can simultaneously encourage us to become atomized nodes in a network", Camille Isaacs contends that concerning "the transmission of affect, formation of identity and building of community, technology both enables and restricts" (2016: 179). With her saids and not-saids via a technological means that makes anonymity possible, Ifemelu enables "fashioning blackness not in the singular or as a concrete, static state, but as a continuous, even expedient, process of re-invention" (Phiri 2017: 133). The protagonist can thus defy many of the stereotypical portrayals of the experiences of American and non-American Blacks in America through her blogging.

Ifemelu's understanding of the accepted Western norms of beauty and hairstyle is decisive for her resolution to launch a blog. When Curt considers the magazine *Essence* as "racially skewed" (Adichie 2013: 294), since only Black females are depicted, she takes him to a bookstore to observe all the beauty/fashion magazines. Ifemelu states: "So three black women in maybe two thousand pages of women's magazines, and all of them are biracial or racially ambiguous, so they could also be Indian or Puerto Rican or something. Not one of them is dark. Not one of them looks like me" (295). This way, the protagonist claims that, while these magazines seem to address "everyone" and introduce "universal" cosmetics, they are practically written for white women: "This tells you about different hair products for *everyone* — and 'everyone' means blonds, brunettes, and redheads. I am none of those. And this tells you about the best conditioners — for straight, wavy, and

154

curly. No kinky" (295, emphasis in original). Curt's failure to notice the true nature of the problem leads Ifemelu to write a long email to her friend Wambui, "about the bookstore, the magazines, the things she didn't tell Curt, things unsaid and unfinished. It was a long e-mail, digging, questioning, unearthing" (295). Despite Curt's reaction, Wambui, a Kenyan woman who also migrated to America for her studies, acknowledges the significance of the matter, encouraging Ifemelu to approach the issue with utmost seriousness and consideration: "This is so raw and true. More people should read this. You should start a blog" (295).

The blog brings about a sense of revival of Black traditions for Ifemelu and offers her an opportunity for reflection on racial issues and promises with its saids and not-saids to open up political possibilities to undermine racial prejudices and to foster more welcoming attitudes toward African immigrants. In Ifemelu's words: "Posting on the website was like giving testimony in church; the echoing roar of approval revived her" (Adichie 2013: 213). The blog's undertakings challenge Ifemelu's first "presumption of being able to give objective (true) and unprocessed (raw) accounts of what happens to her" (Guarracino 2014: 15). The blog posts reveal Ifemelu's critical consideration of race, gender and class in America and her own stance within these structures of discrimination and marginalization.

155

2.1. bell hooks's Notion of 'talking back' in Ifemelu's Blog Posts

As mentioned above, for Ifemelu, blog posts are the space where she talks to Black women and concurrently, like writing back to the empire, talks back to a hierarchical system that affirms and validates white superiority and dehumanises and negates Black existence in America. As a silenced subaltern, Ifemelu attempts to talk back to authority and recreate and reclaim her racial and cultural identity. For hooks, talking back means "speaking as an equal to an authority figure […] daring to disagree and sometimes […] having an opinion" (1989: 22). Talking back to white supremacy is a defiant assertion of agency and a significant act of resistance. It provides an opportunity to counter the discourses of power and to recreate oneself in a manner that is distinct from the self-image endorsed by the hegemonic ideology. For hooks, "[m]oving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible" (9). Breaking this silence is of paramount significance to empower those who experience racial discrimination and to push them from obscurity into visibility. Underscoring the importance of speaking truth to oppressive hierarchies as an assertion of identity, hooks argues, "[i]t is that act of speech, of 'talking back,' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject — the liberated voice" (9).

In talking back, Ifemelu can position herself as a liberated agent who is empowered and self-constituting, resisting gender, racial and class oppression. The protagonist conveys that, even though she was never taught absolute silence, she was taught that it was important "to speak but to talk a talk that was in itself a silence", in hooks's words (1989: 25). According to hooks, "true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless" (27). Talking back breaks oppressive hierarchies rather than sustaining those hierarchies. As hooks states, true speaking is "a courageous act — as such, it represents a threat. To those who wield oppressive power, that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced" (27). Fearing the silencing of her views, Ifemelu thus expresses some of her observations in an implicit, silent, ironic form, while her "talking back" acts against "unwittingly silent perpetuation of racist imagination" (Oniwe 2017: 91). Therefore, in Ifemelu's blog posts, "the 'Subalterns' are not only speaking; they are silencing certain prejudiced voices from the West. Ifemelu often speaks up to correct myopic views about Africa and Africans" (Opeyemi 2019: 24).

The blog is thus a political, psychological and ideological strategy for Ifemelu to write all of her saids and unsaids of her experiences in America. With all saids and not-saids at her disposal, Ifemelu "repeatedly disputes not only the descriptions of white friends and acquaintances who misperceive racism but also those Nigerian immigrants who stubbornly nurse misleading 'mythologies of home'" (Levine 2015: 593). The blog is a space in which her observations cannot be silenced any longer. In an unnamed blog post, Ifemelu clearly writes, "*When it comes to dressing well, American culture is so self-fulfilled that it has not only disregarded this courtesy of self-presentation, but has turned that disregard into a virtue*" (Adichie 2013: 129, emphasis in original). Ifemelu notes, "*We are too superior/busy/cool/ not-uptight to bother about how we look to other people, and so we can wear pajamas to school and underwear to the mall*" (129, emphasis in original). Here, Ifemelu plainly talks about "foreign pathology" (128), displaying one of the pitfalls of Western culture, not complying with the proper dress code.

In the post titled "Why Dark-Skinned Black Women —Both American and Non-American— Love Barack Obama", at the end of chapter 20, Ifemelu explicitly observes that "dark women love Barack Obama. He broke the mold! He married one of their own. He knows what the world doesn't seem to know: that dark black women totally rock" (Adichie 2013: 214). Ifemelu plainly demonstrates that dark women desire Obama to win the presidential election because perhaps eventually "somebody will cast a beautiful chocolate babe in a big-budget rom-com that opens in theaters all over the country, not just three artsy theaters in New

York City" (Adichie 2013: 214). This hopeful expectation is plainly indicated by Ifemelu to reveal that there is a remedy in the form of awareness-raising to select a promising political leader to heal pathologies of Black culture in the current US sociopolitical context, emerging from within the Black community itself.

In the post titled "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby", at the close of chapter 21, Ifemelu addresses non-American Blacks, "when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't 'black' in your country? You're in America now" (Adichie 2013: 220). Here, as Maia L. Butler argues, Ifemelu evidently "underscores how a hypercollective conception of Blackness in the US works against Black immigrants, erasing the particularity of their identities previously informed by national histories and cultures, ethnicities, religious affiliations, and languages" (2022: 299). Ifemelu clearly displays, as Butler affirms, "America has no respect for Black diversity" (2022: 299). In the same post, Ifemelu utilises humor strategically as a means of resistance against racial oppression and as a refusal to cohere to white homonormative values. Uncovering her racial fears, Ifemelu attempts to cope with the trauma of loss of dignity through humor, stating for example that "If a black cashier gives poor service to the nonblack person in front of you, compliment that person's shoes or something, to make up for the bad service, because you're just as guilty for the cashier's crimes" (Adichie 2023: 221). Therefore, here, Ifemelu attempts to give a voice of bitter humor to Black people at the margins of the US society.

In a post titled "Open Thread: For All the Zipped-Up Negroes", situated at the end of chapter 33, Ifemelu invites Black people to speak about their experiences of oppression and exploitation, namely racism, sexism and classism: "This is for the Zipped-Up Negroes, the upwardly mobile American and Non-American Blacks who don't talk about Life Experiences That Have to Do Exclusively with Being Black. Because they want to keep everyone comfortable. Tell your story here. Unzip yourself" (Adichie 2013: 307). Addressing her readers, but simultaneously herself, Ifemelu confirms, "This is a safe space" (Adichie 2013: 307). This safe space aims to "help Black women resist the dominant ideology promulgated not only outside Black civil society but within African-American institutions" (Collins 1990: 111). Ifemelu desires her safe space to "form prime locations for resisting objectification as the Other" (Collins 1990: 111). This way, Ifemelu's safe space allows "Black migratory subjects [to] seek belonging in communities with boundaries broader than those of their respective nations" (Butler 2022: 295).

In her blog post, "A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor", at the end of chapter 31, Ifemelu explicitly articulates the "desire of the 'Other'

157

rested in taming the curly, kinky African tresses by straightening and smoothening them so that they resemble the White woman's hair pattern" (Mallya and Susanti 2021: 409). Ifemelu here openly discusses her observations about the dislike of African natural hair: "Some black women, AB and NAB, would rather run naked in the street than come out in public with their natural hair. Because, you see, it's not professional, sophisticated, whatever, it's just not damn normal" (Adichie 2013: 297). Nevertheless, Ifemelu openly confesses against the 'desire of the 'Other'': "I have natural kinky hair. Worn in cornrows, Afros, braids. No, it's not political. No, I am not an artist or poet or singer. Not an earth mother either. I just don't want relaxers in my hair" (Adichie 2013: 297). Through her open confession as a Black woman, Ifemelu asserts her existence as a subject by challenging the system that makes her an object. Thus, Ifemelu "critiques the positive and negative sign-significations associated with the woman's hair as well as questions the process of becoming the 'Other'" (Mallya and Susanti 2021: 410). The blog post develops into "the cathartic voice of many African-American women who are forced to use relaxers and other harmful chemicals everyday so that it resembles the hair texture of the White woman" (Mallya and Susanti 2021: 410). Black women's coming to voice in a public sphere can be thus understood as an act of insurrection against white authority and provides an opportunity for their self-transformation.

2.2. The Machereyian 'not-said' in Ifemelu's Blog Posts

Ifemelu would not desire her blog posts to be deemed as only expanding the boundaries of existing knowledge. In the way she writes, Ifemelu, like Macherey, embodies that "[t]he act of knowing is not like listening to a discourse already constituted, a mere fiction which we have simply to translate. It is rather the elaboration of a new discourse, the articulation of a silence" (1978: 6). Ifemelu demonstrates that, by articulating silences in her blog posts, she can set up possibilities for new knowledge about race. As Macherey maintains, knowledge is not "the discovery or reconstruction of a latent meaning, forgotten or concealed. It is something newly raised up, an addition to the reality from which it begins" (6). While Ifemelu is at some parts quick to reveal most of her feelings about race, racism and gender in her blog posts, she is sometimes hesitant to disclose some of her concerns about race or some of the experiences of abuse and violence against Blacks in America. It is the ideology shaped in a specific historical reality which governs what needs to and what needs not to be verbalised. As Macherey writes, "Like a planet revolving round an absent sun, an ideology is made of what it does not mention; it exists because there are things which must not be spoken of" (132). An ideology provides the specifications by which authors can relate their tales, while avoiding particular aspects. The language of ideology, as

Macherey observes, is always eventually found, "at the edge of the text", which is "momentarily hidden, but eloquent by its very absence" (60).

As there is an elusive quality to silences and absences, implicit in the words of notable thinkers and critics, the parts that remain cut off and left out from Ifemelu's blog posts, either intentionally or unintentionally, open a Pandora's box of possible interpretations that demands serious contemplation. The ambiguity of her silences on some matters invites myriad possible meanings. Language, in its silence, provides a space for reflection, intuition, creativity and deeper understanding, challenging traditional modes of communication. Ludwig Wittgenstein observes, "[w]hereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (1922: 189). Language cannot capture topics, particularly in the realm of aesthetics, ethics or metaphysics, that are inherently ineffable or beyond empirical perception. Exploring the interconnection between speech and silence, Maurice Merleau-Ponty asserts that silence "continues to envelop language; the silence of the absolute language, of the thinking language" (1968: 176). Jacques Derrida remarks that silence performs "the irreducible role of that which bears and haunts language, outside and *against* which alone language can emerge. […] Like nonmeaning, silence is the work's limit and profound resource" (1978: 65-66, emphasis in original). Derrida's notion of silence is thus the source of all meaning. Michel Foucault declares that silence functions within discourse; it is "an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies" (1978: 27). Using the term 'sigetics', meaning 'to be silent', to describe the governing logic of silence, Martin Heidegger pronounces that silence "corresponds to the soundless tolling of the stillness of appropriating-showing Saying" (1971: 131). Heidegger's silence, in its various forms, is thus analogous to showing. Søren Kierkegaard states that silence is "like the tone, the fundamental tone, which is not given prominence and is called the fundamental tone precisely because it lies at the base" (1990: 49). Kierkegaard's silence hence implies that silence acts as a foundation upon which discourse is built.

To begin with, Ifemelu has formerly lapsed into prolonged silence when she struggles with severe depression as she experiences utmost poverty while studying in America to the extent that she has to prostitute herself with the tennis coach; then she isolates herself from contact with friends. Therefore, "Ifemelu's bout of depression closely aligns with the extent to which she alienates herself linguistically" (Esplin 2018: 80). At this point in her life, "her self-loathing had hardened inside her. She would never be able to form the sentences to tell her story" (Adichie 2013: 158). Owing to the inability to call for assistance, Ifemelu's condition deteriorates and she ceases interaction with Obinze for years. However, Ifemelu's not verbalising her own abuse in her blog posts reveals her self-

159

awareness of the vulnerability of Black female victims and her conscious attempt not to stereotype them.

Regarding language, Ifemelu, as a member of a minority, does not desire her reflections and observations to be excluded from the dominant culture, so Igbo language is absent from her blog posts lest her voice and perspective be silenced by the white-dominated narrative. As Ifemelu knows the fact that the West views Igbo language with derision, she does not intend her posts to adopt negative stereotypes. Without her blog posts in English, her anti-racist sentiments would not have materialised; they would have remained locked in their own silences, unable to be listened to or listen to the voice of others who needed to be heard, while Ifemelu actually "longed for other listeners, and she longed to hear the stories of others" (Adichie 2013: 296). By not using Igbo words in her blog posts, Ifemelu allows many suffocated whispers concerning race to be heard. She is addressing non-American Blacks, so she uses a language that non-American Blacks make use of in America, thus "she masters the English of the blogosphere, and she becomes proficient in, though wary of, the jargon of higher education" (Esplin 2018: 75). These absences chart the means by which Ifemelu has initially internalised the ideal state of being known as an educated woman in America and then enacts her definition of it.

Giving examples from the posts, in one blog entry titled "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: American Tribalism", at the end of chapter 17, Ifemelu writes, "In America, tribalism is alive and well. There are four kinds — class, ideology, region, and race" (Adichie 2013: 184). Butler refers to Ifemelu's "elision of gender from her description of American tribes", when "she observes the workings of a racial hierarchy ladder in the popular American imaginary" (2022: 297). Butler, however, notes that "Ifemelu's understanding of this racial ladder lacks intersectional considerations of identity; Blackness means everyone who appears Black, regardless of their nation of origin or immigration status" (2022: 298). Ifemelu, in the same post, refers to "a ladder of racial hierarchy in America. White is always on top, specifically white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, otherwise known as WASP, and American Black is always on the bottom, and what's in the middle depends on time and place" (Adichie 2013: 184). Ifemelu is again silent about matters that are subject to change, depending on time and place. These statements imply, as Palapala talking about Adichie's *Americanah* declares, "If American Black is at the bottom of the hierarchy of races, it is logical to conclude that the African immigrant is below the American Black; and if there is a hierarchy of oppression, we can further deduce that the black African woman is at the very bottom of such a hierarchy" (2018: 138). Ifemelu leaves the lowest step of the hierarchical ladder of race unsaid since she may aim to challenge and

subvert the pre-existing racial narratives, allowing the Black African women to "continuously reconstruct their racialized, classed, and gendered identities" through "digital diaspora" (Butler 2022: 311). This way, Ifemelu aims to offer the possibility for Black African women to proactively embrace a fluid, dynamic subjectivity.

In a post titled "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What Do WASPs Aspire To?", at the close of chapter 19, Ifemelu narrates a discussion between Professor Hunk, a Black professor, and a Jewish professor about 'oppression olympics'. Here, she informs the reader of one reason to explicate the Machereyian not-said situation in the racist American society: "'oppression olympics' is what smart liberal Americans say, to make you feel stupid and to make you shut up" (Adichie 2013: 205). The term oppression olympics suggests that American racial minorities "all get shit from white folks, different kinds of shit, but shit still", but that everything is always more awful for Black people: "However, all the others think they're better than blacks because, well, they're not black" (Adichie 2013: 205). Ifemelu thus informs that oppression olympics is what precludes Black people from talking about their feelings, or better precisely, about the effects of racial discrimination. Ifemelu thus implies that racial minorities in America need to work together to view marginalization as a basis for fostering a sense of solidarity rather than a competition so that they prevent the silencing of the individuals who speak out against racial discrimination.

161

In the post titled "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby", at the close of chapter 21, Ifemelu further promotes the Machereyian not-said position. Sometimes Ifemelu's implicit language reveals her ignorance of a particular topic: "We all have our moments of initiation into the Society of Former Negroes. Mine was in a class in undergrad when I was asked to give the black perspective, only I had no idea what that was. So I just made something up" (Adichie 2013: 220). Here, Ifemelu deliberately beats around the bush, refraining from discussing a subject that she is unfamiliar with. Yet at another point, she asks Black women to be reticent: "If you are a woman, please do not speak your mind as you are used to doing in your country. Because in America, strong-minded black women are SCARY" (220). Having decided not to be a perfect Americanah to adopt American customs, values, and practices,[1] Ifemelu chooses to voice her views on racial, class, sex-based discrimination in America, but she simultaneously decides not to voice nearly any of the fears and concerns tumbling through her head because they are entirely too overwhelming to be laid out in words. In the same post, Ifemelu encourages Black Americans to be silent about racist injustices that befall them because they will be condemned of being real racists themselves through voicing them: "Don't even bother telling a white conservative about

anything racist that happened to you. Because the conservative will tell you that YOU are the real racist and your mouth will hang open in confusion" (221). Ifemelu may aim to imply that being taciturn about racist experiences better helps the racial minorities to cope with racism and circumvent the internalization of disturbing realities.

Accordingly, Macherey argues that, in order for something to be articulated, other things must be left unarticulated. In Ifemelu's posts, these gaps are acknowledged by readers but often tricky to explore. These silences might represent fundamentally oppressive operations against non-American Blacks, crushed under the ideological burden of America's racist, oppressive laws. These gaps and omissions display how Ifemelu as a Black woman watches herself and others and is watched as she observes, explains and comments upon the racial issues that she encounters in the US. These ruptures display the interconnections between the white and the Black in America, on how each evaluates and is evaluated through the ideological lens of racial assumptions. The gaps are potential outlets that reveal racial truth of American society. Therefore, in a post titled "So What is the Deal?", at the end of chapter 32, Ifemelu argues:

> They tell us race is an invention, that there is more genetic variation between two black people than there is between a black person and a white person. Then they tell us black people have a worse kind of breast cancer and get more fibroids. And white folk get cystic fibrosis and osteoporosis. So what's the deal, doctors in the house? Is race an invention or not? (Adichie 2013: 302).

Here, the protagonist leaves the response to the question of "what's the deal" unsaid, aiming toward contraction rather than expansion. One cannot, according to Macherey, claim to comprehend what a literary work expresses without realising accurately what it does not express: "What is important in the work is what it does not say… what the work *cannot say* is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is acted out, in a sort of journey to silence" (1978: 87, emphasis in original). Macherey's theoretical framework suggests that meaning is not simply attached to the text. Rather, it is accomplished from the negotiation between text and context. A narrative rupture is not "a lack" that has to be "remedied" or "an inadequacy" that needs to be "made up for" (84). Therefore, "the radical otherness" created by the unsaid should not be "resolved or absorbed", but should simply be "*displayed*", namely "the imprint of a determinate absence" must exist in the work as "the principle of its identity" (80, emphasis in original). Nevertheless, the deal is that, as Bernard Ayo Oniwe expounds in his analysis of the novel, "genetics do not explain the reality that color of skin and false science of race has been used historically to justify the minimization of some people's humanity and intelligence by another group of privileged people" (2017: 89-90).

Macherey sees absence as an essential constituent of a narration, "the explicit requires the implicit: for in order to say anything, there are other things *which must not be said*" (1978: 85, emphasis in original). He relates the absence of certain information to Freud's concept of the unconscious so that silence is associated to a disavowal of certain materials: "it is this silence which tells us —not just anything, since it exists to say nothing— which informs us of the precise conditions for the appearance of an utterance, and thus its limits, giving its real significance, without, for all that, speaking in its place" (1978: 86). Therefore, as Oniwe informs, even white Americans are afraid of discussing racism because they do not desire to be designated as the oppressors: "The root of this dismissal of existence in some quarters is the fear and anxiety from discussing the subject because it would eventually place them as the oppressors" (2017: 90). In a post titled "Job Vacancy in America — National Arbiter in Chief of 'Who Is Racist'" at the end of chapter 34, Ifemelu attempts to substitute "Racial Disorder Syndrome" for racist (Adichie 2013: 315). This implicit phrase camouflages the unspoken truth and opts to express such an unvoiced, agonising experience in a disguised form.

In the post titled "Obama Can Win Only If He Remains the Magic Negro", at the end of chapter 35, Ifemelu attempts to feature the Machereyian not-said position when she writes about "American Blacks", stating that they "know an America different from American Whites; they know a harsher, uglier America. But you're not supposed to say that, because in America everything is fine and everyone is the same" (Adichie 2013: 321). In trying to picture positive and colorful representations of life in America, many racist discriminatory practices remain unarticulated. When Ifemelu writes "how Barak Obama can only win if he remains a safe Black in the eyes of white Americans" (Nwabara 2017: 139), she aims to imply that Obama needs to remain silent on "great suffering", "all kinds of racist shit" and "the sad but understandable prejudice" (Adichie 2013: 321). So, the not-saids are often vital for navigating social interactions and maintaining personal well-being.

In a later post, in the middle of chapter 36, titled "Friendly Tips for the American Non-Black: How to React to an American Black Talking About Blackness", when enumerating the reasons for the hatred of American Blacks, Ifemelu only specifies two of them, namely their laziness and unintelligence, and becomes reticent about other reasons: "In the hatred of American Blacks, there is no possibility of envy — they are so lazy, these blacks, they are so unintelligent, these blacks" (Adichie 2013: 326). As she does not aim to reduce the Black community into further stereotypes and negative perceptions, she limits herself to two reasons. In the same post, after going through a list of 'don'ts', demanding an American Black person not to disclose too much information about the experience of being

163

Black, Ifemelu selectively recommends only one 'do' and chooses to leave out other 'dos'. Her hesitation to name them exhibits her reticence not to divulge too much information and make herself vulnerable. To reveal so many unsolved racial challenges in the white American society where Black people are struggling to find solutions, Ifemelu prefers to leave these challenges unarticulated, shrouding them in an aura of enigmatic mystery:

> So after this listing of don'ts, what's the do? I'm not sure. Try listening, maybe. Hear what is being said. And remember that it's not about you. American Blacks are not telling you that you are to blame. They are just telling you what is. If you don't understand, ask questions. If you're uncomfortable about asking questions, say you are uncomfortable about asking questions and then ask anyway. It's easy to tell when a question is coming from a good place. Then listen some more. Sometimes people just want to feel heard. Here's to possibilities of friendship and connection and understanding. (Adichie 2013: 327)

Here, Ifemelu aims to imply that listening to the experiences of American Blacks who are kept silenced by the white racist authorities in America may be the only important remedy for their age-long anguished, silenced suffering. The loudest sounds are embedded in the silenced Black suffering. Expressing the Machereyian not-said fosters connection, understanding, healing and empathy and contributes to a harmonious, meaningful existence. Listening to the experiences of African Americans can be understood as a matter of respecting their voice, even if it is not enough for an effective alleviation. In the post "Is Obama Anything but Black?" at the end of chapter 37, Ifemelu states, "race is not biology; race is sociology. Race is not genotype; race is phenotype. Race matters because of racism. And racism is absurd because it's about how you look. Not about the blood you have" (Adichie 2013: 337). Here, Ifemelu observes that race is considered as phenotype —the observable physical properties of an organism— and racism occurs out of the negative influence of only three phenotype examples: "the shade of your skin and the shape of your nose and the kink of your hair" (Adichie 2013: 337). There are, however, approximately 5,000 phenotypes that are currently known such as eye color, which Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), desperately longed for. One of the reasons Ifemelu possibly leaves out other proofs is to display that "[b]ecause this is America. You're supposed to pretend that you don't notice certain things" (Adichie 2013: 127). She may intend to uncannily limit the visibility of Black differences from the privileged whites, hence challenging the official discourse of Black deviancy from the white norms. Through the concealment of some information, Ifemelu may aim to "horizontally interpellate and refute an overarching heteronormative, heteropatriarchal narrative of blackness" (Phiri 2017: 132). Perhaps she limits her reasons only to those Eurocentric ideals of beauty in order to look professional. From Ifemelu's

perspective, a Black may be subjected to dehumanising treatment in America due to these reasons.

Ifemelu is of the opinion that non-American Blacks cannot discuss racism in America. They need to remain silent on racial matters, as Ifemelu explains in one blog post, titled "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: A Few Explanations of What Things Really Mean", at the end of chapter 39: "If you are having a conversation with an American, and you want to discuss something racial that you find interesting, and the American says, 'Oh, it's simplistic to say it's race, racism is so complex'", it may signify that "they just want you to shut up already. Because of course racism is complex" (Adichie 2013: 350-351). She also states that if Black people need a job or favour from white Americans, they need to be reticent about race. Ifemelu develops the Machereyian not-said position more when she makes use of irony in the same post, providing explanations for white American people's implicit racial statements. She states, "Sometimes they say 'culture' when they mean race. They say a film is 'mainstream' when they mean 'white folks like it or made it'. When they say 'urban' it means black and poor and possibly dangerous and potentially exciting. 'Racially charged' means we are uncomfortable saying 'racist'" (Adichie 2013: 351). Annalena Geisler observes that the stark distinction between the explicit and the implicit in these statements has "the effect of mocking Americans' dread of openly engaging with racism" (2022). Thus, the whites also leave so many not-saids and ambiguities about racism to separate themselves from it and to deny they are racists.

In a blog post titled "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: Thoughts on the Special White Friend", at the end of chapter 40, Ifemelu defends the Machereyian not-said position once more, encouraging Black people not to talk about the jobs which they could not have because they are not white: "But in fact, since the beginning of America, white people have been getting jobs because they are white. Many whites with the same qualifications but Negro skin would not have the jobs they have. But don't ever say this publicly. Let your white friend say it" (Adichie 2013: 361). Ifemelu believes that if they make the mistake of revealing this subject, they will be "accused of a curiosity called 'playing the race card'" (Adichie 2013: 361). Eventually, as she does not desire "to live with a computer-mediated notion of her homeland, Nigeria", she closes her blog and figuratively silences her posts in America (Isaacs 2016: 174). This temporary silence gives Ifemelu's audience an ideal opportunity for reflection to read between the lines and to fill in the gaps which they have been previously left with. In fact, Ifemelu essentially plays a fort/da game with her audience and upon her return to Lagos, after resigning from *Zoe* magazine, starts her new blog under the name "The Small Redemptions of Lagos", coming to voice once more.

3. Conclusion

Applying hooks's notion of talking back and the Machereyian not-said, the current study argues that Adichie's *Americanah* is characterised by the contradictions inherent in the tension between what Ifemelu's blog posts express and what they repress about the experiences of American and non-American Blacks in America. Ifemelu both outwardly and inwardly reveals realities about American and non-American Blacks in her blog posts, displaying the impingements of racist politics on the formulation of her writing, among other things. The overall impact of the sociopolitical context on Ifemelu may be more realistic in understanding how the novel's protagonist participates in the process of revealing and concealing information to display the condition of female Black subjectivity in America. Ifemelu, as a blogger, interweaves the said and the not-said to demonstrate the plausible outcome of the suppressive ideologies and agendas enacted by the white racist liberal community to subject Black immigrants in the US to abject oppression and victimization and Blacks' counter-measures against the white racist power structure. Ifemelu produces a work containing presences and absences because within ideology, there are subjects which can or which cannot be articulated. The explicit directly verifies Ifemelu's intention pertaining to race. The unspoken areas of Ifemelu's blog posts also speak expressively without words. The silenced thoughts are presented more prominently by their very absence, for they feature what cannot be voiced. To enunciate them would be to swim against the current of the American racial discourse. Ironically, attempting to silence thoughts only does the reverse, for they address realities more effectively than what are straightforwardly uttered in Ifemelu's blog posts. These gaps are not a mechanical imposition forced on individuals. The aesthetic effect these gaps produce instills in the reader a new awareness and sensibility of Black female struggles to find their niche in expression in the US.

The multiplicity of voices in Ifemelu's text challenges the preponderance of a single story of female Black subjectivity, embracing multiple perspectives and welcoming diversity. The protagonist's limited vision is compensated for by allowing the readers of her blog posts to share their opinions in the comment sections. Each reader presents Nigeria and the United States from different angles, featuring diverse ways of thinking and feeling. Through rejecting a monolithic voice in her blog posts, Ifemelu aims for a broader and more nuanced understanding of diasporic, racialised subjects. Therefore, in order to reclaim agency over Blacks' self-perception in relation to whites, Ifemelu takes the opportunity in her blog to challenge the ideological misrepresentation of vulnerable immigrants by talking back to the privileged whites. The unconscious of the text also unsettles the articulation of the dominant hegemonic discourse, revealing the hidden mechanisms of ideology. The overt or covert knowledge or discourse that Ifemelu produces in her blog posts consequently challenges racist interpellation of diasporic subjects by the dominant white social order of America.

166

Notes

1. In an interview with Terry Gross, Adichie defines Americanah as a Nigerian term, describing those Nigerian immigrants who go to the United States and then return to Nigeria, either taking on American affectations, or pretending not to understand their mother tongues any more, or refusing to consume Nigerian food, also it is often used for those individuals who are truly Americanised (2013).

Works Cited

ADICHIE, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2009. *The Danger of a Single Story*. TED Conferences. <https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story>. Accessed September 4, 2024.

ADICHIE, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2013. *Americanah*. Fourth Estate.

ALTHUSSER, Louis. 1971. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. B. Brewster. Monthly Review Press.

BUTLER, Maia L. 2022. "Blogging Race, Blogging Nation: Digital Diaspora as Home in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*". *College Literature* 49 (2): 287-315. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2022.0007>.

COLLINS, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought. Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Unwin Hyman. Inc.

DERRIDA, Jacques. (1967) 1978. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. A. Bass. Routledge.

DUCE, Violeta. 2021. "Social Media and Female Empowerment in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*". *The European Legacy* 26 (3-4): 243-256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2021.1891667>.

ESPLIN, Marlene. 2018. "The Right Not to Translate: The Linguistic Stakes of Immigration in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*". *Research in African Literatures* 49 (2): 73-86. <https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.49.2.05>.

FOUCAULT, Michel. (1976) 1978. *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*. Trans. R. Hurley. Pantheon Books.

GEISLER, Annalena, 2022. "Alienation and Defamiliarization in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013)". *La Clé des Langues*. <https://cle.ens-lyon.fr/anglais/litterature/litterature-postcoloniale/alienation-and-defamiliarization-in-americanah-2013>. Accessed September 15, 2024.

GROSS, Terry. 2013. "'Americanah' Author Explains 'Learning' to Be Black in the U.S.". *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/195598496>. Accessed September 30, 2024.

GUARRACINO, Serena. 2014. "Writing 'So Raw and True': Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*". *Between* IV (8): 1-27.<https://doi.org/10.13125/2039-6597/1320>.

HEIDEGGER, Martin. (1959) 1971. *On the Way to Language*. Trans. P. D. Hertz. Harper & Row.

HOOKS, bell. 1989. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. South End Press.

167

Isaacs, Camille. 2016. "Mediating Women's Globalized Existence through Social Media in the Work of Adichie and Bulawayo". *Safundi* 17 (2): 174-188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2016.1179463>.

Kierkegaard, Søren. (1851) 1990. *For Self-Examination: Judge for Yourself Kierkegaard's Writings, XXI.* Trans. and Ed. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton U.P.

Levine, Caroline. 2015. "'The Strange Familiar': Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie's *Americanah*". *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 61 (4): 587-605. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2015.0051>.

Macherey, Pierre. (1966) 1978. *A Theory of Literary Production.* Trans. G. Wall. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Mallya, Deepali and Rini Susanti. 2021. "Theorizing Race, Marginalization, and Language in the Digital Media". *Communication & Society* 34 (2): 403-415. <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.34.2.403-415>.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. (1964) 1968. *The Visible and the Invisible.* Trans. A. Lingis. Ed. Claude Lefort. Northwestern U.P.

Nwabara, Olaocha Nwadiuto. 2017. "New Routes to the African Diaspora(s): Locating 'Naija' Identities in Transnational Cultural Productions". PhD Dissertation. Michigan State University. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1948886692/fulltextPDF/ 8EB49CDB986847D3PQ/1?accountid=173708&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses>.

Oniwe, Bernard Ayo. 2017. "Narrating the (Im)Migrant Experience: 21st Century African Fiction in the Age of Globalization". PhD Dissertation. University of South Carolina. <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/4524>.

Opeyemi, Ajibola. 2019. "The Lovable Whites Are Not Yet Born: Colour Politics in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*". *Journal of Communication and Language Arts* 10 (1): 11-33.

Palapala, Joan Linda. 2018. "There Is No Place for African Women: Gender Politics in the Writings of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie". PhD Dissertation. Southern Illinois University Carbondale. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2081020381/ fulltextPDF/C2310E2DECC42E7PQ/1?accountid=173708&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses>.

Phiri, Aretha. 2017. "Expanding Black Subjectivities in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*". *Cultural Studies* 31 (1): 121-142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2016.1232422>.

Wall, Geoffrey. 1978. "Translator's Preface". In Macherey, Pierre. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd: vii- ix.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1921) 1922. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., LTD.

SINDIWE MAGONA Y LA VIDA EN COMUNIDAD: SOLIDARIDAD SUDAFRICANA EN *FORCED TO GROW* Y *WHEN THE VILLAGE SLEEPS*

SINDIWE MAGONA AND COMMUNITY LIFE: SOUTH AFRICAN SOLIDARITY IN *FORCED TO GROW* AND *WHEN THE VILLAGE SLEEPS*

<https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202510908>

ISABEL GIL-NAVEIRA
Universidad de Oviedo
gilisabel@uniovi.es
<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8347-5797>

Resumen

Desde la abolición del *apartheid*, Sudáfrica ha intentado transmitir la idea de unidad entre comunidades; sin embargo, en su estudio sobre la solidaridad panafricana, Steven L. Gordon (2023) incide en la preocupación por los altos niveles de antagonismo interracial en la llamada nación arcoíris. Partiendo de una perspectiva postcolonial, este artículo explora dos obras de la escritora sudafricana Sindiwe Magona: la segunda parte de su autobiografía, *Forced to Grow* (1992), y la novela *When the Village Sleeps* (2021). A través del concepto de solidaridad entre comunidades, estudiado por Edith Stein, entre otros, se analizan ambas obras y sus reflejos de los movimientos sociales y religiosos en Sudáfrica en las décadas de sus publicaciones —los años previos a la abolición del *apartheid* y a principios de la década de 2020— para identificar la lucha de Magona contra la opresión del sistema del *apartheid* y sus consecuencias en las décadas posteriores. El artículo pretende probar que el papel de la autora en su comunidad se transforma con el tiempo en un papel político y social, convirtiéndose sus escritos en herramientas para promover el apoyo social y la unión entre comunidades.

Palabras clave: solidaridad, comunidad, Sindiwe Magona, Sudáfrica.

Abstract

South Africa has been trying to transmit the idea of unity among communities since the abolition of apartheid; however, Steven L. Gordon's study on Pan-African solidarity (2023) signals the worrying levels of interracial antagonism in the

169

rainbow nation. From a postcolonial perspective, this article delves into two books by South African writer Sindiwe Magona: the second part of her autobiography, *Forced to Grow* (1992), and the novel *When the Village Sleeps* (2021). Under the concept of solidarity among communities, studied by Edith Stein, among others, this article will analyse both books and their reflection of the social and religious movements in South Africa in the decades they were published —the years prior to the abolition of apartheid and the early 2020s— to identify Magona's struggle against the oppression of apartheid and its consequences in the following decades. My contention is that Magona's role within her community evolves into a political and social role and, hence, her writings become a tool to foster social support and union among communities.

Keywords: solidarity, community, Magona, South Africa.

1. Introducción

Sudáfrica es conocida como la nación arcoíris,[1] una nación que aúna once lenguas y tradiciones culturales muy diversas entre sí y que ha intentado transmitir, desde la abolición del *apartheid*, la idea de unidad a través de símbolos como la bandera arcoíris y sus seis colores (Bornman 2006: 384). Sin embargo, en su reciente artículo sobre la solidaridad panafricana en Sudáfrica, Steven Lawrence Gordon (2023) comparte la preocupación de otros autores contemporáneos (Gibson 2009; Finchilescu y Tredoux 2010; Durrheim et al. 2011) por los altos niveles de antagonismo interracial. Diversas formas de discriminación racial y esclavitud ya existían en Sudáfrica antes del siglo XX, pero fue en 1948 cuando el Partido Nacionalista Purificado implantó el sistema del *apartheid*,[2] un sistema de coerción draconiano cuya legislación, en particular la Ley de Registro de Población de 1950, clasificaba a la población en grupos raciales: negros, en ocasiones llamados bantú; blancos, en ocasiones se distingue entre la población de origen británico y habla inglesa y la población de origen holandés y habla afrikáans; hindúes; y *coloured* (mestizo o 'de color'), término que englobaba a lo que se consideraba población mestiza, la cual había sido llevada a Sudáfrica desde otras zonas de África o Asia. Esta clasificación racial no solo ha definido la realidad social del país durante décadas, sino que conlleva una subdivisión de estos grupos —ocasionalmente basada en diferencias reales, como las divergencias lingüísticas que se asocian a sub-identidades étnicas, y en otros casos basada en diferencias creadas o exageradas por el sistema político del *apartheid* (Finchilescu y Tredoux 2010: 227) con fines económicos y políticos—.

Gillian Finchilescu y Colin Tredoux (2010) aluden a las numerosas investigaciones socio-psicológicas llevadas a cabo durante las décadas de 1930 a 1980 por autores

como Ian D. MacCrone (1949), Thomas F. Pettigrew (1960) y Pierre L. Van den Berghe (1962) para analizar las distintas actitudes entre los diferentes grupos raciales en Sudáfrica, señalando sus resultados un evidente antagonismo interracial. En concreto, resaltan los prejuicios mutuos entre la comunidad blanca de origen holandés y los grupos negro, hindú y de color (Finchilescu y Tredoux 2010). Con la abolición del sistema del *apartheid* en 1994, tras las primeras elecciones libres y la llegada al poder de Nelson Mandela, llega también una incertidumbre social.[3] La división racial y social perpetuada durante décadas perdura en la sociedad sudafricana, y autores como Edward LiPuma y Thomas A. Koelble señalan la inseguridad que sentía parte de la población blanca en 1995 y su temor al trato que pudieran recibir por parte del nuevo gobierno. También aludían a la idea de solidaridad que debería permear la cultura pública del país como parte del proceso de reconciliación que experimentaría Sudáfrica. Para estos autores, la simbología de la nación arcoíris del gobierno de Mandela pretende sustituir la violencia en la que se basaba el régimen anterior con solidaridad (LiPuma y Koelble 2011: 5). De este modo, Mandela apelaría a la solidaridad de las diferentes comunidades del país, que deberían aceptar el multiculturalismo de Sudáfrica, dejando a un lado el racismo y las experiencias pasadas y abrazando la nación multicultural de la que todos formarían parte (20).

No obstante, la falta de cohesión social y su evolución desde el siglo XX al XXI han perdurado en el tiempo. Autores como Elirea Bornman (2022) centran sus estudios en la evolución de la sociedad sudafricana, comparando el orgullo nacional en Sudáfrica en 1998 y la falta de orgullo nacional en la actualidad. Gordon (2023), por otro lado, insiste en la conexión entre la falta de identificación de los sudafricanos con el continente africano y la falta de cohesión social presente a día de hoy en Sudáfrica, mientras que Toks Dele Oyedemi (2021) analiza las generaciones nacidas tras la abolición del *apartheid* para concluir que siguen siendo víctimas postcoloniales. Más aún, estas generaciones han retomado el concepto de decolonización como parte de su identidad y de las respuestas culturales a la utopía post-*apartheid* (Oyedemi 2021: 214).

Partiendo de una perspectiva postcolonial, este artículo pretende analizar dos obras de la reconocida escritora sudafricana Sindiwe Magona, *Forced to Grow* (1992), la segunda parte de su autobiografía publicada pocos años antes de la abolición del *apartheid*,[4] y la novela *When the Village Sleeps* (2021), publicada tras la pandemia de Covid-19. A través del concepto de solidaridad entre comunidades, estudiado por Edith Stein, entre otros, se analizarán ambas obras y su reflejo de los movimientos sociales y religiosos en Sudáfrica en las décadas de sus publicaciones para identificar la lucha de Magona contra la opresión del sistema del *apartheid* y sus consecuencias en las décadas posteriores. Este artículo argumenta que el papel

de Magona en su comunidad se transforma con el tiempo en un papel político y social, convirtiéndose sus escritos en herramientas para promover el apoyo social y la unión entre comunidades. Se pretende probar que la intención de Magona es recordarle a la sociedad sudafricana la importancia de la unión y de conceptos tradicionales como el concepto sudafricano de *Ubuntu*[5] —fuertemente ligado a la idea de comunidad— para preservar la existencia y buen funcionamiento de la sociedad sudafricana. Así, se pretende demostrar que estas obras tratan de promover un apoyo social y una unión ante las distintas problemáticas de cada comunidad, que parecen haberse perdido en las últimas décadas según los estudios de Bornman, Gordon y Oyedemi previamente mencionados.

2. Comunidad, sociedad y solidaridad

En su reciente artículo "Sobre los conceptos de solidaridad y de dignidad humana", el filósofo Manuel Atienza recoge "las ambigüedades que aqueja[n] a la idea de solidaridad […] que permite un doble uso ideológico" (2023: 31). Por una parte, encontraríamos la solidaridad como "la defensa del nacionalismo, del racismo y de la xenofobia [y donde] los miembros del grupo [comparten] unos mismos valores que constituirían sus señas de identidad" (31). Es decir, la idea de 'nosotros' frente a 'ellos', el concepto de 'otredad' que utilizó Edward Said (1978) en términos (post)coloniales. Por otro lado, Atienza alude a la conexión que el filósofo Javier de Lucas establece entre la solidaridad y "la lucha contra la exclusión, con la defensa de valores universalistas […] y de sociedades abiertas, pluralistas e igualitarias" (31), que se relaciona con el concepto postcolonial de 'alteridad'. En este segundo uso se entiende la solidaridad siguiendo los parámetros de "caridad […] amistad, *philia*, benevolencia o fraternidad", y como una figura jurídica que conecta la solidaridad con los conceptos de igualdad, necesidades básicas y deberes positivos de los miembros de la comunidad (32).

Es Émile Durkheim (1985), en el ámbito de la sociología, quien relaciona inicialmente los conceptos de solidaridad y sociedad, considerando la existencia de una "solidaridad mecánica", que se basa en las semejanzas de los miembros, y una "solidaridad orgánica", que se relaciona con la división del trabajo. Edith Stein, a su vez, diferencia los conceptos de comunidad y sociedad según la relación que los individuos establecen entre ellos. Así, en la comunidad habrá una "vinculación natural y orgánica" mientras que en la sociedad existirá una "vinculación racional y mecánica" (2005: 344). En lo referente a la relación entre solidaridad, sociedad y comunidad, Stein establece que

> cuando una persona se sitúa como sujeto ante otra persona como objeto, la examina y la "trata" según un plan establecido basado en el conocimiento adquirido y

obtiene de ella los efectos pretendidos, entonces ambas conviven en sociedad. Por el contrario, cuando un sujeto acepta al otro como sujeto y no sólo está ante él sino que además vive con él y es determinado por sus movimientos vitales, en este caso los dos sujetos constituyen entre sí una comunidad. En la sociedad cada uno se halla absolutamente solitario. […] En la comunidad reina la solidaridad. (344)

Teniendo en cuenta que "la comunidad sin una sociedad es posible, pero que no lo es la sociedad sin una comunidad" (345), la comunidad —condicionada por factores espaciotemporales y por valores éticos, estéticos, religiosos o culturales— se vuelve algo esencial. Sus miembros pasan también a tener un papel primordial, puesto que

[e]l "núcleo" de una comunidad, a partir del cual se plasma su carácter y que garantiza su permanencia a la comunidad, lo constituyen los portadores de la vida comunitaria. […] Cuanto más numerosos sean los portadores que apoyen a una comunidad y cuanto más extensa sea la entrega que hagan de sí a la comunidad, tanto más sólida será la existencia de la misma, y tanto más segura será su manifestación al exterior. (490)

En su estudio del hombre social y el hombre comunitario,[6] Stein establece que para el hombre comunitario que pretende guiar a su comunidad "serán decisivos los deseos, las necesidades, los intereses del pueblo, que él […] hace que influyan inmediatamente sobre sí" (345). Pero no solo las relaciones que han de establecerse entre los miembros de una comunidad resultan relevantes, sino que las que se establecen entre comunidades a través de sus individuos también repercuten en la comunidad hasta el punto de que se puede crear una nueva comunidad.

Esta definición de comunidad en relación con el individuo, así como la relación entre solidaridad y sociedad descritas por Stein, se asemejan enormemente al concepto de *Ubuntu*, que se podría traducir como 'yo soy porque tú eres/ nosotros somos'. Este concepto tradicional señala la importancia del individuo dentro de la comunidad y, por ende, dentro de la sociedad en general. Líderes como Nelson Mandela (Stengel 2009) y Desmond Tutu (1999) aludieron a esta relación entre el individuo y la comunidad, destacando la importancia de la humanidad y la compasión que ha de mostrarse a los iguales. Según el concepto de *Ubuntu*, el individuo forma parte de la comunidad y la comunidad está compuesta de individuos, siendo los éxitos y el bienestar de los unos la clave de los éxitos y el bienestar de los otros. O lo que es lo mismo, la comunidad y la sociedad están supeditadas a la existencia o no de solidaridad entre los miembros de esa misma comunidad.

El filósofo y sociólogo Michel Foucault analizó el concepto de poder y cómo éste se estructura, promoviendo la idea de que "no existe un único poder en una sociedad, sino que existen relaciones de poder extraordinariamente numerosas,

múltiples, en diferentes ámbitos" (1999: 277), como las relaciones sexuales, el poder político y el poder económico, y que se podrían estudiar "desde el punto de vista de la psiquiatría, de la sociedad, de la familia" (278). Es decir, si las relaciones entre individuos son políticas, no podremos cambiar la sociedad a no ser que cambiemos estas relaciones. Por este motivo, resulta especialmente relevante para este artículo entender las relaciones que se establecen en Sudáfrica entre las distintas comunidades, oprimidas o no. A este respecto, Óscar Pérez de la Fuente señala la *coalición multicolor* que propone Iris Marion Young (2000), en la que "cada uno de los grupos que la constituyen afirma la presencia de los otros, así como la especificidad de su experiencia y perspectiva respecto de las diversas cuestiones sociales" (Pérez de la Fuente 2021: 33), como una posibilidad para la aparición de sinergias entre minorías, forjando "lazos de solidaridad, desde una *política de coalición*" (35).

Esta conexión entre la solidaridad, la comunidad y el mundo político y social es aplicable al estudio de la vida y obras de la autora sudafricana Sindiwe Magona. Nacida en la zona rural de Ciudad del Cabo en 1943 (Shober 2021), Magona pertenece a la comunidad Xhosa o AmaXhosa, una de las seis naciones catalogadas bajo la etiqueta de bantú[7] por el sistema del *apartheid*, por lo que vivió gran parte de su juventud en Guguletu, uno de sus distritos segregados.[8] En la década de 1960 Magona aunaba ya una serie de características que la relegaban a un segundo plano, tanto para el gobierno y la sociedad sudafricana como para su comunidad. El hecho de haber sido abandonada por su marido en 1966, con 23 años y embarazada de su tercer hijo, restringía sus posibilidades laborales, siendo la economía sumergida la única opción posible durante un tiempo. Más adelante, como mujer negra casada, Magona sólo podría ejercer su profesión de profesora en puestos temporales, independientemente de si su marido estaba presente y contribuía o no a la economía familiar. La obra autobiográfica *Forced to Grow* relata esta situación, señalando que "[p]ermanent posts were for real breadwinners — all men, irrespective of their marital status, and also unmarried women" (Magona 1992: 45). Por otro lado, el abandono sufrido también suponía un cambio en la posición de Magona y de sus hijos en la comunidad. Las mujeres abandonadas por sus maridos, o *idikazi*, eran discriminadas o, como se recoge en la autobiografía, para su comunidad pasó a ser "a woman alone, a woman considered by consequence of that fact alone as morally bankrupt" (48). Sin embargo, es desde esta posición de otredad que Magona se involucra en acciones sociales y se convierte en un miembro relevante en su comunidad, ejerciendo, como defiende este artículo, prácticas de resistencia que van de lo local a lo global, ante el fracaso del gobierno en las mismas.

En su análisis sobre Michel Foucault y Maurice Blanchot, Carolina Villada Castro alude a la figura del intelectual como vigía o centinela anónimo, "una voz anónima

que se dona a los anónimos, no para hablar 'por' los ausentes ni para hablar 'en lugar de' los ausentes, sino justamente para nombrar su ausencia e inaccesibilidad" (2020: 198). De este modo, el intelectual o escritor se expone a sus propios límites, planteándose de nuevo las ideas de otredad y alteridad mencionadas anteriormente. Así, en su definición de la pasividad, Blanchot establece que:

> En la relación de mí (lo mismo) con El Otro, El Otro es el lejano, lo ajeno, mas si invierto la relación, El Otro se relaciona conmigo como si yo fuese Lo Otro y entonces me hace salir de mi identidad, apretándome hasta el aplastamiento, retirándome, bajo la presión de lo muy cercano, del privilegio de ser en primera persona y, sacado de mí mismo, dejando una pasividad privada de sí (la alteridad misma, la otredad sin unidad), lo no sujeto, o lo paciente. (1990: 23)

Este artículo plantea que las obras de Magona a analizar, *Forced to Grow* y *When the Village Sleeps*, revelan su responsabilidad social como escritora, o en palabras de Gugu Hlongwane "[b]y confronting a South Africa that is not a homogeneous monolith, she thus 'writes home' to a future South Africa which will eventually, if gradually, have to learn how to transgress the stubborn boundaries of race, class and gender" (2004: 50).

175

3. Solidaridad en *Forced to Grow*: Asociaciones sociales y religiosas intercomunitarias

En la obra autobiográfica *Forced to Grow* (1992) Sindiwe Magona narra su lucha por obtener una educación, un trabajo fuera de la economía sumergida y la igualdad de oportunidades para ella y sus hijos durante las décadas de 1960 a 1980 en Sudáfrica, así como su experiencia en el exilio —en los Estados Unidos— y su decisión de abandonar un país que se resistía aún al cambio. Este artículo aduce que Magona traslada sus experiencias personales como parte de su lucha por transformar tanto su comunidad como la sociedad sudafricana, desempeñando, por tanto, un papel político y social en las mismas. Su personaje, Sindiwe, evoluciona con el paso del tiempo en lo que respecta a su relación con la comunidad, hasta el punto en que, en un intento por promover una transformación social y política en Sudáfrica, se involucra en diversas asociaciones civiles y religiosas que intentaban promulgar la igualdad entre las razas divididas por el sistema del *apartheid*.

La década de 1970 se caracteriza por una serie de movimientos que luchan por las cuestiones sociales y políticas que acaecen al país desde el *apartheid*. Magona relata en su autobiografía la creación de "women's groups and […] youth groups, church groups and secular groups, political groups, non-political groups and apolitical groups" (1992: 121) que intentaban resistir a las políticas ejercidas por el estado. En su lucha por el cambio, el primer paso del personaje fue unirse en

1969 a la *National Council of African Women*, que le ayudó a verse a sí misma "as someone who could do something out there […] that [she] had the right and, indeed, the obligation to intervene in situations of distress" (80-81). De este modo, la obra comienza a establecer la solidaridad entre comunidades como una vía adecuada para conseguir una Sudáfrica unida. La decisión del personaje de trabajar posteriormente en Asuntos Sociales, con la intención de mejorar la vida de la población no blanca, también refleja la situación social y las necesidades del momento. Según Finchilescu y Tredoux, "[t]he demography and socioeconomic inequality of South Africa are obstacles to the potential positive effects of intergroup contact" (2010: 232). Esta idea se refleja en su autobiografía en la crítica de Magona hacia el sistema y las instituciones gubernamentales. De hecho, la falta de iniciativas de fomento de la igualdad y la aceptación de separación que el sistema promovía en parte de la población determinan su abandono de toda esperanza que pudiera haber puesto en él y su posterior decisión de dejar su trabajo y centrarse en otro tipo de asociaciones.

Por otra parte, la relación entre la iglesia y el estado en Sudáfrica pasó por distintas fases a lo largo de los años. Hasta mediados del siglo XX existieron tres fases: 'aceptación incondicional' (de la iglesia hacia el estado) durante el período de colonización holandesa (1652-1800); 'aceptación crítica' durante la colonización británica (1800-1911), en la cual la mayoría de los misioneros criticaban tanto al estado como a la iglesia y luchaban por los derechos de las comunidades negras; y 'oposición crítica', durante las primeras décadas de la Unión Sudafricana (1912-1960), en las que algunas secciones de las iglesias de la población blanca y la mayoría de las de la población negra estaban en contra de la legislación contra la población negra (Kumalo 2014). De 1961 a 1990, con la implantación plena del sistema del *apartheid*, encontramos una relación de 'testigo profético', donde destacan movimientos religiosos y líderes como Desmond Tutu (Kumalo 2014).[9] Es durante esta fase, en 1973, que el personaje de Magona "became, quite by accident, a member of Church Women Concerned. [This] marked a turning-point in [her] life" (1992: 122). Resulta interesante la apertura que esta asociación religiosa promulgaba, más allá de las barreras raciales establecidas, y que el personaje presenta como posible, a pesar de la política separatista de la época:

> In this group I met women who were white — not white women. I met women who were classified coloured — not coloured women. I met women of Indian descent. For the first time in my life, in my thirtieth year, I encountered people — yes, with a different colour skin, but they were people first. They spoke with me, person to person. We shared ourselves. They listened to what I had to say. I, in turn, heard what they said. (122)

Esto coincide con el planteamiento de Stein cuando asegura que "[e]n lo que respecta a la influencia recibida de la subjetividad ajena, habrá que considerar no

176

sólo a los individuos que se hallen fuera de la comunidad, sino también a los contactos con otra comunidad distinta" (2005: 415). Así, la importancia de las relaciones que estas mujeres establecieron no radica exclusivamente en los cambios promovidos a nivel individual, sino que supone un acercamiento entre comunidades, como se aprecia en las afirmaciones de Sindiwe: "I discovered human beings in these white women and, through them, in their families" (1992: 122-123). Más aún, Magona pone de ejemplo a estas mujeres que visitaron las casas y lugares de reunión de las distintas comunidades con la idea de mostrar al resto de la población que la convivencia era no solo posible, sino deseable. Como plantea la autora, el objetivo era promulgar un cambio de actitud "[u]nder the broad umbrella of religion" (128), consiguiendo que mujeres relevantes en su comunidad se vieran a sí mismas como "an agent for change" (129). Esta idea, que comparten y transmiten a través de su literatura escritoras africanas de generaciones previas, como la ghanesa Ama Ata Aidoo y la nigeriana Buchi Emecheta, podría ayudar en la creación de "una *nueva* comunidad que abarca[se] en sí a la antigua comunidad y al 'elemento animador' que llega hasta ella desde fuera […] tales influencias no afectan a la comunidad independientemente de los individuos que pertenecen a ella, sino que los individuos son afectados, y *en* ellos es afectado todo el conjunto" (Stein 2005: 415-416, énfasis en el original).

Perseguir una educación mejor y las oportunidades que esta le podía brindar en un futuro también son presentados como fundamentales, así el personaje de Magona forma parte de organizaciones educativas como SACHED (South African Committee for Higher Education), que le permitió "meet, interact with and get to know people who were classified differently from [her]. […] Suddenly, [she] was part of a brilliant rainbow, partaking of the wealth of human diversity that is South Africa's" (1992: 102). Para Stein "la solidaridad de los individuos, que se hace visible en la influencia de las actitudes de un individuo sobre la vida de otro individuo, es capaz en sumo grado de *constituir comunidad*", pero para que exista esta vida comunitaria han de cumplirse ciertas condiciones de reciprocidad, es decir, los individuos deben estar "'abiertos' recíprocamente [y] las actitudes de un individuo no [deben chocar] contra el otro, sino [penetrar] en él y despl[egar] su eficacia" (2005: 423, énfasis en el original). Finchilescu y Tredoux aluden, a su vez, a la hipótesis del contacto intergrupal, estudiada en la década de 1950 por Gordon Allport, como medio para mejorar la sociedad sudafricana a comienzos del siglo XXI, puesto que aseguraba que "prejudice will be reduced if members come into contact under a number of optimal conditions" (Finchilescu y Tredoux 2010: 230). No obstante, estudios posteriores sobre el contacto intergrupal, como el de Pettigrew en 1998, han continuado analizando la importancia de la amistad y sus efectos en las relaciones entre grupos sin llegar a unos resultados concluyentes en cuanto a si este contacto puede realmente eliminar los prejuicios establecidos

177

(231). A pesar de ciertas experiencias positivas del personaje de Magona, no todos los miembros de la comunidad ni de las comunidades vecinas participaban de sus inquietudes; de hecho, cabe destacar cómo en la autobiografía "el miedo a lo desconocido provoca el rechazo y la falta de comprensión" (Gil-Naveira 2019: 228). La crítica de Magona al momento social vivido durante el *apartheid* se ve reflejado en el rechazo que sufre su personaje por no estar subordinada a la clasificación racial establecida, ser independiente y establecer lazos de amistad con otras comunidades y razas, lo que suponía un ultraje a su comunidad y sociedad, así como un peligro para su integridad física.

La última referencia en la obra autobiográfica a las asociaciones creadas y a la solidaridad entre comunidades viene de la mano de lo que comenzó como una revuelta estudiantil en Soweto en 1976 contra la denominada Educación Bantú, y que derivó en una serie de disturbios de fama internacional. Sindiwe, involucrada en la asociación *Church Women Concerned*, acudió a Cape Town a una reunión "of women of all colours, languages and races, irrespective of class" (Magona 1992: 165), que dio lugar al Women's Movement, siendo Sindiwe parte de "its Executive Committee until late 1978 when [she] bowed out of all bridge-building and all attempts at working for peaceful change in South Africa" (166). El desencanto que demostró el personaje cuando abandonó su trabajo en Asuntos Sociales se repite de nuevo al final de la autobiografía. Con su viaje a los Estados Unidos, el personaje comienza a mirar a Sudáfrica "from a distance, perhaps for the first time dispassionately" (182). Su vuelta del exilio señala un cambio de vida: Sindiwe deja a un lado su faceta pública en las asociaciones para centrarse en la escritura. Pese a que sus escritos no son públicos aún, puesto que no tenía referentes y no confiaba en sus posibilidades de comenzar una carrera narrativa, sí son un modo de responder a todas las injusticias del país, el primer paso hacia las obras que la propia Magona comenzaría a publicar en la década de 1990, consiguiendo con ellas "not only [to] encourage other women to write, but also to challenge, resist, and participate at a political level" (Koyana 2001: 64-65).

4. *When the Village Sleeps* y el futuro de la sociedad sudafricana

When the Village Sleeps (2021) es quizás una de las novelas más complejas de Magona hasta la fecha, no solo porque narra la vida de varias generaciones de una familia sudafricana, sino por todas las problemáticas históricas, sociales y políticas que se desarrollan y que son indispensables para descubrir la realidad sudafricana en el siglo XXI. A través de referencias a episodios vividos por las diferentes generaciones de mujeres en la familia protagonista, la novela alude a la

falta de evolución de la sociedad sudafricana desde el *apartheid*. Aunque autores como Finchilescu y Tredoux señalan la evolución política y social de Sudáfrica desde su independencia hasta los primeros años del siglo XXI, tras conseguirse supuestamente la igualdad entre las razas, también insisten en que la realidad era bien distinta para la mayoría de los sudafricanos negros, que no veían cubiertas sus necesidades básicas, enfrentándose a altos niveles de desempleo y dificultades en el acceso a la educación, la vivienda y la sanidad (2010: 226).

Estas diferencias entre los distintos grupos sudafricanos en el ámbito social se han visto a su vez reflejadas en las relaciones personales establecidas entre los grupos. En la primera década post-*apartheid* se anticipaba "more intergroup contact, of better quality, and this may be expected to lead to the breakdown of hostilities and a general improvement in intergroup relations" (231). Sin embargo, los estudios realizados por James Gibson y Christopher Claassen (2010) señalan que, mientras los grupos minoritarios tenían más contacto entre ellos, lo que llevó a una mejoría en las relaciones sociales, los prejuicios aumentaron en el grupo mayoritario de sudafricanos negros debido, en gran medida, a que eran conscientes del estatus devaluado de su grupo social y tenían menos contacto con otros grupos por residir en zonas rurales y sufrir altos niveles de desempleo. Siguiendo esta estela, en su análisis de la sociedad sudafricana actual, Oyedemi achaca al imborrable legado colonial la situación social del país, en el que "that political decolonisation achieved through representational participation in an electoral process is merely symbolic; it is yet to produce economic and cultural decolonisation" (2021: 225), para añadir que "deregulation, privatisation, trade liberalisation and other 'free market' ideologies have been unable to address unemployment and social inequalities" (220).

Al igual que con la obra anterior, este artículo pretende mostrar que el papel de Magona como escritora no es únicamente compartir su perspectiva respecto a la problemática social sudafricana, sino intentar promover un cambio positivo en la sociedad del país. Lo que en principio se muestra en la novela como la historia lineal de tres generaciones, pasa a ser, con el nacimiento de la bisnieta, una historia circular. La ahora bisabuela Khulu, que vivió la mayor parte de su vida durante el sistema del *apartheid* y permanece muy ligada a sus costumbres tradicionales, intenta mantener una familia que parece derrumbarse con cada generación. Asimismo, una de sus hijas, Phyllis, mantiene a tres hijos, de tres padres distintos, con el dinero que le da su madre y con el subsidio que le ofrece el estado, dinero que emplea casi en su totalidad en alcohol. La siguiente generación, la nieta de trece años, Busi, tiene la oportunidad de estudiar en una buena escuela, pero la sociedad que le rodea le lleva a planear quedarse embarazada y dañar la salud del feto con alcohol y drogas para cobrar un subsidio mayor que el que cobra su

madre, lo que, en su opinión, le permitirá vivir una vida de lujos. Es la bisnieta, Mandla, discapacitada por los daños sufridos siendo un feto, la que vuelve a la tradición y a una vida comunitaria que se basa en la solidaridad, tanto dentro de su comunidad como entre comunidades.

Las desigualdades sociales se reflejan al comienzo de la novela, en la que Magona enfrenta la idea que transmite el gobierno a la sociedad sudafricana contra la realidad vista por sus protagonistas. Busi anhela la ayuda que una trabajadora social promueve por televisión y la existencia de grupos comunitarios que la fomenten, resaltando las diferencias que aún existen en el país entre comunidades. Magona también relata la realidad social a la que distintas generaciones se enfrentan, mostrando cuán perjudiciales han resultado las ayudas sociales para la población negra, en particular. En la novela, las palabras del Ministro de Mujeres, Niños y Gente con Discapacidad ante el parlamento vanagloriándose de las ayudas —que son televisadas y aceptadas como una verdad absoluta por Phyllis— se pueden entender como una crítica de Magona al sistema, ya que estas ayudas se convierten en un arma de doble filo que previene el verdadero avance de la población:

> 'Do you still remember that you didn't get any grants from government during apartheid? Yes, my friends, if you were classified Bantu you were not allowed to even apply for grants. Grants were only given to Whites, Coloureds, Indians and Asiatics! But this is your government, and it is doing all in its power to support the poorest of the poor. Look at how much money your party, the party in government, spends. Hear how much grant money you get every month!' (2021a: 28-29)

Oyedemi insiste en que en la Sudáfrica actual las divisiones sociales, culturales y económicas entre grupos —y dentro de los propios grupos— son visibles hasta el punto en que "the rainbow nationalism ideology is beginning to be questioned. […] It has led to a new form of nationalism fuelled by the anger of unmet economic needs and the inequality that the neoliberal capitalist policies continue to exacerbate" (2021: 221). Por lo tanto, lo que las generaciones que vivieron durante el *apartheid* consideran un gran avance social en la novela, el hecho de que sus descendientes puedan asistir a los mismos colegios que la población blanca, solo remarca la falta de oportunidades en otros ámbitos vitales para la generación de Busi. De hecho, Busi no solo comprende la precaria situación económica a la que se enfrenta, sino que repite el patrón de caer en la misma trampa que su madre al intentar depender de las ayudas del estado de por vida, planteándose la posibilidad de dañar la salud de su futura hija para obtener un mayor beneficio económico, como señala la novela a través de sus pensamientos: "And then Busi had a new idea: for a disabled child, the grant must be huge: a thousand… at least!" (2021a: 15).

Magona establece también una comparativa entre las comunidades rurales y urbanas, en lo que respecta a las relaciones entre individuos dentro de la comunidad y a la sencillez de una vida que parece escapar de las constricciones económicas presentes en las sociedades del siglo XXI. De este modo, la novela muestra las comunidades rurales como lugares que destacan por su solidaridad y sentido de comunidad, y el personaje de Busi se sorprende al ver a una comunidad en la que "Everybody knew everybody else" (104), estableciendo contrastes entre su barrio de Ciudad de Cabo y el pueblo en el que reside su abuela y reconociendo cómo el pueblo "had changed her, opening her eyes. […] a place where she could just be herself. […] The amazing spirit of community co-operation" (121). No obstante, a medida que la novela avanza, estas comunidades rurales que parecen haber mantenido una idea de solidaridad y comunidad tradicional o pre-colonial se transforman en lugares hostiles, donde es habitual encontrar ejemplos de torturas, acusaciones de brujería y asesinatos perpetrados por las nuevas generaciones, lo que aduce la degradación de la sociedad sudafricana y lo que realmente ocurre en esta sociedad cuando el pueblo duerme, como indica el propio título de la novela. Esta sociedad, ya sea rural o urbana, ha perdido, según la novela, parte de su identidad. Por consiguiente, Magona no solo critica la falta de solidaridad de una comunidad a otra, sino que remarca que tampoco existe solidaridad dentro de las propias comunidades. Para ello describe cómo las nuevas generaciones se han desligado del concepto tradicional de *Ubuntu*, que se define en la novela como "I am because/ You are. […]/ A human is human through the humanity of others./ That is the marrow of ubuntu" (193).

A mi entender, al igual que en la obra anterior, la autora intenta despertar a un país sumido en una rueda que no deja de girar a través de sus personajes. Por un lado, confronta al lector con una sociedad que parece abocada al fracaso por la actitud de las nuevas generaciones, criticando, al mismo tiempo el abandono que estas parecen haber sufrido: "The curse of a nation/ Children begetting children/ Long before they are ready to be parents/ As we are correcting things, they are disturbing them:/ What cruel times they live in, our leavelings!/ What cruel times, our neglected leavelings" (63). Por otro lado, critica a aquellas comunidades que perpetúan las diferencias establecidas por el régimen político anterior entre los distintos grupos raciales —como se señala a través de los pensamientos de la bisabuela sobre la violencia que aún se vive en los *townships*: "*that always-there Other — we create in the smallness and meanness of our hearts, in our inability to see the inescapable oneness of humanity; our blunted, blighted and blinded soul eyes.* Us-them! We-they! Making monsters of one another, making monsters of ourselves" (71, énfasis en el original)— para finalmente retratar la separación en la sociedad actual. Esto coincide con los planteamientos de Oyedemi acerca de la política capitalista neoliberal al recordar la falta de evolución del país, como se observa en el comentario de Phyllis, que se indigna con el gobierno al ver las noticias: "'In

the land of the first heart transplant, our teeth rot to mush. And all because of corruption. […] 'The formerly dispossessed continue to blame history, while the present is but a mirror thereof. Graft is king'" (73).[10]

El personaje de la bisabuela, representante de la comunidad rural a pesar de haber vivido y trabajado durante años en la ciudad, personifica la solidaridad sudafricana y el concepto de *Ubuntu*. Ante la problemática que va a vivir su nieta Busi durante y después de su embarazo, Khulu decide cuál debe ser su comportamiento hacia la familia: "*Always be of service to others*, came immediately to mind, followed closely by: *to help others in their becoming*" (153, énfasis en el original). Este comportamiento está directamente relacionado con su actitud ante las ayudas gubernamentales por la discapacidad de su bisnieta, negándose a depender de las mismas, puesto que "Those who need help should be helped, […] but *temporarily*. […] they must not be helped to stay poor. […] People must be helped to stand on their own feet — proud, independent agents in their own lives and the living of those lives!'" (173, énfasis en el original).

No obstante, el personaje principal de la novela, Mandla, es el que Magona utiliza para cerrar el círculo y enviar el mensaje de los antepasados a las nuevas generaciones. Su actitud ante la vida le permite huir de la sociedad sin valores que les rodea, y que está decidida a cambiar. El papel de Mandla puede relacionarse de nuevo con el concepto de *Ubuntu* así como con la visión de Stein acerca del rol de los miembros de la comunidad en la misma y su conexión con la mejora de la sociedad planteados previamente. Para Stein "es posible que la vida de la comunidad se paralice por completo en algunos trechos. […] Esto no significa que con ello se interrumpa el ser de la comunidad" (2005: 379), sino que es en este punto donde radica la importancia del individuo, así "[c]uando falla una comunidad, cuando su energía se paraliza, la salvación podrá llegarle únicamente de un individuo (y […] de una pluralidad de individuos), y en esa persona puede nacer una nueva fuente de energía" (403). De este modo, el personaje de Mandla puede ser entendido como la esperanza de la sociedad sudafricana, transformando a las personas con las que se relaciona, como señala la novela: "In everyone she spoke to, she encouraged self-revelation. Find your own strength and then find a fellow who would benefit from association with you and your particular strength, this was her motto. […] Respect for self; Respect for the other, whoever and whatever they might be" (Magona 2021a: 253-254).

Para llegar a más personas, y con ello a más comunidades, Mandla crea la asociación juvenil YoFoP (*Youth, Fulfil our Promise*) que promueve en sus miembros, jóvenes discapacitados como ella, una evolución individual con la idea de que fomenten a su vez cambios en otras personas de sus respectivas comunidades. De este modo, Mandla parece cumplir la teoría de Stein sobre el papel del individuo en su comunidad y en la solidaridad entre comunidades, ya que

un individuo que pertenezca a diversas comunidades, puede establecer entre ellas el efecto de una conexión inmediata. […] Puede suceder que yo me convierta en "eslabón" entre ambas comunidades en el sentido de que […] todo lo que afecte a la una trascienda también a la otra. Pero existe igualmente otra posibilidad distinta: cuando en el círculo de amigos al que pertenezco esbozo una imagen viva de mi familia, […] puede fluir un soplo vivificador y tonificante sobre quienes escuchan mis palabras. (2005: 418)

El personaje se vale de las enseñanzas y la ética del esfuerzo que le transmite la bisabuela, y es a su vez el vehículo a través del cual los antepasados envían mensajes y advertencias a las nuevas generaciones. El mensaje que se transmite durante los trances que experimenta desde niña y con las enseñanzas que promulga en las nuevas generaciones es claro: "Check your attitude: humility is not stupidity. Loyalty to self and loved ones is essential. Kindness and empathy — an open mind, willingness to be of worth to the world; this is how we build ourselves, our communities, our society" (Magona 2021a: 290).

La muerte de Mandla a manos de un policía que acude a intervenir el reparto de comida que realizaba la protagonista durante la pandemia de Covid-19 critica la falta de actuación gubernamental en Sudáfrica durante la pandemia y sirve como recordatorio para la sociedad sobre su propia responsabilidad en su bienestar social. Según Stein, "[l]a comunidad 'se fundamenta' esencialmente en individuos, y su carácter se modifica eventualmente, si los individuos que pertenecen a ella modifican su carácter, si ingresan en ella nuevos individuos o si individuos antiguos dejan de pertenecer a la misma" (2005: 448-449). De hecho, la propia Magona reconoce la importancia de los individuos a la hora de construir la solidaridad entre comunidades, y la repercusión que estos tienen en el futuro del país, puesto que

none of us can be a spectator in life; we all have innate abilities which are needed on earth to make life for all, a good life. […] The adults have a collective responsibility for the children of this country… they are ours in community and the distress in which the young wallow should be the business of the entire nation. (2021b)

De este modo, la novela insta al público lector a seguir el ejemplo de Mandla y formar parte de su comunidad y sociedad en un ambiente de solidaridad, responsabilizándose, a su vez, de su papel en las mismas.

5. Conclusiones

Partiendo de una perspectiva postcolonial —considerando los estudios de Bornman, Gordon y Oyedemi— y utilizando los conceptos de solidaridad y sociedad de autores como Atienza, de Lucas, Durkheim, de la Fuente y Young, y más concretamente la relación entre solidaridad y comunidad de Stein, este

artículo ha analizado dos obras de la autora sudafricana Sindiwe Magona. La autobiografía *Forced to Grow* (1992) y la novela *When the Village Sleeps* (2021), pertenecientes a los últimos años del *apartheid* y a la segunda década del siglo XXI, plasman la lucha personal de Magona a nivel individual y colectivo contra la opresión del sistema del *apartheid* y sus consecuencias en los años posteriores y, por ello, pueden ser interpretadas como herramientas que Magona utiliza en su crítica social y política hacia Sudáfrica. Ambas historias reclaman la importancia de movimientos sociales y religiosos en Sudáfrica, a través de los cuales una parte de la población, entre la que se incluye la propia autora, ha luchado por erradicar las desigualdades que separan a las distintas comunidades. Asimismo, Magona también se sirve de estas obras para compartir sus experiencias personales antes, durante y tras el *apartheid* con la idea de promover un apoyo social y una unión ante las distintas problemáticas de cada comunidad. Sin embargo, pese a que se refleja cierta esperanza, mostrando los cambios progresivos en las comunidades propias y vecinas que entran en contacto con las protagonistas Sindiwe y Mandla, la autora comparte también el desencanto vivido en ambas épocas, mostrando en la segunda obra la pervivencia de los problemas sociales y económicos, así como las diferencias que se establecieron entre razas en Sudáfrica. El concepto esperanzador de la nación arcoíris y de la vuelta a la tradición y la vida en comunidad, representadas por el concepto de *Ubuntu*, se ven distorsionados por el final de la novela. La solidaridad que muestra Mandla, encargándose de alimentar a la población durante la pandemia de Covid-19 se ve recompensada con la violencia que se ejerce contra ella; y su muerte, que queda impune, señala el camino que aún queda por recorrer en la sociedad sudafricana.

A pesar de que las obras estudiadas plantean la solidaridad como herramienta de cambio contra la opresión del sistema del *apartheid* y la separación y, por ende, contra la incomprensión entre comunidades que afianzaban dicho sistema, también insisten en que dichas problemáticas son difíciles de eliminar y siguen existiendo en el siglo XXI. El activismo y esperanzas presentes antes del *apartheid*, reflejados en la autobiografía, se tiñen parcialmente de desesperanza ante las comunidades sudafricanas que han abandonado su sentido de la solidaridad en favor de la inmediatez y el consumismo propios de esta nueva época, convirtiéndose la segunda obra en una llamada de atención a los sudafricanos. Es quizás por esta pervivencia de los problemas sociales y económicos después de tres décadas de libertad, que la octogenaria Sindiwe Magona continúa luchando activamente, involucrándose, tanto a título personal como en su rol como escritora y figura pública, en favor de la solidaridad entre comunidades en la sociedad sudafricana y recordándole a la población con sus historias que: "People must help themselves if they want to get anywhere in life!" (2021a: 11).

Notes

1. Este término fue acuñado por Desmond Tutu, clérigo sudafricano que recibió el Premio Nobel de la Paz en 1984. Los seis colores de la bandera representan "the convergence of diverse elements within South African society, taking the road ahead in unity" (Bornman 2006: 384).

2. Apartheid es un término afrikáans que significa separación y que fue utilizado para hacer referencia al sistema político sudafricano (1948-1994) que promovía la separación de las diferentes comunidades raciales que conformaban el país en todos los aspectos de la vida diaria.

3. En 1992 tuvo lugar un referéndum promovido por el presidente sudafricano Frederik W. de Klerk en el que la población blanca fue llamada a las urnas para decidir unilateralmente acerca de la transformación del gobierno sudafricano en un gobierno multirracial. El 27 de abril de 1994 tuvieron lugar las primeras elecciones libres en las que toda la población, independientemente de su raza, pudo votar al nuevo presidente del país. El resultado tuvo como consecuencia la llegada al poder del primer presidente negro en Sudáfrica, el activista y líder político encarcelado durante décadas, Nelson Mandela.

4. La primera parte de su autobiografía, *To My Children's Children*, fue publicada en 1990.

5. Concepto originado en las comunidades Xhosa y Zulú, que alude a las relaciones humanas y conexión entre individuos.

6. Entendemos la referencia a 'hombre' como 'persona o individuo'.

7. Término utilizado durante el apartheid para clasificar a la población sudafricana negra y que incluía a las comunidades Zulú, Xhosa, Pedi, Basotho, Nguni y Ndebele.

8. Las leyes de segregación racial del apartheid separaban a la población según su color de piel, estableciendo reservas —homelands y townships— que ocupaban el 8% del territorio como zona de residencia de las poblaciones negra y coloured, que constituían el 80% de la población.

9. Para más información acerca de la evolución de la relación entre estas organizaciones y el estado de Sudáfrica, consúltese el artículo de Raymond Simangaliso Kumalo (2014).

10. Para más información acerca de la pervivencia de las desigualdades económicas entre las distintas comunidades en Sudáfrica tras la abolición del apartheid, consúltese el artículo de Geoffrey Schneider "Neoliberalism and Economic Justice in South Africa: Revisiting the Debate on Economic Apartheid" (2003), que alude al papel negativo del neoliberalismo en la distribución económica en el país.

185

Works cited

Allport, Gordon. (1954) 1979. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.

Atienza, Manuel. 2023. "Sobre los conceptos de solidaridad y de dignidad humana. Un diálogo con Javier de Lucas". *Cuadernos Electrónicos de Filosofía del Derecho* 49: 29-37. <https://doi.org/10.7203/CEFD.49.26077>.

BLANCHOT, Maurice. 1990. *La escritura del desastre*. Trad. P. de Place. Monte Ávila Editores.

BORNMAN, Elirea. 2006. "National Symbols and Nation-Building in the Post-Apartheid South Africa". *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 30 (3): 383-399. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j. ijintrel.2005.09.005>.

BORNMAN, Elirea. 2022. "National Pride and Identification with National Symbols in a Divided Society: The Case of South Africa". *Identities. Global Studies in Culture and Power* 29 (3): 282-300. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2021.1994227>.

DE LUCAS, Javier. 1993. *El concepto de solidaridad*. Fontamara.

DURKHEIM, Émile. 1985. *La división del trabajo social*. Planeta-Agostini.

DURRHEIM, Kevin, Colin TREDOUX, Don FOSTER y John DIXON. 2011. "Historical Trends in South African Race Attitudes". *South African Journal of Psychology* 41 (3): 263-278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0 08124631104100302>.

FINCHILESCU, Gillian y Colin TREDOUX. 2010. "The Changing Landscape of Intergroup Relations in South Africa". *Journal of Social Issues* 66 (2): 223-236. <https://doi.org/10.1111 /j.1540-4560.2010.01642.x>.

FOUCAULT, Michel. 1999. *Estrategias de poder*. Trad. J. Varela y F. Álvarez Uría. Paidós.

GIBSON, James L. 2009. *Overcoming Historical Injustices: Land Reconciliation in South Africa*. Cambridge U.P.

GIBSON, James y Christopher CLAASSEN. 2010. "Racial Reconciliation in South Africa: Interracial Contact and Changes over Time". *Journal of Social Issues* 66: 255-272.

GIL-NAVEIRA, Isabel. 2019. *Cuatro mujeres escriben África: El desarrollo de la identidad en la narrativa de A.A. Aidoo, B. Emecheta, G. Ogot y S. Magona*. The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd.

GORDON, Steven L. 2023. "Pan-African Solidarity in South Africa: An Empirical Public Opinion Analysis". *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 94 (101789): 1-12.

HLONGWANE, Gugu. 2004. "Writing Apartheid for the Post-Apartheid Era: Magona's Autobiographical Works". En Koyana, Siphokazi (ed.) *Sindiwe Magona. The First Decade*. University of KwaZulu-Nata Press: 35-50.

KOYANA, Siphokazi. 2001. "Womanism and Nation-building in Sindiwe Magona's Autobiographies". *Agenda 50 (Special Issue on African Feminisms)*: 64-70. Agenda Feminist Media.

KUMALO, Raymond S. 2014. "Facts and Faction: The Development of Church and State Relations in Democratic South Africa from 1994-2012". *Journal of Church and State* 56 (4): 627-643.

LIPUMA, Edward y Thomas A. KOELBLE. 2011. "Rituals of Solidarity in the New South Africa". *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 11 (1): 1-24.

MACCRONE, Ian D. 1949. "Race Attitudes". En Hellman, Ellen (ed.) *Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa*. Oxford U.P.: 669-705.

MAGONA, Sindiwe. 1992. *Forced to Grow*. The Women's Press.

MAGONA, Sindiwe. 2021a. *When the Village Sleeps*. Picador Africa.

186

Magona, Sindiwe. 2021b. "Author Q&A: When the Village Sleeps, a New Novel from the legendary Dr Sindiwe Magona". *Pan Macmillan* (5 mayo). <https://www.panmacmillan.co.za/blogs/news/author-q-a-when-the-village-sleeps-a-new-novel-from-the-legendary-dr-sindiwe-magona>. Consultado el 4 de junio de 2024.

Oyedemi, Toks Dele. 2021. "Postcolonial Casualties: 'Born-frees' and Decolonization in South Africa". *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 39 (2): 214-229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2020.1864305>.

Pérez de la Fuente, Óscar. 2021. "Vulnerabilidad y solidaridad". *Ius Fugit* 24: 15-38.

Pettigrew, Thomas F. 1960. "Social Distance Attitudes of South African Students". *Social Forces* 38: 246-253.

Pettigrew, Thomas F. 1998. "Intergroup Contact Theory". *Annual Review of Psychology* 49: 68-85.

Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

Schneider, Geoffrey. 2003. "Neoliberalism and Economic Justice in South Africa: Revisiting the Debate on Economic Apartheid". *Review of Social Economy* 61 (1): 23-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0034676032000050257>

Shober, Dianne. 2021. "Sindiwe Magona". *South African History Online*. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/sindiwe-magona>. Consultado el 4 de junio de 2024.

Stein, Edith. 2005. *Obras completas II. Escritos filosóficos (etapa fenomenológica: 1915-1920)*. Editorial de Espiritualidad/Editorial Monte Carmelo/Ediciones El Carmen.

Stengel, Richard. 2009. *Mandela's Way: Fifteen Lessons on Life, Love and Courage*. Prólogo de Nelson Mandela. Crown Publishers.

Tutu, Desmond. 1999. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. Doubleday.

Van Den Berghe, Pierre. 1962. "Race Attitudes in Durban, South Africa". *Journal of Social Psycholog*y 57: 55-72.

Villada Castro, Carolina. 2020. "Foucault-Blanchot: la solidaridad de los anónimos". *Universitas Philosophica* 37 (75): 175-202. <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.uph37-75.fbsa>.

Young, Iris Marion. 2000. *La justicia y la política de la diferencia*. Trad. S. Álvarez. Cátedra.

187

"FIGHT TAUGHT RIGHT":[1] EDITH GARRUD AND THE ART OF SUFFRAJITSU IN *OLD BAGGAGE* AND *ENOLA HOLMES*

"LA LUCHA BIEN ENSEÑADA": EDITH GARRUD Y EL ARTE DEL SUFFRAJITSU EN *OLD BAGGAGE* Y *ENOLA HOLMES*

<https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202511192>

MARIANA RIPOLL-FONOLLAR
Universidad de las Islas Baleares
mariana.ripoll@uib.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3284-5820>

Abstract

This article explores the revival and representation of Edith Garrud, the art of suffrajitsu and the jujitsuffragettes in Lissa Evans's novel *Old Baggage* (2018) and Harry Bradbeer's *Enola Holmes* films (2020, 2022). These works revisit the figure of this jujitsu instructor and her fellow suffragette trainees to respond to certain misrepresentations of these women in both historical and contemporary narratives and depictions of the suffragette movement. By resorting to the figure of Garrud and her self-defence lessons for suffragettes, the novel and films vindicate the contributions of these women to feminism. The works not only shed light on jujitsu's usefulness and relevance for women's own protection, but also on the potential of this martial art to empower women and subvert gender stereotypes. *Old Baggage* and *Enola Holmes* offer more accurate and faithful versions of the jujitsuffragettes and their trainer than those offered by detractors of women's suffrage during the period, thus restoring and commemorating the contribution of these women to first-wave feminism.

Keywords: suffragette, Edith Garrud, *Old Baggage*, *Enola Holmes*, feminist self-defence.

Resumen

Este artículo explora el resurgimiento y la representación de Edith Garrud, el arte del *suffrajitsu* y las *jujitsuffragettes* en la novela *Old baggage* (2018), de Lissa Evans y las películas de *Enola Holmes*, de Harry Bradbeer (2020, 2022). Estos productos

189

rescatan la figura de esta instructora de jiu-jitsu y sus compañeras y aprendices *suffragettes* para responder a ciertas tergiversaciones sobre estas mujeres presentes en narrativas y representaciones del movimiento sufragista tanto históricas como contemporáneas. Al recurrir a la figura de Garrud y sus lecciones de autodefensa a las *suffragettes*, la novela y las películas reivindican las contribuciones de estas mujeres al feminismo. Estas obras no sólo iluminan la utilidad y relevancia del jiu-jitsu para la propia protección de las mujeres, sino también el potencial de este arte marcial para empoderar a las mujeres y subvertir los estereotipos de género. *Old Baggage* y *Enola Holmes* ofrecen versiones más precisas y fieles de las *jujitsuffragettes* y su entrenadora que las ofrecidas por los detractores del sufragio femenino durante ese período restaurando y conmemorando así la contribución de estas mujeres a la primera ola del feminismo.

Palabras clave: suffragette, Edith Garrud, *Old Baggage*, *Enola Holmes*, autodefensa feminista.

1. Introduction

190

There has recently been a growing offer of women's self-defence courses worldwide, triggered by women's "desire to overcome fear" (Burman 2024) and "tak[e] responsibility for their own safety" (Roussel 2023) due to the never-ending threat of, and potential exposure to male violence in both the domestic and public domains. Just to give a few examples, a "Women Fight Back class" teaching the Israeli self-defence method Krav Maga is offered in Paris. A new self-defence course in mixed martial arts, including boxing and jujitsu, is also available for Torontonian women as a result of the "partner violence […] epidemic in Ontario" (Burman 2024). Its founder, Nikki Saltz, explains that she aims to provide women with a "safe space beyond self-defence training" (2024), a space where they can share their experiences, support each other and feel empowered. Sisterhood and emancipation, the core course teachings, elucidate the links between women's self-defence training and feminism. Yet these ties are not new, since feminist self-defence is not a phenomenon of the present, and neither is gender violence.

In order to trace the origins of feminist self-defence it is pertinent to go back to the suffragette movement. Members of Emmeline Pankhurst's organisation of suffragettes, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), showed interest in self-defence techniques after the physical and sexual violence used by the police during a march to the House of Commons on 18 November 1910 (Elliott 2018: 318). The police attacks lasted for around six hours and concluded with the arrest of 115 women and 4 men (Green 1997: 20). This event became one of the most violent episodes experienced by Pankhurst's troops, for many suffragettes

were "beaten, pinched and mistreated, and [some of them were even] indecently assaulted" (Billington 1982: 671). This episode was commonly known as Black Friday due to the brutality several WSPU members faced at hands of the police (Nym Mayhall 2003: 101). Black Friday marked a turning point, for it not only accelerated WSPU's shift towards more radical and violent forms of militancy but also encouraged suffragettes to take up jujitsu, a Japanese martial art based on self-defence that consists of deploying the attacker's strength and weight against him (Godfrey 2012: 91).

Suffragettes' deployment of jujitsu set an example for future feminist movements, since it emphasises the relevance and correlation of physical independence and empowerment. In this context, it is important to revisit the figure of one suffragette in particular: Edith Garrud, who in the early twentieth century became one of the British pioneers of jujitsu (Kelly 2019: 9). Together with her husband, William, Garrud first learnt jujitsu at Mr. Barton-Wright's Bartitsu[2] School in London, and then at the Golden Square's training school run by two Japanese instructors Yukio Tani and Sadakazu Uyenishi. William and Edith Garrud eventually took over the ownership of Tani and Uyenishi's martial arts hall —or *dojo* as referred to in Japan— as well as of their jujitsu teachings (2019: 11-12). Subsequently, Edith opened her own training centre at Argyll Place and offered jujitsu lessons for women and children (Godfrey 2012: 99-100). In 1909, Garrud gave a jujitsu demonstration at the Prince's Skating Rink's Bazaar, organised by the WSPU, where she showed her ability to throw a policeman to the ground despite his physical advantage over her (2012: 99). After this event, Garrud became involved in the Cause[3] and offered jujitsu classes exclusively to suffragettes twice a week (Godfrey 2012: 99; Callan et al. 2019: 536). She was in charge of training Mrs. Pankhurst's Amazons or 'The Bodyguard', a group of around thirty women whose role was to protect the WSPU's leaders from (re)arrest (Godfrey 2012: 99-100; Kelly 2019: 9). The term 'suffrajitsu' was coined to refer specifically to suffragettes' deployment of jujitsu (Callan et al. 2019: 531) and the term 'jujutsufragettes' to allude to the union's bodyguard (Kelly 2019: 13-14). Garrud's jujitsu instructions provided suffragettes with valuable skills and tools to defend themselves from anti-suffragist assaults, police attacks and arrest.

Despite her significant contributions to the Cause, Garrud has remained mostly unknown until recently, and absent from the popular imagery of the British suffrage movement. Scholar Simon Kelly claims the material about Garrud is reduced to a few newspaper articles, satirical drawings and magazine reports (2019: 19). Like many other WSPU members, Garrud has probably been forgotten because, when revisiting the suffragette movement, the focus has been mostly placed on the leaders of the organisation, more specifically, on the Pankhursts (Kelly 2019: 21).

191

Nevertheless, there has been a growing interest in honouring "this little-known suffragette" (Williams 2012) and rescuing her from oblivion. Such concern started in 2012 with the unveiling of a commemorative plaque —"Edith Garrud 1872-1971: The suffragette who knew jiu-jitsu lived here"— at her former house in London. The increasing popularisation of self-defence training for women has probably sparked curiosity towards the origins of feminist self-defence, and thus, towards Garrud. When looking into the roots of feminist self-defence, however, one realises the limited sources available about the pioneering role of Garrud, which has "added mystery surrounding Edith and her fellow jujutsuffragettes" (Kelly 2019: 19-20). The wish to unravel such a mystery has resulted in a diverse range of cultural, literary and media products and references related to the suffragettes' jujitsu instructor and her trainees.

Accounts of Garrud's resurgence have appeared in different fields ranging from the press —with magazine and newspaper articles including *El País*'s "Suffrajitsu: The women who used martial arts to fight for the vote" (Bravo 2023) and *Stylist*'s "Everything You Need to Know about The Awesome Art of Suffrajitsu" (Keegan 2018)— to media productions like Katherine and Tony Wolf's 2018 documentary *No Man Shall Protect Us: The Hidden History of the Suffragette Bodyguards* and Sarah Gavron's film *Suffragette* (2015). This offers an overview of the suffragette movement through Maude Watts, a working-class woman who progressively becomes involved with Pankhurst's union. Although Edith Garrud is not present in the film, there are some allusions to her, once again through the actress Helena Bonham Carter, who renames her character Edith in homage to the suffragette jujitsu instructor (Kelly 2019: 20). In addition, there is a short scene in which Maude, played by Carey Mulligan, is thrown to a mat by Edith, which hints at suffragettes' usage of martial arts to defend themselves from potential male attacks and sexual aggressions.[4] The figure of Garrud also reappeared on stage thanks to Kate Prince and Priya Parmar's musical *Sylvia* (2023). With a predominantly Black cast, the musical addressed the often-ignored racial aspect of the women's suffrage movement while emphasising the underrepresentation of Black people in both history and the arts. Although the musical focuses on Sylvia Pankhurst, it offers an overview of the suffragette campaign, devoting a scene to choreograph jujitsu moves, and pays homage to Garrud, whose role is here played by the Black actress and dancer Jade Hackett.

Literature has also been the target of Garrud's comeback. The 2018 centenary of partial voting rights for some British women generated manifold publications about the suffrage movement such as David Roberts's children's book *Suffragettes: The Battle for Equality* (2018), which includes a few pages about the art of suffrajitsu and the Amazons. Other authors writing suffragette stories for child audiences

include Iszi Lawrence, whose book *The Unstoppable Letty Pegg* (2020) follows a protagonist learning jujitsu from the suffragettes, and features Garrud as a key character. Additionally, it is important to highlight two graphic novels for young adults centred exclusively on the figure of Garrud and the suffragettes' bodyguard: Tony Wolf and Joao Vieira's trilogy *Suffrajitsu: Mrs. Pankhurst's Amazons* (2015), and *Jujitsufragistas: Las Amazonas de Londres*, published in Spain in 2023 (Xavier et al.) at the same time as the English version in the US, but originally published in 2020 in France. The fact that not all products of and references to Garrud and the suffragettes' self-defence have arisen from the British context reveals the transnational interest towards the origins of feminist self-defence as well as the popularisation of Garrud and the present-day relevance of her training in other countries beyond the UK.

All these literary and cultural representations revive the herstory[5] of suffrajitsu to commemorate the movement, as they give voice to Garrud and the Amazons and emphasise their courage, bravery and empowerment. Against this background, this article focuses on two other examples that update the figure of Garrud and the jujitsuffragettes for contemporary audiences: Lissa Evans's novel *Old Baggage* (2018) and Netflix's *Enola Holmes* film (2020) and its sequel, Enola Holmes II (2022), the last two based on Nancy Springer's young adult series of detective novels *The Enola Holmes Mysteries* (2006-2023). These examples have been chosen because of their instructive potential in presenting feminist self-defence and the history of women's resistance to younger audiences and general readers unfamiliar with the suffragette movement. Both Evans and Bradbeer resort to fiction to offer accessible and captivating stories that emphasise the contribution of martial arts to women's emancipation and political activism. The didactic approach behind Evans's work of historical fiction is clear in its inclusion of a protagonist that teaches lessons about the women's suffrage movement and later creates a girls' club and trains them in jujitsu. The *Enola Holmes* films exploit the inherent didacticism of the young adult books on which they are based, prompting audiences to (un)learn certain ideas about the suffragette movement. Although Springer's books refer to Enola's mother Eudoria and her involvement with the women's suffrage movement, they do not develop this aspect. Hence, for this study, I have chosen to focus on the films, as they incorporate the figure of Garrud into the story, which is not present in the books. The films develop Eudoria's role as a suffragette who knows jujitsu and teaches it to her daughter, thus becoming "the first mainstream production to feature suffrajitsu-style action as a major plot point" ("Martial Arts" 2020). This article thus analyses *Old Baggage* and *Enola Holmes* as representative examples of contemporary cultural artefacts revisiting Garrud and the Amazons. I claim that the novel and the movies under analysis challenge certain misrepresentations of the women's suffrage movement and the

193

suffragettes, such as their portrayal as inherently violent individuals and their association with terrorism and prejudices stemming from their use of military tactics such as arson and bombing. Additionally, I argue that by revisiting the art of suffrajitsu, Evans and Bradbeer highlight the suffragettes' contribution to feminism by representing the politicisation of women's bodies through jujitsu. Such a portrayal underscores suffragettes' use of this martial art to challenge gender prejudices and empower women.

Old Baggage follows the story of Mattie Simpkin, a middle-aged Londoner who was active in the suffragette movement. Set primarily in 1928, as universal suffrage nears approval, Mattie believes the fight for equality is not over, so she delivers lectures on the women's struggle and then founds the Hampstead Heath Girls' Club. Drawing from the martial art of jujitsu, she trains the club members —called the Amazons— in both combat techniques and the ideological skills needed to embrace their new roles as enfranchised citizens. The *Enola Holmes* films are about Sherlock Holmes's little sister Enola, who in each movie must solve a mystery. To accomplish her missions and fight back against her enemies, Enola resorts to the art of jujitsu she learnt thanks to her suffragette mother Eudoria, played by Helena Bonham Carter. Eduoria's knowledge of jujitsu comes from lessons received from Edith Grayson, a self-defence instructor whose character clearly alludes to Garrud, here represented again by a Black actress, Susan Wokoma.[6]

In the first section of this article, I will deploy different analyses of feminist historiography and women's suffrage (Billington 1982; Green 1997; Nym Mayhall 2003; Purvis 2013; Elliott 2018; Cooper-Cunningham 2019) to unravel how the novel and films contest suffragettes' traditional association with violence and account for their deployment of insurgent tactics, either as a means of protest or self-defence, but never to hurt anyone. Subsequently, I will examine suffragettes' association with terrorism, drawing on examples from Evans and Bradbeer to illustrate how the novel and films strategically engage with this theme to contest the presentation of WSPU members as terrorists. Finally, I shall point out how the analysed products also disprove the falsehood that women only became enfranchised thanks to their contributions during wartime, focusing rather on the suffragettes' bravery. In the second section, I will first delve into the political functions of jujitsu training halls to illustrate they were not just seen as sports or self-defence clubs but as safe spaces for suffragettes. Then I shall focus on the novel and films' references to the dual potential of suffrajitsu to defy gender biases and expectations. To explore these ideas, I rely on historical studies on women's involvement in sport (Kay 2008; Harvey et al. 2013; Cahn 2015), archival material related to Edith Garrud and the suffragettes (Godfrey 2012: 100; Rouse 2017; Callan et al. 2019; Kelly 2019) and a variety of contemporary feminist theoretical

frameworks (Butler 1990; Butler 1993; Ahmed 2004; Gillis et al. 2004; Budgeon 2011; Ahmed 2017; Rivers 2017; Genz 2021). These studies will be helpful to illustrate jujitsu's political and feminist potential since suffragettes' deployment of this martial art served both as a strategy to challenge prejudices about women's physical strength and power, and as a method of empowerment and emancipation for women.

2. Suffragettes Fight Back: From Defencelessness to Self-Defence

As explained in the introduction, *Old Baggage* and *Enola Holmes* are works that incorporate the figure of Garrud and the art of jujitsu to contest one of the most recurrent stereotypes of the suffragettes: their portrayal as violent subjects by nature. During the women's movement, its detractors resorted to various images —mainly propagandistic posters— to promote a counter-discursive narrative against the Cause. These biased representations were mostly disseminated by members of openly anti-suffrage groups. One of the largest anti-suffrage parties was the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage (NLOWS), which was created by Mrs. Humphry Ward in 1910, and by 1914 had a total of 42,000 members. The NLOWS resulted from the union of two existing anti-suffrage societies: The Women's National Anti-Suffrage League and the Men's League for Opposing Woman Suffrage. Among its members were renowned personalities, most notably Queen Victoria (1819-1901), who considered the Cause "a wicked folly" (Roberts 2018: 48); PM Asquith, known as the most resentful enemy by the suffragettes; and Home Secretary Winston Churchill (1874-1965), who was much criticised for his cruelty when ordering repressive actions against suffragette activists during Black Friday. The most reactionary and anti-pedagogical representations against the women's suffrage campaign presented its members as the instigators of violence, and policemen and anti-suffragists as the victims (Rouse 2017: 131-133), grotesquely depicting suffragettes as aggressive, dehumanised cannibals, even inciting violence against them.[7] Such inaccurate depictions deliberately reversed roles, since the police and some men from the crowd were the ones throwing spoiled fruits and vegetables at suffragettes, and even verbally abusing and sexually assaulting them, often making of suffragettes the victims of taunts, pushes, kicks and blows (127). Different suffrage societies responded to such an array of misrepresentations with their own images and artistic productions to clarify that women were not the agents but the object of violent attacks, and to vindicate their true objective: equality between men and women, specifically in the political terrain.[8] Garrud herself sought to challenge anti-suffragists' perception

of jujitsuffragettes as "masculinised Amazons preying on innocent policemen" (133). Mattie, the protagonist of Old Baggage, voices Garrud's preoccupations in emphasising suffragettes' role as victims of aggression, for she claims that

> women asking questions of Cabinet Ministers at public discussions would be dragged from the hall, punched and kicked, shaken and indecently manhandled, often in full view of an unprotesting audience. I myself have a permanent depression in one calf resulting from a steward jabbing the ferrule of his umbrella directly into the muscle. (Evans 2018: 31-32)

Garrud declared that the martial art was only taught for self-defence (Callan et al. 2019: 540) to provide suffragettes with methods to protect themselves from possible attacks and (sexual) assaults, thus alluding to jujitsu's principles of using "soft flowing movements to absorb, disrupt and redirect force and aggression rather than seeking to oppose [the attackers] with brute strength" (Kelly 2019: 9).

Besides jujitsu moves, Garrud trained women in the use of domestic tools and homemade arms such as the wooden Indian club that jujitsuffragettes concealed under her garments and used for defensive ends (Godfrey 2012: 100; Kelly 2019: 17). Like Garrud, Mattie combines her jujitsu tactics with the use of weapons to face potential enemies. The novel opens with a reference to a club that Mattie usually carries in her bag for protection, which in turn hints at the title "old baggage", possibly in reference to the equipment that Mattie would carry. She is later depicted practicing jujitsu using domestic weapons: "she windmilled through another exercise, then tucked the rolling pin under one arm and lunged with the club towards an imaginary policeman, feinting and thrusting" (Evans 2018: 57). Mattie reproduces Garrud's methodology, for she bases the training of her girls' club on the art of jujitsu and instructs her pupils to rely on the use of weapons "as a protest; as a means of defence: as an exercise in coordination", adding that arms do not just serve to initiate conflicts but are also useful to stop them (67). This claim further calls into question the belief that suffragettes were the instigators of violence and proves that Mattie serves as the voice for Garrud, for she also warns her pupils that "violence should always be a last resort and have a purpose" (69) and claims, "I am not teaching these skills with violence in mind [...]. I also make certain there is no one at all in the next-door gardens during our practice sessions" (78). This latter statement in turn appears as an illustration that jujitsu's philosophy fits well with the WSPU's ideology, which was based on Mrs. Pankhurst's premise of not hurting anyone in the name of the Cause (Purvis 2013: 584).

The *Enola Holmes* films also defy the idea of suffragettes being the perpetrators rather than the object of violent attacks. The jujitsu scenes included in the movies illustrate either women practicing this martial art between them or using it to defend themselves when facing aggression or being chased. For instance, in the first

film, Enola puts her jujitsu skills into practice with Edith Grayson, unsuccessfully trying to throw her to the ground with "the corkscrew manoeuvre", one of the jujitsu moves that she later tries again to combat a man in the street who pushes her into a wall and her head into a water barrel. In the same manner that Arthur Conan Doyle had Sherlock Holmes use Bartitsu skills to fight Professor Moriarty in "The Adventure of the Empty House" (1903), the movies depict Enola practicing and using jujitsu to repel her enemies. This is a novelty that Bradbeer incorporates into the story, emphasising jujitsu's potential for women's self-defence not only through its protagonist but also through other characters, including Eudoria and Edith Grayson. As reflected in the second film, mother and daughter appear together with Grayson using their jujitsu moves against three police officers who are running after them. The aforementioned examples highlight the actual purpose of jujitsu, particularly in the context of the suffrage movement, and suggest that similar to Conan Doyle's popularisation of Bartitsu (Dorlin 2022: 207), Bradbeer contributes to the re-popularisation of jujitsu for women's agency, independence and empowerment. In turn, his film adaptations memorialise women pioneers in feminist self-defence, for they simultaneously pay homage and give visibility to the sometimes silenced voices of Garrud and those suffragettes who bravely and exclusively used this martial art in self-defence.

The films further address the connection between suffragettes and violence by denying the links established between the movement and terrorism. WSPU members such as Emily Davison and other suffragettes involved in acts of bombing and arson have at times been related to terrorism (Pugh 2013: 5), and they have been even referred to as "Britain's forgotten terrorists" (Webb 2014). Historian Simon Webb argues that the violence that these suffragettes conducted has been frequently omitted from the history of suffrage and questions the extent to which such violent tactics postponed rather than contributed to the achievement of the franchise. The *Enola Holmes* films somehow respond to Webb's claim of the omission of suffragettes' more combative tactics, including numerous references to their acts of arson. One of the first allusions to explosive material appears in the first film, in Edith Grayson's dojo, where Enola sees a box with bangers — the same she sees at her home, in the meeting room where her mother and other suffragettes plan to set fire to different locations around London. After this episode, Enola discovers a storehouse filled with bombs, bangers and barrels inscribed with "dragon firework", "gun powder" and "black gunpowder amberlite". There are also pamphlets that read "Votes for Women. Make Your Voices Heard", "Protest unrest and civil disobedience" featuring the "Orsini bomb" (Bradbeer 2020: min. 48),[9] and a newspaper with the headline "The dynamite outrages at the West End London" featuring images of a bombed-out building and a post box burnt down. The sequel also contains references to suffragettes' acts of arson since it opens with

197

an image of Eudoria dropping an incendiary device into a post box and becoming the target of search and arrest as a result. These examples contribute to the questioning of suffragettes' image as terrorists since they show that the WSPU's used incendiary devices against property, not against people, and simultaneously bring to light what suffragettes were willing to do for the Cause.

The *Enola Holmes* films not only challenge the scepticism towards the WSPU's more combative approach but also defy other deep-rooted misconceptions about suffragettes. By giving visibility to their more extreme militant tactics, the films emphasise the extent of suffragettes' courage and bravery to question the recurrent misbelief that women's suffrage was approved exclusively thanks to their contributions during wartime (Nym Mayhall 1995: 334). The movies in turn question other prejudices and stereotypical representations of the suffragettes as careless mothers.[10] This becomes clear at the end of the first film, when Eudoria tells Enola, "I didn't leave you because I didn't love you, I left for you because I couldn't bear to have this world be your future. So I had to fight. You have to make some noise if you want to be heard" (Bradbeer 2020: min. 113), in turn recalling Emmeline Pankhurst's "make some noise" motto.

198

Evans' novel refutes the same misrepresentations of Pankhurst's followers as those contested in *Enola Holmes*. On the one hand, Mattie's lectures are oriented toward resisting suffragettes' role as terrorists. In one of these lectures, she argues that suffragettes never intended to harm anyone despite being the target of violent attacks. A man from the audience contests her claim, referring to the arson and bombing campaign some suffragettes carried out during 1913-1914 (Bearman 2007: 864), which included burning golf courses, cricket pavilions, the orchid house at Kew Gardens and the Oxford boathouse (Roberts 2018: 98). When asked about suffragettes' "criminal acts of arson", Mattie replies that "men have been allowed to use bloodshed and disorder to gain their freedom —have been celebrated for their passion in pursuit of the vote— and yet the suffragettes, who hurt not a single person with their fires, are condemned" (Evans 2018: 33). On the other hand, Mattie denies that women won the right to vote due to their work during wartime. This becomes evident when a member of the audience suggests this idea and she responds that it was "only the Government's fear that militancy would return after the war that forced the bill through" (37). Mattie thus devotes her lectures to the suffragettes' pre-war contributions to reinforce the idea that the right to vote was achieved thanks to suffragettes' deeds and sacrifices, a purpose that becomes clear in her first lecture when she claims

> I hope over the next hour and a half, to convey something of the history and methods of the militant suffragette movement, to slice through the integument of myth and slander that has so often overlaid the truth of its beliefs and actions, and to expose to clear view those of its aims that have yet to be achieved. (28)

Therefore, by challenging the different misbeliefs about the WSPU and their members, Evans and Bradbeer prove their interest in counteracting biased references to suffragettes such as their perception as the UK's "forgotten terrorists" and rather reclaiming their role as Britain's (at times) forgotten feminist pioneers.

3. Suffragettes' Bodies as Battlegrounds: The Politicisation of Jujitsu

Old Baggage and *Enola Holmes* not only revisit the herstory of suffrajitsu and the figure of Garrud to question some of the aforementioned misapprehensions surrounding the WSPU and its members, but also to emphasise their courage and empowerment. Both the novel and the films mirror how jujitsu underwent a politicisation process in the context of the suffrage movement, as this martial art was not only seen as a sport or a self-defence tool but also as a vehicle to challenge gender biases regarding women's capabilities. Suffragettes' deployment of jujitsu can be seen as a performative expression defying traditional gender constructs, which echoes Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990). Butler argues that "gender is performatively produced [adding that] there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 1990: 34). Suffragettes' expression of strength and resilience through jujitsu thus contributed to the resignification of female bodies in the public domain and the political context. It is not surprising that Evans and Bradbeer resorted to suffrajitsu to make visible and reclaim suffragettes' contribution to feminism, since it became a form of literally embodying the political as jujitsu offered suffragettes a vivid and concrete manifestation of their political struggle. Pankhurst's followers relied on the politicisation of their bodies throughout their campaign. WSPU members turned to militancy, convinced that the women's movement needed "a new approach, a shift from the gently audible to the boldly visible" (Evans 2018: 30), as Mattie replicates. At the beginning of their campaign, they believed in the relevance that the body on display had for the Cause and combined fashionable femininity with activism based on the idea of an "ornamental body as a civic body" (Green 1997: 3). At this stage, marches, processions and demonstrations became their main strategies to demand enfranchisement. At a more advanced phase of the movement, many suffragettes resorted to acts of civil disobedience and were consequently incarcerated. While in prison, they needed to find a way to keep fighting, which resulted in their shift from the ideal of the "ornamental body" to the image of the "docile body", as they decided to go on hunger strikes and undergo forcible feeding for the Cause (25). In her work *Living a Feminist Life*,

199

Sara Ahmed discusses the notion of wilfulness in the context of contemporary feminism as "the persistence in the face of having been brought down" and presents persistence as "an act of civil disobedience" (2017: 84). Against this background, suffragettes' willingness to adopt militant tactics and sacrifice their bodies for the Cause can also be read as an act of feminist wilfulness. Towards the end of their campaign, a significant number of suffragettes took up jujitsu lessons and self-defence training became a further way of turning the physical into something political (Rouse 2017: 6-7). Hence, Ahmed's theorisation proves to be relevant once again. Her notion of "feminist killjoy" resonates with the actions of the suffragettes who can be seen as "willing to get in the way" (2017: 66) —to borrow Ahmed's phrasing— since they refused to conform to the Edwardian ideal of a woman based on passivity and subjugation and persistently used their bodies to challenge this traditional perception of womanhood.

Yet researchers have constantly ignored or failed to recognise the potential that practicing jujitsu had in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries for women's personal and political empowerment and have merely focused on the usefulness of this martial art for purposes of self-defence (Rouse 2017: 8). Sport historians, however, have often perceived women's involvement in sports as part of the emancipation movement (Kay 2007: 539). Either consciously or not, women's participation in physical activities and competitions became a tool to claim the control and enjoyment of their bodies, so advocates of women's sports "shared an agenda and an activist spirit with self-defined feminists involved in reproductive rights campaigns, antirape organising, women's health clinics, women's self-defence classes, lesbian feminist activism, and self-help efforts that encouraged women to explore their own sexuality" (Cahn 2015: 252). In the context of the women's suffrage campaign, the Gymnastic Teachers' Suffrage Society, founded in 1909, was the only women's sport association that actively took part in the suffrage movement (Kay 2008: 1347-1348). Nevertheless, when it comes to the involvement of women sport instructors and practitioners in the Cause, Garrud's contribution to women's emancipation as a jujitsu pioneer for women in Western Europe was unique (Callan et al. 2019: 531). Garrud not only helped to popularise jujitsu at the beginning of the twentieth century with her self-defence lessons for women, but also delved into its political potential through her writings (Kelly 2019: 14). Garrud emphasised women's situation of vulnerability in England during the Edwardian period and relied on jujitsu's reformative capability in conjunction with the suffragette movement (Callan et al. 2019: 536). WSPU members also acknowledged that women's lack of political emancipation was related to their physical and sexual oppression (Rouse 2017: 149). Suffragettes believed that this martial art offered them a means of rebellion against their subjugation; a way to put equality "into motion" (Dorlin 2022: 43),

200

and challenge definitions of women as "the weaker sex". During the suffrage campaign and the post-suffrage era, women's sport instructors advocated women-only lessons, since they defended the idea of physical exercise exclusively offered by and for women (Kidd in Harvey et al. 2013: 54). Against this background, Garrud taught jujitsu to women and offered sessions exclusively to suffragettes twice a week in her dojo at Argyll Place (Callan et al. 2019: 536; Kelly 2019: 14). Inspired by Garrud's writings, demonstrations and instructions, suffragettes "politicized their bodies", embracing the possibilities that jujitsu offered them to "struggle together, for themselves and by themselves" (Dorlin 2022: 46), and used this martial art as a tool to defy and both literally and metaphorically overthrow the patriarchal system that oppressed them (Kelly 2019: 9). Thus, the figure of Garrud attests to the "politicization of women and sport" (Callan et al. 2019: 531) since her dojo was not just perceived as a training centre but also as a political site of struggle.

The political dimension jujitsu acquired in the context of the women's movement is manifested in both *Old Baggage* and *Enola Holmes*. Mattie's and Edith Grayson's sessions recall Garrud's exclusive lessons for women and suffragettes, because the club Mattie creates is only for girls, and when Edith's dojo features in the films, only women appear training in the background. Mattie's house and Edith's dojo also serve the political functions of Garrud's training halls. Garrud's dojos in Argyll Street and Golden Square provided suffragettes a place to train for physical combat, but also became "safe spaces" for their gatherings and, more specifically, for those campaigners who sought a place to hide from the police and avoid being (re)arrested, and to recover physically after being released from prison (Godfrey 2012: 101; Callan et al. 2019: 539; Kelly 2019: 17). Mattie's place, for instance, is referred to as "the Mousehold" because, during the suffrage campaign, it was used as a refuge and a place of recovery for suffragettes, known as "mice", once liberated from jail under the Cat and Mouse Act (Evans 2018: 54).[11] Edith Grayson's training centre, for instance, is used to store explosive material. Besides, both Enola and Sherlock visit Edith's dojo to see if their missing mother is hiding there, which again reminds us of the political ends of Garrud's training halls. These examples illustrate that jujitsu was not only an expression of anger and defiance but also a reflection of female solidarity. The sisterhood linked to jujitsu's practices and spaces reveals "how emotions work as a form of cultural politics" (Ahmed 2004: 210) for emotions like solidarity between women became political tools that define collectives such as the suffragette movement.

Old Baggage and *Enola Holmes* further depict how the Japanese martial art became political when practiced suffragettes through Mattie's instructions to the girls and Eudoria's education of Enola. Both women train their pupils in

201

mind and body, taking as their point of departure the philosophy of the suffrage movement, which encouraged the notion of *mens sana in corpore sano* to prove that women were both physically and mentally capable and thus met the requirements to exercise their right to vote (Godfrey 2012: 86). Mattie thus argues that her lessons on self-defence "nicely balance the brain work which is also part of the club regime" (Evans 2018: 87). The opening scenes of *Enola Holmes I* illustrate that Eudoria teaches different skills to her daughter, ranging from reading, science and chess to darts, archery, fencing and jujitsu. As Enola herself explains, a working day with her mother consisted of history, lunch and fitness followed by fight combat (Bradbeer 2020: min. 50). By equipping Enola with both intellectual and physical skills, Eudoria is teaching her to think critically and defend herself, thus challenging traditional Victorian educational norms for girls based on domestic skills. Eudoria's reluctance to comply with the educational expectations of the period when teaching her daughter recalls Butler's theorisation on gender and subversion. Butler argues that gender identity is based on a set of "regulatory ideals" (1993: 26) and explains that such ideals depend on specific manifestations of femininity and masculinity (176). Therefore, failing to embody pre-established notions of femininity implies subversion, which is what Eudoria demonstrates in the films. She relies on self-confidence and independence as the basis of her teaching in a world that often restricts women. Considering Eudoria's involvement in the suffragette movement, her training can also be read as Eudoria's way of preparing Enola to follow in her footsteps and take part in broader societal struggles.

Mattie and Eudoria not only teach jujitsu for self-defence, but also rely on the possibilities that Garrud saw in jujitsu to "introduce women to new ideas about the possibilities for their gender and undermine assumed notions of their vulnerability" (Callan et al. 2019: 541). Both Mattie and Eudoria decide to transmit this idea to their trainees, which indicates that the novel and films represent intergenerational female interactions as encouraging and motivating (Gillis et al. 2004: 3). Mattie argues that "a woman who can unerringly thread a needle can accurately throw a stone" (Evans 2018: 66). Similarly, Eudoria passes her suffrajitsu skills on to her daughter, insisting on the need to be autonomous and self-sufficient, which is something that Enola's name symbolises (when read backwards it becomes "alone"). Eudoria clarifies that the choice of her daughter's name is not meant to imply Enola should be a lonely woman, but an independent one. Both characters thus echo and vindicate Garrud's perception of self-defence as "an ongoing process of embodying equality and putting it into practice" (Dorlin 2022: 48) and encourage their pupils to understand and deploy jujitsu in the same terms. Against this background, a feminist ideal based on female bonds and intergenerational connections (Rivers 2017: 5) is promoted in *Old Baggage* and *Enola Holmes* to

reproduce an ongoing perception of common fight (Cooper and Short 2012: 166-167). This idea of a mutual struggle is what Eudoria and Mattie seek to convey to Enola and the Amazons, respectively.

Mattie and Eudoria therefore promote a new understanding of femininity inspired by Garrud and the jujitsuffragettes, acknowledging their contributions to the feminist movement. Garrud sought to redefine femininity and present it more dynamically while insisting that women's practice of jujitsu did not mean losing their ladylike attributes (Godfrey 2012: 103). This is evident in *Enola Holmes II*, when Eudoria, Enola and Edith demonstrate their jujitsu skills against three police officers despite wearing corsets and long skirts, in typical Edwardian fashion. This scene proves that jujitsu could be practiced even while out of uniform and despite wearing these most uncomfortable and constrictive garments. However, the scene is also relevant for other reasons. On the one hand, having the three characters fight together contests the notion that women tend to relate better to people of the same or similar age than to other women, and thus recognises the potential for feminist interactions among women from other generations (Budgeon 2011: 280). On the other hand, it recalls Garrud's intentions to dismantle ideas about women's inherent weakness and to encourage them to interact with and understand their bodies differently so that they could defend themselves against attacks from men. Suffragettes also recognised jujitsu's potential to provide a new idea of womanhood based on empowerment and self-confidence (Rouse 2017: 8) and to challenge gender stereotypes that presented men as strong, aggressive and violent and women as fragile, passive and peaceful (116). Although Mattie and Eudoria clearly question gender prejudices through their lessons, Enola also participates in this disruption. For instance, in the second movie, there is a scene that reverses gender roles by presenting Enola as capable of fighting and teaching Lord Tewksbury, one of the leading male characters, who is unskilful in physical combat, how to punch and deflect the blows of his enemies. *The Enola Holmes* films thus vindicate the relevance of self-defence training to empower women and deny the misbelief that they needed male protection.

Similarly, the fact that Mattie deploys the jujitsu skills she learnt as a suffragette as the grounds of her teaching to girls for their new life as enfranchised subjects not only reclaims the connections between women's physical empowerment and their (political) emancipation (Rouse 2017: 117), but also reinforces the relevance of intergenerational dialogues and lessons. Eudoria and Mattie's teachings to the younger generations prove to be helpful to show that although the different feminist phases have had their specific aims, the movement as a whole has equity among men and women as its common goal (Genz 2021: 202). In this context, jujitsu is presented as one of the means to vindicate equality between the sexes,

203

since by training and practicing this martial art, suffragettes "literally used their physical stamina to fight for the vote" (Rotunno 2016: 42). *Old Baggage* and *Enola Holmes* therefore echo Garrud's and the suffragettes' perception of the physical being political (Schultz 2010) and reaffirm the contributions of the jujitsuffragettes and their instructor to feminism. That is why they can nowadays be remembered and commemorated —deploying Ahmed's terminology— as "feminist killjoys and wilful subjects" (2017:11) for they refused to abide by gender norms, and "stood up, [spoke] back, [and put their lives at risk] in the struggle for more bearable worlds" (1).

4. Conclusion

In sum, *Old Baggage* and *Enola Holmes* resort to suffrajitsu for revisionist purposes, offering a corrective and more accurate portrayal of the history of the suffragette movement, which undermines specific misrepresentation of suffragettes such as their image as intrinsically violent subjects. Both the novel and films provide faithful versions of these first-wave feminist icons because they emphasise their bravery and empowerment by revisiting Edith Garrud and the jujitsuffragettes. Rather than seeing jujitsu as a mere vehicle of physical self-defence, the novel and films acknowledge the political potential of this martial art as a tool to defy gender norms and express women's agency and solidarity. Borrowing Barbara Kruger's famous statement "Your body is a battleground" (1989), these cultural products demonstrate that by means of jujitsu, suffragettes literally made their bodies a battleground to fight back against the patriarchy and metaphorically questioned the inequalities of the patriarchal institutions and system that oppressed them.

Through the depiction of figures such as Mattie and Eudoria transmitting their knowledge and physical abilities to the younger generations, Evans and Bradbeer also remind contemporary audiences of the relevance of intergenerational interactions for the feminist mission. The exchanges and bonds among women from different (feminist) generations not only serve to emphasise the importance of carrying on the fight for equality, but also to insist on the undeniable link between physical autonomy and political emancipation. These contemporary representations thus illustrate the politicisation of women's bodies as a valuable tool to advocate for equality between men and women. Therefore, *Old Baggage* and *Enola Holmes* recover the figure of Garrud and her suffragette practitioners with reparative and commemorative aims, seeking to dissociate the suffragettes from violence while highlighting their revolutionary potential and lasting contribution to feminism.

204

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. "Fight Taught Right" features in one of Netflix's promotional posters of the first Enola Holmes film together with a picture of Susan Wokoma, the actress playing Edith Garrud, who appears wearing jujitsu training clothes.

2 Resulting from a blending of its creator's name and the Japanese martial art of jujitsu, Bartitsu was the term given to a method of self-defence combining boxing, French kickboxing and jujitsu that Edward William Barton-Wright introduced in Britain and taught in his Bartitsu Club, founded in 1898 (Godfrey 2012: 91).

3. Historically, the term 'the Cause' has been used to refer to the British women's suffrage movement. An illustration of this is The Common Cause, the name given to the newspaper of the largest suffrage association (National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS)). Ray Strachey's work The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain (1928) is also an example of the common usage of the term to denote the suffrage campaign.

4. Although the scene about suffragettes' self-defence is brief, it can be inferred that they resort to this martial art to defend themselves not only against physical attacks but also against sexual assaults by males. In the movie there are various scenes in which women face violence from different men, including male bystanders, police officers and their own husbands. Gavron also draws particular attention to sexual abuse through the character of Mr. Taylor (played by Geoff Bell), the boss of the laundry company where Maud works. In one scene, Violet, one of Maud's coworkers, is sexually harassed by Mr. Taylor, who also abuses Maude. Gavron's inclusion of this topic in the film reveals her intention to denounce the patriarchal system's abuse of women's bodies and recalls one of the reasons that motivated suffragettes' use of jujitsu.

5. This notion refers to the re-examination of history from a feminist lens (Colman 2015). In the context of this article, the term proves to be useful to refer to suffragettes' deployment of jujitsu from a feminist perspective.

6. The choice of a Black woman to play Garrud's role has generated some controversy. Although it can be read as a way to recognise the contributions of people of colour to the fight for women's suffrage and position women of colour as pioneering feminist role models for contemporary audiences, having a Black woman represent a white suffragette has also been related to whitewashing and colour-blindness strategies. For instance, a review of the film presents the incorporation of people of colour in the show "more like boxes checked than meaningful characters" (Johnson 2020). In addition, having a Black woman represent the figure of suffragettes' jujitsu can be read as a form of reproducing the exoticization of Black women and their stereotypical portrayal as being "sexually aggressive" (Hill Collins 2000: 82), "unfeminine and too strong" (76).

7. An example of this portrayal is the anonymous poster "We want the vote" (1908), which can be found in Cooper-Cunningham's article about posters from the British women's suffrage movement (2019).

205

8. An example of pro-sufffrage propaganda highlighting suffragettes' goal of achieving the franchise, and equality for all people, appears in the poster "The Appeal of Womanhood" (Gosling et al. 2018: 57).

9. Named after its creator, the Italian revolutionary Felice Orsini, the artifact was initially designed to kill Napoleon III in 1858. However, replicas and adaptations of this explosive device became tools of radical combat used by terrorists and insurgents for different revolutionary purposes until the 1910s (Crossland 2023: 355).

10. An example of this biased portrayal of suffragettes appears in Walt Disney's film *Mary Poppins* (1964). Its director, Robert Stevenson, depicts women's suffrage as a pastime and comically represents Mrs. Banks giving support to Emmeline Pankhurst, participating in suffragette marches and neglecting her duties as a mother. Ms. Poppins, the nanny, is cast as the one in charge of restoring the family order and fulfilling the tasks that Mrs. Banks disregards. The messages implied in this Disney production are therefore similar to those conveyed by anti-suffrage propaganda like the poster "A Suffragette's Home" (Devaney 2018) and the postcard "What is a suffragette without a suffering household?" (Nikolic 2019), which presented suffragists and suffragettes negatively to emphasise women's role as "the angel of the house".

11. This was the common name given to The Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health Act of April 1913, which consisted of liberating those imprisoned suffragettes who had become physically weak after going on hunger strikes to avoid their death in jail and foster their recovery outside prison. Once their health improved, the police, commonly known as "cats", rearrested the temporarily released suffragettes, metaphorically known as "mice", and sent them back to jail (Brown 2002: 635).

206

Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh U.P.

Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke U.P.

Anon. "The Martial Arts of 'Enola Holmes'". 2020. *Suffrajitsu* (September 24). <https://suffrajitsu.com/the-martial-arts-of-enola-holmes/>. Accessed October 31, 2024.

Bearman, Christopher. 2007. "An Army without Discipline? Suffragette Militancy and the Budget Crisis of 1909". *The Historical Journal* 50 (4): 861-889.

Billington, Rosamund. 1982. "Ideology and Feminism: Why the Suffragettes Were Called 'Wild Women'". *Women's Studies International Forum* 5 (6): 663-674.

Bradbeer, Harry. 2020. *Enola Holmes*. Netflix.

Bradbeer, Harry. 2022. *Enola Holmes 2*. Netflix.

Bravo, Eduardo. 2023. "Suffrajitsu: The Women Who Used Martial Arts to Fight for The Vote". *El País* (March 25). <https://english.elpais.com/culture/2023-03-25/suffrajitsu-the-women-who-used-martial-arts-to-fight-for-the-vote.html>. Accessed October 31, 2024.

Brown, Alyson. 2002. "Conflicting Objectives: Suffragette Prisoners and Female Prison Staff in Edwardian England". *Women's Studies* 31 (5): 627-644. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497870214046>.

Budgeon, Shelley. 2011. "The Contradictions of Successful Femininity: Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities". In Gill, Rosalind and Christina Scharff (eds.) *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Palgrave Macmillan: 279-292.

Burman, Dilshad. 2024. "'The Desire to Overcome Fear Is Really Strong': New Self-Defence Course Creating Safe Space for Women to Train in MMA". *City News Everywhere* (April 23). <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2024/04/23/self-defence-course-for-women/>. Accessed October 31, 2024.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. Routledge.

Cahn, Susan K. 2015. *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport*. University of Illinois Press.

Callan, Mike, Conor Heffernan and Amanda Spenn. 2019. "Women's Jūjutsu and Judo in the Early Twentieth-Century: The Cases of Phoebe Roberts, Edith Garrud, and Sarah Mayer". *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 35 (6): 530-553. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2018.1544553>.

Colman, Andrew. M. (ed.) 2015. *A Dictionary of Psychology*. Oxford U.P. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095933417>.

Cooper, Katherine and Emma Short. 2012. *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Cooper-Cunningham, Dean. 2019. "Seeing (In)Security, Gender and Silencing: Posters in and about the British Women's Suffrage Movement". *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21 (3): 383-408.

Conan Doyle, Arthur. 1903. "The Adventure of the Empty House". *Collier's* (September). <https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/images/2/28/Colliers-1903-09-26-the-empty-house-p12.jpg>. Accessed October 31, 2024.

Crossland, James. 2023. "Radical Warfare's First 'Superweapon': The Fears, Perceptions and Realities of the Orsini Bomb, 1858-1896". *Terrorism and Political Violence* 35 (2): 355-369. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2021.1924692>.

Devaney, Susan. 2018. "This Is How Misogynists Tried to Stop Women from Winning the Vote." *Stylist*. <https://www.stylist.co.uk/visible-women/misogynists-anti-suffragette-illustrations-stop-women-win-vote-history-features/187998>. Accessed September 10, 2025.

Dorlin, Elsa. 2022. *Self-Defense: A Philosophy of Violence*. Verso.

Elliott, Gemma. 2018. "'Women Who Dared to Ask for a Vote': The Missing Memoirs of the Scottish Suffragettes". *Women's Writing* 25 (3): 314-328.

Evans, Lissa. 2018. *Old Baggage*. Doubleday.

Gavron, Sarah. 2015. *Suffragette*. Filmin.

Genz, Stéphanie. 2021. "Busting the 'Post'?: Postfeminist Genealogies in Millennial Culture". In Paul, Herman and Adriaan Van Veldhuizen (eds.) *Post-Everything: An Intellectual History of Post-Concepts*. Manchester U.P.: 195-214.

Gillis, Stacy, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford. 2004. "Introduction". In *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*. Palgrave Macmillan: 1-6.

Godfrey, Emelyne. 2012. *Femininity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature and Society: From Dagger-Fans to Suffragettes*. Palgrave Macmillan.

207

Gosling, Lucinda, Hilary Robinson and Amy Tobin. 2018. *The Art of Feminism. Images that Shaped the Fight for Equality, 1875-2017*. Chronicle Books.

Green, Barbara. 1997. *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage 1905-1938*. Macmillan Press LTD.

Harvey, Jean, John Horne, Parissa Safai, Simon Darnell and Sébastien Courchesne-O'Neill. 2013. *Sport and Social Movements: From the Local to the Global*. Bloomsbury Academic. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472544995>.

Hill Collins, Patricia. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge.

Johnson, Alicja. 2020. "Enola Holmes". *Mediaversity* (October 3). <https://www.mediaversityreviews.com/film-reviews/2020/10/3/enola-holmes>. Accessed April 7, 2025.

Kay, Joyce. 2007. "'No Time for Recreations Till the Vote is Won': Suffrage Activists and Leisure in Edwardian Britain". *Women's History Review* 16 (4): 535-553. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0961202 0701445909>.

Kay, Joyce 2008. "It wasn't just Emily Davison! Sport, Suffrage and Society in Edwardian Britain". *International Journal of the History of Sport* 25 (10): 1338-1354. <https://doi.org/10. 1080/09523360802212271>.

Keegan, Hannah. 2018. "Everything You Need to Know about The Awesome Art of Suffrajitsu". *Stylist*. <https://www.stylist.co.uk/visible-women/suffragettes-votes-for-women-suffrajitsu-fighting-ju-jitsu/188142>. Accessed October 31, 2024.

Kelly, Simon. 2019. "Edith Garrud: The Jujutsuffragette". In McMurray, Robert and Alison Pullen (eds.) *Power, Politics and Exclusion in Organization and Management*. Routledge: 8-23.

Kruger, Barbara. 1989. *Untitled* (Your Body Is a Battleground). Photographic Silkscreen on Vinyl. The Broad, Los Angeles. <https://www.thebroad.org/art/barbara-kruger/untitled-your-body-battleground>.

Lawrence, Iszi. 2020. *The Unstoppable Letty Pegg*. Bloomsbury Education.

Nikolic, Isabella. 2019. "'What Is a Sufraggette without a Suffering Housefold?': Sexist Anti-suffrage Postcards from Britain and the US Reveal How Men Were Warned against Giving Women The Vote in The Early Twentieth Century". *Mail Online* (March 15). <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6814615/Sexist-postcards-Britain-reveal-men-warned-against-giving-women-vote.html>. Accessed April 9, 2025.

Nym Mayhall, Laura E. 1995. "Creating the 'Suffragette Spirit': British Feminism and the Historical Imagination". *Women's History Review* 4 (3): 319-344. <https://doi.org/10.1080 /09612029500200088>.

Nym Mayhall, Laura E. 2003. *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930*. Oxford U.P.

Prince, Kate and Priya Parmar. 2023. *Sylvia*. Old Vic Theater.

Pugh, Martin. 2013. "Emily Wilding Davison: The Good Terrorist". *History Today* 63 (6): 4-5.

Purvis, June. 2013. "Gendering the Historiography of the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian Britain: Some Reflections". *Women's History Review* 22 (4): 576-590. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09 612025.2012.751768>.

Rivers, Nicola. 2017. *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave. Turning Tides*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Roberts, David. 2018. *Suffragette. The Battle for Equality.* Two Hoots.

Rotunno, Laura. 2016. "Trained Bodies: From Gymnasts to "Jujutsu Suffragettes". *Victorian Review* 42 (19): 37-43. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/vcr.2016.0038.

Rouse, Wendy L. 2017. *Her Own Hero: The Origins of the Women's Self-Defense Movement*. New York U.P. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1gk091g>.

Roussel, Jane. 2023. "The Boom in Self-Defense for Women: 'I Needed to Remind Myself That I'm A Warrior'". *Le Monde* (December 31). Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/our-times/article/2023/12/31/the-boom-in-self-defense-for-women-i-needed-to-remind-myself-that-i-m-a-warrior_6391046_39.html>.

Schultz, Jaime. 2010. "The Physical is Political: Women's suffrage, Pilgrim Hikes and the Public Sphere". *International Journal of the History of Sport* 27 (7): 11331153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523361003695801>.

Springer, Nancy. 2006-2023. *Enola Holmes Mystery Series*. Penguin Young Readers.

Stevenson, Robert. 1964. *Mary Poppins*. Walt Disney Pictures.

Strachey, Ray. 1928. *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain.* George Bell & Sons.

Webb, Simon. 2014. *The Suffragette Bombers: Britain's Forgotten Terrorists*. Pen and Sword History.

Williams, Rachel. 2012. "Edith Garrud: A Public Vote for the Suffragette Who Taught Martial Arts". *The Guardian* (June 25). <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/jun/25/edith-garrud-suffragette-martial-arts>. Accessed October 31, 2024.

Wolf, Katherine and Tony Wolf. 2018. *No Man Shall Protect Us: The Hidden History of the Suffragette Bodyguards*. Wolf Point Media.

Wolf Tony and Joao Vieira. 2015. Suffrajitsu: Mrs. Pankhurst's Amazons. Jet City.

Xavier, Clément, Lisa Lugrin and Albertine Ralenti. 2023. *Jujitsufragistas: Las Amazonas de Londres*. Trans. M. Terrones. Garbuix Books.

209

210

SAPPHIC GIRLHOOD ON SCREEN: NEGOTIATING IRISH LESBIAN IDENTITY IN *DATING AMBER* (2020)

LA ADOLESCENCIA DE LAS CHICAS SÁFICAS EN LA PANTALLA: NEGOCIANDO LA IDENTIDAD LÉSBICA IRLANDESA EN *DATING AMBER* (2020)

<https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202511375>

IRIA SEIJAS-PÉREZ
Universidade de Vigo
iria.seijas@uvigo.gal
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7326-198X>

Abstract

While no laws explicitly targeted lesbianism as illegal, Irish lesbians and queer women at large were active in the battle to decriminalise homosexuality — which finally occurred in Ireland in 1993. Irish lesbian activism also focused on the establishment of groups, organisations and helplines for queer women (Crone 1988, 1995; Connolly and O'Toole 2005). Despite such advancements, in the 1990s homophobia continued to negatively impact the lives of the Irish LGBTQ+ community (Moane 1995). It is in this climate of legalised homosexuality but ingrained homophobia that the film *Dating Amber* (2020) takes place. In this coming-of-age film directed by David Freyne, gay teenagers Amber and Eddie pretend to have a relationship to stop the homophobic harassment from their classmates, but once they discover the LGBTQ+ community of Dublin they are driven apart as Amber comes out and Eddie continues to deny his homosexuality. This article focuses on the character of Amber and how she navigates her lesbian girlhood in the rural Ireland of the mid-1990s. Particularly, Amber's oppressive environment in opposition to the more tolerant city and her friendship with Eddie will be analysed, bringing the two elements together in an attempt to explore the development of Amber's self-perception and her coming out.

Keywords: girlhood, lesbian identity, sexuality, Irish film, *Dating Amber*.

Resumen

Aunque no había ninguna ley que criminalizase el lesbianismo, las mujeres lesbianas irlandesas —acompañadas de otras mujeres *queer*— participaron activamente en

la batalla para descriminalizar la homosexualidad, lo que finalmente ocurrió en Irlanda en 1993. Además, el activismo de las mujeres lesbianas también se centró en la creación de grupos, organizaciones y líneas de apoyo para las mujeres *queer* (Crone 1988, 1995; Connolly and O'Toole 2005). A pesar de estos avances, en la década de los noventa la homofobia seguía impactando negativamente las vidas de la comunidad LGBTQ+ irlandesa (Moane 1995). La película *Dating Amber* (2020), dirigida por David Freyne, transcurre en este clima de homosexualidad legal pero homofobia arraigada. Los adolescentes Amber y Eddie, lesbiana y gay respectivamente, deciden fingir tener una relación para escapar del acoso homofóbico de sus compañeros del instituto, pero una vez que descubren la comunidad LGBTQ+ de Dublín comienzan a distanciarse, ya que Amber decide salir del armario mientras que Eddie continúa negando su homosexualidad. Este artículo se centra en el personaje de Amber y en como navega su adolescencia como lesbiana en la Irlanda rural de los años noventa. Particularmente, se analizarán el entorno opresivo de Amber en contraste con la ciudad más tolerante y su amistad con Eddie, juntando así estos elementos con la intención de explorar el desarrollo de la percepción que Amber tiene de sí misma y su salida del armario.

Palabras clave: adolescencia, identidad lésbica, sexualidad, cine irlandés, *Dating Amber*.

1. Introduction

The Republic of Ireland's same-sex marriage referendum of 2015 marked a transitional point in the history of the Irish LGBTQ+ community. It was the first time that the decision to legalise same-sex marriage was left in the hands of the popular vote (Macleod 2018: 1), and this event has been argued to "[reverse] a large part, if not all, of Ireland's reputation for a Catholic-led conservatism concerning sexual and gender identities" (Lesnik-Oberstein 2016).[1] Páraic Kerrigan and Anne O'Brien observe that, since the marriage referendum, "Ireland has been internationally recognized as a significant trail-blazer for gay rights and politics" (2020: 1063). However, prior to these positive —and undoubtedly necessary— developments, homosexuality had been historically condemned in Ireland, seen as a threat to the nation's standards of purity and morality.

Following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, "sexual behaviour and its regulation became a national obsession […] in an effort to prove decency, respectability and capability in governing Ireland as an independent nation" (Redmond 2015: 73). Homosexuality was seen as a threat to Irishness and nationalism, endangering the heterosexual family discourse of the state (Conrad 2001: 125). According to Seán Mac Risteaird, since the establishment of an

independent Ireland, "nationalism and conservative political and religious beliefs went hand in hand. [...] Homosexuality was not seen as a native or normal state of being or identity. Ireland, as a nation, strived to build a puritanical society, in order to remain safe from homosexuality" (2020: 64-65). Thus, the priority given to the creation of a morally superior nation rejected homosexuality, positioning this as incompatible with Irish identity.

It was not until 1993 that homosexuality was finally decriminalised after a long and arduous campaign waged by activists of the Irish LGBTQ+ community and David Norris, and marriage equality was seen as the "result of an over two-decade-long battle of activists, politicians and the LGBTQI+ community" (Charczun 2019: 203). Indeed, the fight for equal rights for the queer community in Ireland had come a long way from its early days in the 1970s, when the Sexual Liberation Movement was founded. Between the early 1970s and the 1990s, several LGBTQ+ groups emerged, mostly concerned with the decriminalisation of homosexuality, although others centred on providing safe spaces for the queer community and reaching those who were isolated from the urban areas where most of the action was taking place.

This article explores the film *Dating Amber* (2020) and its depiction of queer identities in 1990s Ireland, particularly the portrayal of Amber, a lesbian teenager who lives in a rural area in county Kildare. It will focus on how Amber negotiates her lesbian identity within her repressive environment. She is portrayed in contrast to sensitive, cowardly Eddie —her gay classmate with whom she has a fake relationship —as "more defiant, unabashedly wielding her punk rock feminism and biting wit against her unbearably heteronormative, rural life" (Brown 2020). She relies on witty humour and what Eddie labels as a "masculine" attitude to face her current situation: while she knows she is a lesbian, she denies it due to the homophobic bullying from her classmates, who often call her slurs denigrating her sapphic identity; on top of this, she is also coming to terms with her father's suicide, an event that complicates her relationship with her mother as both women silently deal with the loss. Thus, Amber holds on to the idea that she will soon be able to leave that place where she is suffocating under the weight of her father's ghost and the blatant homophobia that she must pretend does not affect her.

Nevertheless, Amber's perception of herself and her surroundings shifts as the story develops, moving from a concealment of her identity to a visible embrace of her lesbianism. Through her relationship with Trinity student Sarah, and possibly encouraged by the Dublin queer scene she discovers on her trips to the city with Eddie, Amber is able to openly reveal herself as a lesbian. Furthermore, perhaps feeling hopeful about the possibility of a queer future *within* Ireland, she comes

213

out to her mother, which leads to her public outing by the priest. Amber, hence, continues to confront her village's homophobic attitudes, though now she is able to challenge such discrimination through her self-acceptance, the safety of her home and the comfort of her relationship with Sarah. Before examining the film, we will discuss lesbian activism in late-twentieth century Ireland as well as the representation of lesbian identities on the Irish screen to provide context for the analysis that follows. The main aim of this research is to approach Amber's oppressive setting and her friendship with gay classmate Eddie in an attempt to reveal the development of her self-perception and her coming out as an Irish lesbian.

2. Lesbian Identity and Activism in Late-Twentieth Century Ireland

Irish lesbian accounts of liberation differ slightly from those of gay men. No laws explicitly targeted lesbianism as illegal, for the existence of lesbians was completely erased. Lesbians were rendered invisible because "women's sexuality was largely censored and controlled by a punitive, conservative Catholic morality, which enforced ignorance and shameful silences on women's own bodies and sexual desires" (Carregal 2021: 17). The criminalisation of male homosexuality further othered and marginalised lesbians, silencing their history and culture (O'Rourke et al. 2013). Moreover, the lack of legal recognition underscored how the perception of lesbianism as a taboo topic operated "as an unwritten law, suppressing not only the practice of lesbian sexuality but the awareness of its very existence" (Crone 1988: 346).

Therefore, the movement for LGBTQ+ rights in Ireland "in terms of public media visibility, was almost entirely homogenised by gay men" (Kerrigan 2019: 5). According to Allison Macleod, "[l]esbian issues and experiences have been […] subordinated within the Irish gay rights movement" (2018: 81). Linda Connolly and Tina O'Toole have also noted that despite the involvement of Irish lesbians in numerous campaigns, little information regarding their political activism is available, which contributes "to the general invisibility of lesbian lives in contemporary Ireland" (2005: 172). Nonetheless, Irish lesbians and queer women at large were highly involved in the campaign to decriminalise homosexuality. Similarly, they were active within the women's movement and participated in several social and political movements (Moane 1995: 92). Moreover, they also worked towards creating spaces for queer women, attaining recognition of their sexuality and combating the isolation that many of them faced due to the marginalisation of lesbian identities.

During the 1970s, different groups that addressed the needs of lesbians were created, such as Irishwomen United and the first Lesbian Line Collective. Additionally, a hotline was established to support lesbians in rural areas, advertised as Tel-a-Friend or simply TAF in order to avoid the explicit use of "gay" and "lesbian" (Crone 1988, 1995; Connolly and O'Toole 2005). This decade also saw the celebration of the first Women's Conference on Lesbianism in Dublin, which had a positive impact and boosted lesbian pride (Crone 1995; Connolly and O'Toole 2005).

Throughout the following decade, the 1980s, lesbian activism continued to see the creation of various lesbian communities, groups and organisations, mostly based in urban areas (Connolly and O'Toole 2005: 184), although this was not limited to Dublin. The Quay Co-Op was founded in Cork in 1982, leading to the emergence of the Cork Lesbian Collective a year later, and the first Cork Women's Fun Weekend took place in 1984 (McDonagh 2017: 72). In addition to these organisations, social events for gays and lesbians were also being held in different areas throughout the country, such as Galway and Tipperary (McDonagh 2017).

215

The 1990s were highly marked by the decriminalisation of homosexuality, but the lesbian community also saw the establishment of several cultural, political and social organisations (Crone 1995: 68). Lesbians Organising Together, or LOT, was established in 1991, including First Out groups and Lesbian Line collectives among other organisations (68). Furthermore, during this decade organisations such as Lesbians in Cork, Lesbian Education Awareness and LOT worked to continue the efforts of their predecessors, increasing resources, building community and providing services (Connolly and O'Toole 2005: 192). Unfortunately, homophobia was still prevalent at the time. Ger Moane contends, "Even in the relatively liberated 1990s, homophobia still imposes tremendous burdens on lesbians and gay men in Ireland. […] Positive attitudes in the media and among legislators do not easily erase homophobia, and it remains deeply embedded in Irish culture and psychology" (1995: 87). She remarks that calls to helplines and discussions in coming-out groups continued to demonstrate that feelings of fear, ignorance, self-hatred and shame prevailed, and stories of queer youth who committed suicide or were forced to leave their homes circulated around LGBTQ+ networks (87).

Nevertheless, despite the constant presence of homophobia, the advancements that were made in the three decades between the 1970s and 1990s were remarkably significant. In the mid-1990s, lesbian author Mary Dorcey, who had been actively involved in the fight against homophobia, spoke of the resistance from the Irish queer community against religious and state oppression:

> Lifelong brainwashing from the cradle to the grave to remain faithful to heterosexuality is still not sufficient to keep everyone suppressed. The entire force of Church and State, the entire weight of international culture, is not enough to suppress the strength of nature. The instinct to joy and love and intimacy is irrepressible. Centuries of repression have not worked and can't work. (In O'Carroll and Collins 1995: 28)

Queer Irish individuals have persisted in the face of oppression. Despite the constant messages about the dangers and sinful nature of homosexuality, and despite the attempts from church and state authorities to suppress any identity that would deviate from heterosexuality, the LGBTQ+ community in Ireland continued to make a space for itself within Irish society. The film *Dating Amber* explores the adversities of being gay in 1990s Ireland, and this article aims to reinforce Dorcey's statement of queer resistance through Amber's embrace of her lesbian identity against the persistent discrimination from classmates, neighbours and society at large.

3. Lesbians on the Irish Screen

The Irish film industry is characterised by a "lack of queer visual fare" (Kerrigan and O'Brien 2020: 1064), and within this shortage, queer women are even more absent on the screen. This "can be […] linked to the general invisibility of lesbianism within Irish public and cultural discourses" (Macleod 2018: 5) mentioned above. In her review of Irish queer cinema, Macleod notices that queer women appear only in five of the different feature films that she examines: *Goldfish Memory* (2002), *A Date for Mad Mary* (2016), *Snakes and Ladders* (1996), *Crush Proof* (1998) and *Cowboys & Angels* (2003) (2018: 5). These films also share the characteristic of being urban narratives, which Macleod argues "suggest[s] that the emergence of a new urban sensibility in Irish cinema has not only been accompanied by more overt representations of queer sexuality on-screen but has also been integral to the cinematic representation of queer women" (80). Unfortunately, out of those five films, only *Goldfish Memory* and *A Date for Mad Mary* "offer these female characters any strong narrative agency", while the others either relegate sapphic women to the background or disavow their sexuality (5).

Goldfish Memory stands out as it "features openly lesbian characters and explicit sexual encounters between women, as well as a lesbian social space" (78). Nonetheless, lesbian desire is portrayed as humorous rather than revolutionary, as it is framed from a male heterosexual perspective (78). The butch-femme dynamics that appear in the film serve to constrain lesbian desire within gender binarism, as masculine women appear as the subject which desires and feminine women

as the object that is desired (Holohan 2009: 142-143). Similarly, while *Goldfish Memory* does portray lesbian desire within a public setting, perhaps in an attempt to transgress patriarchal norms that limit female sexuality to private life —if not directly to the closet— this challenge is often quickly discredited (143). Therefore, despite its depiction of out lesbian women and the focus on their relationships, the film ultimately fails at subverting heteronormative narratives.

A Date for Mad Mary, which is the most recent film with sapphic characters in Macleod's study, appears to show "a more fluid representation of queer female identity" (Macleod 2018: 90). The plot revolves around Mary, a queer woman whose experiences take centre stage. As Mary explores her sexuality, the film avoids restraining her to the sexual binary and relegating queer female desire to the subplot as Mary's sexual discovery is linked to other aspects of her life and is thus embedded within the general narrative (88). In doing so, the film "provid[es] a more fluid conception of how different facets of identity and personal relationships inform one another" (88). Macleod suggests that *A Date for Mad Mary*, as a post-Celtic Tiger picture, might be a metaphor for how contemporary Ireland is attempting to break away from established preconceptions about the meaning of Irishness (90). Nonetheless, though this film seems to offer a portrayal of female queerness outside common stereotypes, I argue that it does not contribute to the specific visibilisation of lesbians on screen due to the ambiguity that characterises the sexuality of the queer female characters.

217

I find it significant that all the films with queer women characters that Macleod includes in her study take place in an urban setting. This lack of sapphic representation within rural areas further enhances the dichotomies of the 'liberating' city and the 'repressive' countryside. While it might be true that bigger cities and urban areas offer certain possibilities to explore sexual identity that might not be available in more conservative places, the experiences of LGBTQ+ rural communities deserve recognition and should be represented in the wider media outlets, including films. Similarly, none of these films focuses on adolescent sapphic girls, even though it is frequently during the teenage years that sexuality is explored. This scarcity of sapphic girlhood narratives in Irish cinema could result from preconceived notions of youth as innocent —even asexual— in an attempt to preserve such ideas of purity. However, this only contributes to further erase non-normative, and specifically lesbian, girlhoods as their lack of representation renders them invisible.

Hence, the film *Dating Amber* (2020) seems to fill this gap of rural narratives of lesbian girlhood. Directed by David Freyne and produced by Screen Ireland, it takes place in a climate of post-decriminalisation yet ingrained homophobia, and stands out thanks to its focus on a gay boy and a lesbian girl who navigate their sexualities in their conservative village — narratives previously unaddressed

in Irish cinema. Initially, it had been entitled 'Beards', deriving from the term 'beard', which commonly refers to the fake partner of a queer person who wants to hide their queer identity by pretending to be in a heterosexual relationship — which is precisely what happens in this comedy-drama. The film is set in 1995 on the Curragh Camp, a military complex in county Kildare, at the time of the divorce referendum, which conveys the image of a Catholic Ireland dominated by a religious morality and the repression of sexuality. Teenagers Eddie Cotter and Amber Keenan are struggling with their gay and lesbian identities in a repressive environment during their final year of secondary school. Eddie is in denial of his homosexuality and pretends to be interested in girls to fit in with the boys at school, even though they are constantly harassing him. At home, he chooses to ignore his parents' fighting, reassuring himself that they are fine, and attempts to live up to his often-absent father's expectations to join the army, although that is not what he wants to do. Amber, while more confident about her sexuality, still hides that she is a lesbian from her immediate community to protect herself from ostracisation. As she is still dealing with her father's suicide, she dreams of moving to London, where she will open "an anarchist bookshop but with franchise potential" (Freyne 2020: min. 23) and will be able to be herself openly in the more liberating lesbian punk scene that she believes awaits her in the city. In the meantime, she helps her mother in the caravan park she runs, secretly renting out the caravans to teenagers seeking a private place to have sex, saving the money she charges them so that she can travel to London when school is over.

Both victims of their classmates' insults and mockery, generally connected to their sexuality though neither of them has yet come out, Amber and Eddie begin a fake relationship in an attempt to quiet the rumours about their queerness. As they continue to fake-date, their friendship evolves from a shared understanding of their common struggle and they confess to each other their hopes and fears as gay teenagers in rural Ireland. It is on their trips to Dublin that they experience queer culture and community for the first time, which will impact both adolescents albeit in different ways —"[a]s Amber becomes more comfortable with her queerness, [and] the taciturn Eddie retreats inwards" (Hans 2020)— and will bring trouble to their dating arrangement as well as their friendship.

Dating Amber has been described as "a one-size-fits-all coming-out narrative [...] handled with a lightness of touch" (Hans 2020) and "a well-meaning film that seeks to portray gay identity without problematising it unduly" (Bradshaw 2020). Andrew Scahill contends that the majority of images of youth in cinema have been created by adults, who often "represent an *idea* of youth — a memory, a trauma, a wish" (2019: 114, emphasis in original). There is, indeed, a biographical component to *Dating Amber*. In an interview, director David Freyne explains:

"When you grow up gay you are used to seeing yourself in tragic work. Being beaten up. Dying of Aids. Those films are important and relevant. But if that's the only way you see yourself om [sic] screen it's really depressing" (in Clarke 2020). While Freyne chose to set the story in the mid-1990s, he acknowledges that "[t]here are some people —generally older, straight people— who say: 'Sure, it's fine now!' […] There is a misconception about how easy it is now" (in Clarke 2020). Therefore, while the film takes place in 1995 and reflects the homophobic climate of Ireland's recent past, the struggles confronted by Amber and Eddie in connection to their sexuality are still faced by many queer teens in modern-day Ireland — which makes the film timely as well as significant in its approach to queer girlhood and boyhood.

4. Lesbian Girlhood in 1990s Ireland

4.1. "Fucking lezzer"

In Ireland, homosexuality "occupied an uncomfortable place" (Conrad 2001: 124), and, hence, so did lesbian girlhood. The first scene in the film where viewers meet Amber depicts her at school, sitting by herself on a bench and reading a newspaper with the headline "Drugs in Ireland". When Kevin, another student, shouts a joke to insult her, Amber cleverly turns the joke around on him and, feeling embarrassed, Kevin cannot think of a better comeback than "fucking lezzer" (Freyne 2020: min. 2). John E. Petrovic and Rebecca M. Ballard point to the heterosexism that pervades institutions such as schools at large, "a form of oppression that both assumes and presumes the superiority of heterosexuality, suggesting that heterosexuality is required while (and by) casting nonheterosexuality as abnormal, deviant, or immoral" (2005: 195). Insults related to sexuality are not rare at school, as only a few seconds after his interaction with Amber, Kevin asks Eddie if he is a "faggot" because he has not "had the shift yet" (Freyne 2020: mins. 2-3). This brief introductory scene does not only reveal the heteronormative politics at work within Amber and Eddie's school, but also identifies the societal perception of homosexuality as shameful and unacceptable, this prevalence of heteronormativity that characterises the school system not only in Ireland but in general.

Throughout the film, insults that attack sexual identity such as "fucking lesbian" (Freyne 2020: min. 7), "benders" (min. 11) or "dyke" (min. 68) continue to be reproduced, exposing how homophobia is ingrained within the Irish psyche. This is further reinforced by the school's sex education — if a video of a nun advocating for sexual abstinence until marriage can be referred to as sex education. In a video entitled "A Guide to Love-Making", the nun uses hand gestures to condemn

219

homosexuality, exposing this as wrong, while heterosexual intercourse is right (mins. 16-17). The legalisation of homosexuality in Ireland did "not mean that it was not (as in fact, it still is) frowned upon by Irish society, especially by rural communities of Ireland where Catholicism has historically been more powerful than in Ireland's urban areas" (Charczun 2019: 129). Thus, Amber is constantly faced with the notion that being a lesbian is sinful and deserves denigration, a Catholic belief that is upheld by her school and enforced by her classmates' discourse.

It is not surprising that in such an environment Amber struggles to express her identity freely and even denies that she is gay to her classmates (Freyne 2020: min. 7). Aware that Eddie is also not interested in the opposite sex, she decides to ask him to go on a date with her. When Eddie attempts to —very awkwardly— kiss her, she asks him "aren't you tired of being called a faggot?" and proposes that they fake a relationship: "We pretend to go out just to get everyone to leave us alone. Just-just until school is over and we can get out of this dump" (mins. 14-15). While Amber does deny to other students that she is a lesbian, this conversation with Eddie reveals that her denial does not stem from a lack of self-acceptance but is rather an attempt at self-preservation. Petrovic and Ballard discuss that different studies point to the construction of heterosexual identities as a "coping strategy" by LGBTQ+ students to fit in at school (2005: 196). Through the staging of a heterosexual relationship, Amber aims to avoid harassment from other students until she can leave her small village and finally come out as a lesbian.

Additionally, in her plan to fake-date, Amber not only seeks protection but also a sense of shared understanding, of kinship, that Eddie initially fails to provide in his own denial of his homosexuality. At first, Eddie continues to pretend that he is not gay and rejects Amber's idea. According to Whitney Monaghan, the "inability or unwillingness to accept one's identity is a standard feature of the coming out narrative" (2010: 61). This is the case for Eddie, whose narrative will appear in contrast to Amber's capacity to accept herself as a lesbian. He struggles to admit that he is gay, is unable to say it out loud, yet he agrees with Amber's plan to be her "pretend boyfriend" —though he prefers the term "pretend real boyfriend"— until school is over (Freyne 2020: min. 18). However, while Amber can easily declare that she is gay and so is he, Eddie continues to insist that "it doesn't matter because […] it doesn't matter what [they] are but [they] don't have to be", which Amber resignedly acknowledges because she is aware that Eddie will not go along with her idea otherwise (mins. 18-19). This is a remarkable difference between Amber's and Eddie's perception of themselves, which will later become a conflict in their relationship. Nonetheless, Amber continues to embrace her lesbianism in her private moments with Eddie and does see their friendship as a safe space where she can be herself openly.

4.2. "This place will kill you"

Her fake relationship gives Amber a break from the continuous ridicule of her classmates at the same time as it allows her to find a confidante to share her dreams about going to London, where she hopes a more accepting society awaits her. Amber's desire to go abroad was common among Irish lesbians at the time, who "at some point in their lives, have felt the need to emigrate, mainly to the UK, on the grounds of their sexualities" (Charczun 2019: 155). Amber relies on her side hustle renting out caravans to "horny teens" to save money so that she can leave: "The minute school is over, I am out of here. This place will kill you" (Freyne 2020: mins. 22-23). Two dichotomies are at play here: that of Ireland vs. abroad and that of rural vs. urban. It is not uncommon for Irish films to convey the message "that gay identities can only be confronted when relocated from the 'native soil'" (Barton 2004: 125). Homosexuality has been characterised as being "outside the nation, as a foreign threat or colonial pollutant" which is "subject to State monitoring and regulation" (Macleod 2018: 15). Amber believes that she can only be openly gay if she is in a big city and if she leaves Ireland, positioning lesbian girlhood and growing up in Ireland as incompatible. In this sense, Macleod observes that "the construction of queer subjectivity is frequently embedded within a story of rural to urban migration which maps the psychological journey of 'coming out' onto a physical journey to the city" (92). Amber initially believes that this journey is her only possibility to fully come out. Nonetheless, in the meantime, she manages to subvert Catholic expectations in her secret arrangement with Eddie — at school and at home, she is a heterosexual teenage girl dating a heterosexual teenage boy, while in private the intricacies of being Irish and gay are exposed through Amber's and Eddie's attempts at easing each other's adversities.

Amber and Eddie might not adhere to their society's beliefs, yet they have not been able to escape the stereotypical perceptions that have been culturally attributed to gay men and lesbian women. Macleod argues that while "queerness functions as a disruptive signifier of fluidity and excess in Irish cinema to challenge rigid identity categories and normative structures, such disruptive potential is often diffused through the queer subject's containment within sexual stereotypes, mainstream conventions and narrative function" (2018: 20). To some extent, *Dating Amber* reproduces stereotypes that are often linked with homosexuality. In her conversations with Eddie, Amber subscribes to those clichés that are used to describe gay men, such as that they have an interest in fashion and a good fashion sense or that they are feminine in their mannerisms. When Eddie pretends that he does not like Mr Sweeney but his clothes, Amber is quick to explain why that comment further proves that he is gay: "One, only a gay guy would say that, and two, he dresses like shit, which you would know because gays have a great

221

sense of fashion" (Freyne 2020: mins. 14-15). Similarly, Eddie tells Amber that she should "act a little less […] mannishly" and "walk more feminine", a critique Amber turns around on Eddie claiming that he is the feminine one, which worries him as he wants to hide his homosexuality (mins. 21-22). Moreover, Amber does subject herself to such stereotypes in certain moments. Eddie invites her over to his house for dinner, and asks Amber to "wear something girly" — to which she replies: "I will if you won't" (min. 23). In spite of berating Eddie for calling her masculine, she does wear a pastel-coloured dress and a flower pinned to her hair to Eddie's house, possibly trying to appear more heterosexual and therefore reinforcing stereotypes that lesbians are "mannish" and not "girly".

However, whether it is the film or the characters that surrender to stereotypes is unclear. On the one hand, the scenes that make reference to Eddie's sense of fashion and feminine mannerisms and to Amber's masculine attitudes are reproduced for comedic effect. This could suggest that the film is relying on these stereotypes to appeal to a wider audience that is more accustomed to the representation of gay and lesbian characters as comic relief. On the other hand, the compliance of the characters with stereotypical notions about their sexuality could be an attempt to reflect the influence of heteronormativity upon queer subjects. Amber assumes that Eddie should be into fashion because he is gay, and Eddie understands that Amber should wear dresses if she wants to appear heterosexual. These notions do not simply convey stereotypical characterisations of male and female homosexuality, but are also subjected to heterosexual norms of masculine and feminine traits. In this sense, at the same time as she questions normativity through her lesbianism, Amber also reduces her sexual identity to heteronormative patterns.

4.3. "You can come out too"

The first time Amber goes to Dublin with Eddie, they see a pride flag hanging outside a venue, and hesitantly go inside. Eddie is quickly mesmerised by a drag queen performing on stage, yet Amber stays alone at the back, suddenly shy at this unapologetic display of LGBTQ+ community. When Sarah introduces herself, Amber does not say her name, instead replying, "I'm not a lesbian" (Freyne 2020: min. 36). It appears that, because she has never before been in a public space where being queer is not condemned, she does not feel comfortable. In Ireland, Macleod argues, "[t]he homosexual subject [...] has occupied a key role within Irish discourses in both historical and contemporary contexts, operating simultaneously as evidence of colonial perversion, a marker of national treason and a symbol of modernisation" (2018: 9). While in this new urban setting homosexuality is linked with "modernisation", Amber has grown up to see it as "perversion" and as "treason" to the national ideal. Within such a conservative

perspective, she has been able to negotiate her lesbian identity, playing the part of a heterosexual teenage girl and only allowing herself to admit her homosexuality in solitude or in the presence of Eddie; thus the idea of being perceived as a lesbian by a stranger scares her, likely an automatic response resulting from the suppression of her feelings that she has experienced in her more conservative surroundings where the LGBTQ+ community is lacking and looked down on.

Nevertheless, she convinces Eddie to attend a party Sarah has invited her to under the idea that "wasn't it cool being totally anonymous?" (Freyne 2020: min. 43). Despite her initial reaction to hide her homosexuality, Amber perceives Dublin as a place of anonymity where she can be herself without having to confront the harassment from her classmates and the rejection from her village. Her prior visit to Dublin has revealed to Amber that there exists an Irish LGBTQ+ community, which —for the first time— allows her to consider that being Irish and a lesbian is possible. Unlike at school, where sapphic girlhoods are not recognised, lesbians are generally "more comfortable exploring their sexual identity in places that are frequently outside the school setting" (Petrovic and Ballard 2005: 206). Hence, Dublin is portrayed as a place where Amber can explore her sapphic identity as there is a space there for lesbian girlhood that she cannot find in her conservative school and village.

223

On her second visit to the city, while Amber is still unable to articulate the word "lesbian" in front of Sarah, she does tell her she does not like boys: "I need to make a confession. I don't actually have a boyfriend. Not really. The whole penis thing kind of makes me vom" (Freyne 2020: min. 48). The girls quickly begin a relationship, providing for Amber a new safe space that allows her to grow more comfortable as a lesbian and to renounce the idea of having to go abroad to be herself, encouraging her to end her fake relationship with Eddie (mins. 63-64) and to come out to her mother, who without saying anything holds her daughter's hand as a sign of affection (mins. 65-66). In this sense, it can be observed how the film is marked by the shift in queer cinema "from the representation of homosexuality itself as a problem for queer characters to overcome, towards coming out and self-acceptance as the crucial issue for queer characters" (Monaghan 2010: 58). Amber's experiences are not determined by a need to suppress her lesbianism, but rather by her journey towards a coming out that liberates her from the oppressive systems that surround her.

After her coming out, Amber must confront the blatant homophobia of her village, unable to hide anymore under the pretence that she is not gay. Queer narratives tend "to represent rural space as inherently oppressive and characterised by traditional gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality" (Macleod 2018: 92), which is depicted in *Dating Amber*. Her mother, though trying to show support towards Amber, shares the news with the priest — likely seeking understanding

or advice, shocked at the kind of news that Irish Catholic parents could not fully comprehend due to their own religiously oppressive upbringing. Now Amber is ostracised by students and neighbours at large, the latter blessing themselves as they see her pass (Freyne 2020: min. 78). On top of this, Eddie blames Amber for ruining their "relationship" and instead of supporting her after she is outed, he calls her "dyke" (min. 68), succumbing to the homophobic discourse that surrounds him and that he feels unable to escape without the protection of his relationship with Amber. Amber can no longer deny that she is a lesbian —nor does she want to— and Eddie still wants to rely on their lie to protect himself, demonstrating how the two adolescents have grown apart. She tries to convince him that he "can come out too" because "it's not about other people, […] it's about [him]", yet Eddie insists that he is "happy" and that "join[ing] the regiment and stay[ing] [there] and be[ing] miserable" is "better than being a faggot" (min. 71). It is here that Amber's process of self-acceptance becomes the clearest. While Eddie insists that they should be together and that he would rather join the army and pretend he is not gay, Amber has been able to challenge the heteronormative expectations of her rural Catholic and military setting, choosing to openly embrace her lesbian identity and to interrogate the established moral values.

Furthermore, Amber's coming out and her decision to remain in Ireland challenge frequent portrayals of sapphic sexuality "as 'just a phase' of unruly adolescent development" (Monaghan 2016: 4). Amber's sapphic sexuality does not conclude as she finishes secondary school, but is rather reaffirmed as the narrative develops. In this sense, *Dating Amber* supports Monaghan's assertion that "recent cinematic representations demonstrate the potential for nuanced relationships between queerness and girlhood to be articulated through screen media" (2019: 109). Amber has been able to negotiate her lesbian and Irish identities, no longer needing to run away. In doing so, Amber "challenge[s] linear models of girlhood development and emphasizes the queerness of queer girlhood" (99). Additionally, her decision to remain in Ireland, where she now feels she has a supportive network through her girlfriend, her mother and the Irish queer community at large, conveys a defiance towards Ireland's standards of sexual purity and breaks away from the trend that LGBTQ+ Irish people had to emigrate. Thus, as the film concludes, Amber's lesbian girlhood has been recognised and reaffirmed, claiming a space for it within the Irish setting and challenging homophobic national discourses.

5. Conclusion

Dating Amber provides insight into the development of Irish lesbian girlhood within the conservative framework of 1990s Ireland, a time when discrimination

against the LGBTQ+ community was rife. Nevertheless, while *Dating Amber* looks at the late twentieth century, Anna Charczun sustains that "the stigma and the feeling of being the society's outcast still pervades in many lesbians" (2019: 139), enhancing the relevance and timely production of the film.

The film approaches and reflects on what were —and still are to some extent— common experiences for Irish lesbians, such as the desire to move abroad, homophobic harassment at school and the denial of one's homosexuality in an attempt at self-protection. Discourses on the incompatibility of Irishness and lesbianism are brought to the forefront through the suffocatingly repressive setting where Amber must negotiate her identity. In contrast to her village, Amber finds a safe space in her friendship with Eddie and in the Dublin LGBTQ+ community. Her fake-relationship-turned-into-friendship with Eddie is Amber's first experience of queer kinship, paramount in the lives of queer people where community usually offers the acceptance that cannot be found within heteronormative institutions such as family, school or religion. It is, indeed, community which acts as a catalyst in Amber's realisation that she can be both a lesbian and Irish, resulting in her coming out and her decision to stay in Ireland *and* be herself openly. Her discovery of the Irish LGBTQ+ community in Dublin shows Amber that her sapphic girlhood can be recognised within Irish borders. In coming out to her mother, breaking off her fake relationship with Eddie in order to have a real relationship with another girl, and deciding to stay in Ireland instead of leaving, Amber challenges the established heteronormative expectations of Catholic Ireland. In doing so, Amber exemplifies the resistance from the Irish queer community that drove Irish lesbians in the late twentieth century to mobilise in order to make themselves visible and claim a space for themselves within Ireland.

Dating Amber broadens the scope of queer Irish cinema through its approach to the previously unexplored reality of lesbian girlhood, a gap that this article has attempted to address through its examination of the film and the development of Amber's character. The film also provides an alternative representation of sapphic women, as Amber's sexuality is not depicted as unambiguous and she does not ultimately succumb to heterosexuality, claiming a space for lesbianism within the Irish screen. Furthermore, *Dating Amber* contributes to what Rachel Lewis refers to as "the crucial —but still vastly under-theorized— question of what it means to think lesbian representation globally and transnationally" (2012: 287). It offers a distinctive approach to the perception of lesbianism in Ireland and, in turn, shows how "same-sex female desire can be configured into mainstream texts to create new narrative, aesthetic, and political possibilities" (Pick 2004: 107). In short, Amber's acceptance of herself as an Irish lesbian against a homophobic backdrop interrogates conventional discourses that aim to separate Irishness and lesbianism,

225

and in doing so she refutes the incompatibility of both identities and creates a space for Irish lesbian girlhood(s) to exist within Irish culture and imagery.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. While the success of the referendum was certainly a great achievement, the priority given to marriage recognition in lieu of other more pressing matters and its message of assimilation were also criticised (see, for instance, Mulhall 2015; Silvera 2015).

226

Works Cited

BARTON, Ruth. 2004. *Irish National Cinema*. Routledge.

BRADSHAW, Peter. 2020. "*Dating Amber* Review - Gay Teenagers' Pretend Love Fails to Blossom". *The Guardian* (June 3). <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/jun/03/dating-amber-review-fionn-oshea-sharon-horgan>. Accessed June 16, 2025.

BROWN, Tracy. 2020. "Review: 'Dating Amber' Is the Platonic Queer Love Story We All Deserve". *Los Angeles Times* (November 11). <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2020-11-11/dating-amber-review-lgbtq-love-story-review>. Accessed June 16, 2025.

CARREGAL, José. 2021. *Queer Whispers: Gay and Lesbian Voices of Irish Fiction*. University College Dublin Press.

CHARCZUN, Anna. 2019. "A New Framework for Rethinking Love Between Women: The Development of Lesbian Narrative in Irish Women's Writing, 1801-2017". PhD Dissertation. Brunel University London. <https://bura.brunel.ac.uk/handle/2438/18143>.

CLARKE, Donald. 2020. "*Dating Amber*: A Story about Two Gay Teenagers, Being Each Other's Beards". *The Irish Times* (May 30). <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/dating-amber-a-story-about-two-gay-teenagers-being-each-other-s-beards-1.4262124>. Accessed June 16, 2025.

CONNOLLY, Linda and Tina O'TOOLE. 2005. *Documenting Irish Feminisms: The Second Wave*. The Woodfield Press.

CONRAD, Kathryn. 2001. "Queer Treasons: Homosexuality and Irish National Identity". *Cultural Studies* 15 (1): 124-137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380010012630>.

CRONE, Joni. 1988. "Lesbian Feminism in Ireland". *Women's Studies International Forum* 11 (4): 343-347. zhttps://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(88)90076-3>.

CRONE, Joni. 1995. "Lesbians: the Lavender Women of Ireland". In O'Carroll, Íde and Eoin Collins (eds.): 60-70.

FREYNE, David. 2020. *Dating Amber*. Screen Ireland.

HANS, Simran. 2020. "*Dating Amber* Review - Witty Irish Coming-of-Age Yarn". *The Guardian* (June 7). <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/jun/07/dating-amber-review-witty-irish-coming-of-age-yarn>. Accessed June 16, 2025.

HOLOHAN, Conn. 2009. "Queering the Green: The Limitations of Sexuality as Metaphor in Recent Irish Film". In Le Corff, Isabelle and Estelle Epinoux (eds.) *Cinemas of Ireland*. Cambridge Scholars: 137-145.

KERRIGAN, Páraic. 2019. "Projecting a Queer Republic: Mainstreaming Queer Identities on Irish Documentary Film". *Studies in Documentary Film* 13 (1): 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2018.1535683>.

KERRIGAN, Páraic and Anne O'BRIEN. 2020. "Camping It Up and Toning It Down: Gay and Lesbian Sexual Identity in Media Work". *Media, Culture & Society* 42 (7-8): 1061-1077. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720908149>.

LESNIK-OBERSTEIN, Karín. 2016. "Children's Literature: Sexual Identity, Gender, and Childhood". *Breac: A Digital Journal of Irish Studies*. <https://breac.nd.edu/articles/childrens-literature-sexual-identity-gender-and-childhood/>. Accessed December 18, 2024.

LEWIS, Rachel. 2012. "Towards a Transnational Lesbian Cinema". *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 16 (3): 273-290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2012.673926>.

MAC RISTEAIRD, Seán. 2020. "Coming Out, Queer Sex, and Heteronormativity in Two Irish Language Novels". *Studi Irlandesi: A Journal of Irish Studies* 10: 63-75. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/SIJIS-2239-3978-11752>.

MACLEOD, Allison. 2018. *Irish Queer Cinema*. Edinburgh U.P.

MCDONAGH, Patrick J. 2017. "'Homosexuals Are Revolting' - Gay & Lesbian Activism in the Republic of Ireland 1970s - 1990s". *Studi Irlandesi: A Journal of Irish Studies* 7: 65-91. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/SIJIS-2239-3978-20751>.

MOANE, Ger. 1995. "Living Visions". In O'Carroll, Íde and Eoin Collins (eds.): 86-98.

MONAGHAN, Whitney. 2010. "'It's All in a Day's Work for a 15-Year-Old Gay Virgin': Coming Out and Coming of Age in Teen Television". *Colloquy* 19: 56-69. <https://www.monash.edu/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1762113/monaghan.pdf>.

MONAGHAN, Whitney. 2016. *Queer Girls, Temporality and Screen Media: Not 'Just a Phase'*. Palgrave Macmillan.

MONAGHAN, Whitney. 2019. "Not Just a Phase: Queer Girlhood and Coming of Age on Screen". *Girlhood Studies* 12 (1): 98-113. <https://doi.org/10.3167/ghs.2019.120109>.

MULHALL, Anne. 2015. "The Republic of Love". *Bully Bloggers* (June 20). <https://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2015/06/20/the-republic-of-love/>. Accessed June 16, 2024.

O'CARROLL, Íde and Eoin COLLINS. 1995. "Interview with Mary Dorcey". In O'Carroll, Íde and Eoin Collins (eds.): 25-44.

227

Iria Seijas-Pérez

O'Carroll, Íde and Eoin Collins. (eds.) 1995. *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland*. Cassell.

O'Rourke, Michael, Aideen Quilty, Eibhear Walshe, Moynagh Sullivan, Kathryn Conrad and Michael Barron. 2013. "Roundtable: Are We Queer Yet?". *Irish University Review* 43 (1): 12-54. <https://doi.org/10.3366/iur.2013.0054>.

Petrovic, John E. and Rebecca M. Ballard. 2005. "Unstraightening the Ideal Girl: Lesbians, High School, and Spaces to Be". In Bettis, Pamela J. and Natalie G. Adams (eds.) *Geographies of Girlhood: Identities In-Between*. Routledge: 195-209.

Pick, Anat. 2004. "New Queer Cinema and Lesbian Films". In Aaron, Michele (ed.) *New Queer Cinema*. Edinburgh U.P.: 103-118.

Redmond, Jennifer. 2015. "The Politics of Emigrant Bodies: Irish Women's Sexual Practice in Question". In Redmond, Jennifer, Mary McAuliffe, Sandra McAvoy and Sonja Tiernan (eds.) *Sexual Politics in Modern Ireland*. Irish Academic Press: 73-89.

Scahill, Andrew. 2019. "Fanfic'ing Film: Queer Youth Cinema Reclaims Pop Culture". *Girlhood Studies* 12 (1): 114-124. <https://doi.org/10.3167/ghs.2019.120110>.

Silvera, A.B. 2015. "Marriage Is Not Equality: Thoughts on #MarRef from a Worried Radical Queer". *Feminist Ire* (May 21). <https://feministire.com/2015/05/21/marriage-is-not-equality-thoughts-on-marref-from-a-worried-radical-queer/>. Accessed June 16, 2025.

228

Reviews

INTERNACIONALIZAR LA UNIVERSIDAD ESPAÑOLA: ESTRATEGIAS, PRÁCTICAS DOCENTES Y LENGUAS

EUGENIO RAMÓN LUJÁN MARTÍNEZ
Universidad Complutense de Madrid
erlujan@filol.ucm.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6769-3791>

Este libro supone una importante contribución a un tema que es crucial para el presente de la Universidad y que claramente va a serlo cada vez más en el futuro próximo. Las relaciones internacionales son desde hace mucho tiempo un elemento clave en la vida de las universidades y en España han ido cobrando cada vez más importancia, especialmente desde mediados de los años 80 del siglo pasado, con la integración de España en la Unión Europea y el desarrollo del programa Erasmus y, posteriormente, con la creación del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior. La importancia que acciones estratégicas como las alianzas de universidades europeas están cobrando en estos últimos años marcan el camino por el que habrá que transitar en los próximos años y señalan claramente la necesidad de pararse a repensar qué entendemos hoy por "internacionalización" en la universidad y cómo puede y debe fomentarse, para lo cual este libro constituye un instrumento relevante.

Su coordinadora, Emma Dafouz, Catedrática de Lingüística Inglesa en el Departamento de Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, tiene una larga trayectoria de investigación y de práctica en este ámbito desde su papel en el grupo regional ICLHE España (*Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education*), como asesora para la internacionalización en el Vicerrectorado de Relaciones Internacionales de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid y dentro del grupo de internacionalización de la Conferencia de Rectores (CRUE) entre 2014 y 2019. Ha conseguido reunir para este volumen a un grupo de expertos en diferentes aspectos relacionados con la internacionalización y el resultado ha sido un volumen

que presenta un acercamiento bien fundamentado epistemológicamente y que evidencia un profundo conocimiento teórico de la cuestión, desde la sociolingüística y la etnolingüística, entre otras, con una atención a la dimensión práctica desde la experiencia de los autores que han tenido responsabilidades en el tema en diferentes universidades e instituciones. Las tres palabras del subtítulo ("estrategias", "prácticas docentes" y "lenguas") reflejan bien el variado contenido que se trata.

El libro se abre con un prólogo escrito por J. M. Pingarrón, quien fue Secretario General de Universidades del Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades entre 2018 y 2024, al que siguen dieciséis capítulos, el primero de los cuales —"Introducción. La internacionalización universitaria: un concepto dinámico en un escenario cambiante"— corre a cargo de la coordinadora y editora del volumen. En él se revisa la historia del propio concepto de internacionalización y cómo actualmente solo cabe concebirla como un conjunto de estrategias, en la estela de la definición de Knight (2008: 22-24), según la cual se trata de "integrar una dimensión internacional, intercultural o global dentro del propósito, las funciones y el suministro de la enseñanza postsecundaria" y adoptando una postura que no puede ser ya reactiva, sino necesariamente proactiva y que comprende elementos tales como la elaboración de planes de estudio con un enfoque transnacional (lo que supone una internacionalización del currículo) o las prácticas enfocadas al desarrollo de competencias interculturales y globales, evitando riesgos claros, como la "Englishization". De forma muy adecuada se concluye que en la actualidad la internacionalización ha de ser transversal o sistémica y debe primar no tanto la cantidad como la calidad.

Tras este primer capítulo, el resto de las contribuciones pueden agruparse en dos bloques, con un buen equilibrio entre ellos: en uno se abordan cuestiones de carácter más general y en el otro se tratan necesidades y problemas concretos que surgen cuando se decide abordar la internacionalización "en casa" —un planteamiento que surge en Suecia en los años 90— e impartir docencia en otras lenguas que no son la lengua propia del lugar donde radica la universidad.

Dentro de ese primer bloque los diferentes capítulos permiten obtener, entre otros, una visión histórica —profunda y matizada— de los procesos de internacionalización, del desarrollo e impacto del programa Erasmus, de la creación de las primeras universidades europeas o de los retos que supone la internacionalización de la investigación. Los capítulos 2 y 3 —"Construyendo Europa desde la universidad: la experiencia de Una Europa", de José M.ª Coello de Portugal, Isabel Durán Giménez-Rico y Begoña García Greciano, y "CIVIS: universidades y ciudadanos implicados con su entorno a través de programas educativos transnacionales" de Nadia Fernández-de-Pinedo e Irene Martín— proporcionan ejemplos de las diferentes perspectivas desde las que se ha abordado la creación de las alianzas de

232

universidades a nivel europeo. Estas alianzas suponen un decidido paso más allá respecto de la mera colaboración o intercambio de estudiantes, profesorado y otro tipo de personal, con la integración de las instituciones en círculos académicos de estrecha y permanente interacción que, además, no está cerrada, sino que puede abarcar cualquier aspecto de la docencia, la investigación u otros. Se proporcionan, además, interesantes ejemplos concretos de implantación y desarrollo de programas conjuntos a diferentes niveles (p.ej. grado, doctorado), con información relevante, por ejemplo, sobre cómo se han llevado a cabo las experiencias piloto de tales programas y las barreras y dificultades que ha habido que superar. Pero el análisis de este tipo de alianzas no queda restringido en el volumen a Europa y así, el capítulo 5 —"La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México como miembro de la Unión Iberoamericana de Universidades (UIU). Apuntes sobre la internacionalización regional mediante redes universitarias", de Sergio Joel Paz Díaz y Francisco José Trigo Tavera— nos permite acercarnos a la experiencia de una alianza universitaria entre instituciones de Europa y Latinoamérica.

Si ha habido un programa universitario de relevancia a nivel europeo, ese ha sido sin duda la joya de corona que constituye el programa Erasmus y a él se dedica el capítulo 6 —"Erasmus Student Network (ESN): 33 años fomentando la movilidad internacional", de Inés S. Gascón Varea— que, lejos de repetir lo ya sabido sobre la historia y desarrollo de este programa, está planteado desde la interesante perspectiva de los estudiantes y de los asociados en la *Erasmus Student Network*. También sobre el programa Erasmus versa el capítulo 12, solo que, en este caso, como deja ver su título —"El papel del programa Erasmus de movilidad docente en los procesos de internacionalización de las universidades", de Ruth Breeze y Hanne Roothooft— el foco está puesto en el impacto que ha tenido en los docentes, especialmente en tres aspectos clave como son los métodos docentes, las redes de colaboración y la presencia en las universidades de expertos de otros países.

Un capítulo sorprendente por su temática y realmente interesante es el capítulo 7 —"«Somos una universidad con una fuerte vocación internacional»: la internacionalización como misión institucional transversal de las universidades públicas españolas", de Ana Bocanegra-Valle— para el que su autora ha analizado los programas electorales de dieciséis candidatos a ser rectores y rectoras de universidad con la finalidad de indagar sobre la concepción de la internacionalización que se refleja en dichos programas y ver qué diferencias existen en cómo se pone en práctica ese concepto y qué implicaciones tiene para la docencia y la investigación. Se constata que hay seis temas clave en relación con la internacionalización: prestigio, formación, investigación, cooperación, multilingüismo y responsabilidad social. De este capítulo, que debería ser una lectura obligatoria para cualquier candidato/a a rector/a y para todo vicerrector/a de relaciones internacionales, merece la pena citar literalmente el último párrafo:

233

> Internacionalizar es abrirse al mundo, pero también hacer que el mundo impacte en nuestros contextos local, regional y nacional para la creación de conocimiento, su transmisión a la sociedad, y la formación de ciudadanas y ciudadanos responsables. Como manifiestan algunas candidaturas, «internacionalizar la universidad es más que traer estudiantes extranjeros. Es pensar en múltiples dimensiones» (R10), es «ser una universidad en un mundo global» (R6), es, en definitiva, «una de las mejores inversiones de futuro» (R7).

Con el capítulo 8 —"Internacionalizar la investigación: retos e identidades desde la perspectiva de los investigadores", de Rosana Villares— nos trasladamos al ámbito de la investigación, en el que la internacionalización supone la "producción y circulación del conocimiento a nivel global" (159). Resultan relevantes el análisis que se hace de las implicaciones del uso del inglés como lengua de la comunicación científica y los sentimientos encontrados que plantea su utilización entre quienes no tienen esa lengua como lengua propia, así como las reflexiones sobre la necesidad no solo de formar a los investigadores/as en la escritura académica en inglés (más la docencia en inglés) sino de darles apoyo y asesoría en relación con las actividades científicas que implican internacionalización, lo que, a su vez, conlleva compaginar la formación continua con la actividad docente y de investigación.

También se exponen y revisan las experiencias concretas de varias instituciones de educación superior, tanto en España como en otros países, lo cual supone un rico caudal de información que puede resultar muy útil a quienes tienen que tomar decisiones en estos ámbitos, tanto a nivel ministerial, regional o de las propias universidades, o implantar y desarrollar acciones y programas concretos. A ello se dedican los capítulos 9 a 11: "El sistema educativo español en el extranjero con una metodología de la enseñanza semipresencial: los estudios de Filología de la UNED", de Rubén Chacón Beltrán; "La internacionalización de la Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo desde 1932 hasta 2023", de Carlos Andradas y Margarita Alfaro; e "Internacionalizar en español: retos y recursos", de J. Ignacio Díez, este último dedicado al Centro Complutense de Enseñanza del Español.

Si nos fijamos ahora en el segundo conjunto de capítulos que mencionábamos más arriba, nos encontramos con trabajos que versan sobre cuestiones prácticas de la internacionalización "en casa". Así el capítulo 6 —"La acreditación de idioma extranjero en la universidad española del siglo XXI: compromiso con el rigor y desafío digital", de Dolores González Álvarez— y el 13 —"La formación del profesorado en los programas de instrucción en inglés: necesidades formativas, acreditación lingüística y retos futuros", de David Lasagabaster— nos ofrecen reflexiones y conclusiones concretas de gran utilidad sobre los sistemas de certificación de los niveles lingüísticos y las buenas prácticas al respecto, así como sobre la conveniencia de unificar criterios entre las universidades en España y basar la formación del profesorado en las necesidades que este tiene. El capítulo 14, de

título muy expresivo —"«¡Me tocó!»: panorama y opiniones de la docencia y de la evaluación de contenidos en inglés en la Universidad de Lleida", de Guzman Mancho-Barés, Ingrid Martorell y Berta Ferrer-Rosell— identifica cuatro grandes retos de la docencia en inglés: presencia de alumnado con diferentes niveles de la lengua, necesidad de acreditación de la competencia en inglés en los procesos de contratación del profesorado, el problema de la evaluación de las cuestiones lingüísticas en estudios que no son lingüísticos (es decir, de docencia *en* y no *de* inglés) y cómo lograr la equidad para el estudiantado.

El capítulo 15 —"La multimodalidad en la docencia internacional en inglés", de Inmaculada Fortanet-Gómez— se centra en los elementos no verbales de la docencia, tales como el énfasis, los gestos y la expresión facial y el uso de materiales audiovisuales, mientras que el último capítulo de la obra —"El desarrollo de la competencia escrita en inglés en un contexto universitario español internacionalizado", de María del Mar Sánchez-Pérez— explora las diferencias en la producción escrita que se producen entre un grupo de inglés como lengua extranjera y otro de educación por medio de inglés.

De lo expuesto se deduce que se trata de un libro necesario en los contextos actuales de transformación de la enseñanza universitaria y también tremendamente útil. Personalmente habría valorado enormemente haber podido tenerlo a mi disposición como instrumento y herramienta de trabajo durante los años en que desempeñé el cargo de Decano de la Facultad de Filología de la Universidad Complutense y estoy seguro de que su lectura será muy provechosa para todos los responsables de internacionalización universitaria a diferentes niveles, además de para quienes estén implicados o interesados en este tema. Publicar el libro en español ha sido una decisión consciente para llegar a un público más amplio dentro de las universidades españolas e iberoamericanas y también hay que valorar muy positivamente su publicación en abierto, que sin duda permitirá una mayor difusión.

Works Cited

KNIGHT, Jane. 2008. *Higher Education in Turmoil. The Changing World of Internationalization*. Sense Publishers.

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO LITERATURES AND CRISIS

Edited by Silvia Pellicer-Ortín, Julia Kuznetski and Chiara Battisti
Routledge, 2025

CRISTINA DE LOS RÍOS MARTÍN
Universidad de Zaragoza
cdelosrios@unizar.es
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6603-0306>

Crisis has become a defining framework of our times (Han 2024). In a world characterised by global turmoil, literature has consistently surfaced as both a mirror of the proliferation of crises and a catalyst for change. Within this context, *The Routledge Companion to Literatures and Crisis*, edited by Silvia Pellicer-Ortín, Julia Kuznetski and Chiara Battisti, examines the role of literature in both recording and responding to different crises from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives. First published in 2025, this substantial volume presents a compelling and timely account of literature's enduring significance in times of crisis. The editors' combined expertise ensures a broad yet interconnected approach to the intersections between literatures and crisis. Considering the globalised and interconnected nature of the world, the volume acknowledges an impressive array of cultural and academic perspectives. In fact, one of the strengths of the collection is the comprehensive approach of the 42 chapters, highlighting the varying impacts of crises depending on their geographical and historical context.

The volume opens with an introduction that contextualises the subject matter. The terms *polycrisis* and *permacrisis* immerse readers in the landscape of contemporary crises. The former refers to multiple crises affecting our current society, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the climate emergency, and the latter describes a state of prolonged instability. Both concepts reflect the complex, interconnected and persistent nature of contemporary global challenges, depicting how crises are not isolated disruptions, but long-term, overlapping systemic problems. The introduction also provides insight into the intrinsic complexities of the word crisis.

237

It does so by first addressing its etymology, and second by considering its meaning in other languages, with a focus on Chinese, mainly due to the particularly nuanced understanding of crisis in this language as both "danger" and a "crucial point". This linguistic approach concludes that it is imperative to understand the term as both a critical point and a transformative force. This initial opening framework also introduces essential terms and fields of study, for instance, visibility, relationality and vulnerability. Visibility is addressed in terms of focusing on both large- and small-scale crises as well as taking diverse cultural and historical perspectives into account. Relationality is also a recurring concept, as crises are best understood when considered as part of an interconnected whole, rather than focusing on single or seemingly unrelated events. Relationality is actually highlighted by the notion of vulnerability; drawing from Butler, lives are not seen as isolated, but interwoven with the lives of others (2012: 141). In times of crisis, this interdependency is naturally highlighted, as the condition of being vulnerable makes us turn to each other for support.

The volume is structured into two well-defined parts. Part I, *Addressing crises through literature*, encapsulates the theory and genre analysis that frame the representation of crisis in literature. Part II, *Crises in literatures across the world*, explores how crises manifest across different cultural and historical contexts, through the analysis of case studies. The first two chapters of Part I.I, *Theoretical approaches to crises*, authored by Jean-Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega, respectively, set a strong foundation for the volume, highlighting the essential role of literature in representing and addressing crisis. Ganteau's chapter addresses pressing issues, such as time, visibility and vulnerability, which are further explored and developed throughout the volume. With the example of contemporary British fiction in general, and the genre of climate fiction in particular, Ganteau contends that literature enables time to slow down. This is particularly relevant in the current fast-paced society, where time-saving technologies paradoxically coexist with a widespread sense of urgency. Onega's chapter further reveals the ethical role of literature in not only helping readers process crises, but also encouraging an active engagement. She also highlights literature's potential to represent unrepresentable events. The argument that crises are understood through their relationship with past events is also particularly insightful, as it underscores the role of relationality in shaping contemporary responses to crisis, which is also dealt with in later chapters. The next three chapters delve into theoretical considerations on contemporary crises of war, violence, migration and terrorism. Michael C. Frank (Chapter 3) focuses on the discourse employed by contemporary political narratives when dealing with the war on terror, drawing attention to the mechanisms through which events are presented selectively. Merve Sarikaya-Şen (Chapter 4) focuses on migration, offering a theoretical background on the term and approaching crises

238

as thresholds, in the sense that they are both dividing and connecting forces, an idea that deeply resonates with the meaning of crisis as both a critical moment and an opportunity, stated in the introduction and echoed throughout the volume. Also dealing with migration, Sue Vice (Chapter 5) effectively highlights the tensions between migration and forced displacement. Refugee literature is analysed in terms of how it challenges traditional narrative structures, emphasising hybrid forms that deepen our understanding of the representation of crises in literature. Chapter 6, co-authored by Lisa Baraitser and Laura Salisbury, provides a theoretical linkage between crisis and care, emphasising collective interdependence and relational temporalities. Chapter 7, by Gala Arias Rubio, serves as a conclusion for the first section, offering a thought-provoking theoretical discussion on climate crisis and its historical representation in literature. It identifies "propositive narratives" as an emerging narrative form focused on climate change, arguing that, unlike other narratives that concentrate mostly on apocalyptic views, this form offers a fresh perspective on climate discourse, highlighting a hopeful vision that is significantly evoked throughout the volume.

The next section, I.II *Literary genres and crises*, sheds light on the different forms and genres through which crisis can be represented and engaged. Paul Majkut (Chapter 8) focuses on mediaeval and Renaissance drama and the way it has historically engaged with different physical, spiritual and moral crises. This specific focus brings our attention to how past crises still resonate with contemporary struggles. Ivan Armstrong turns to poetry in Chapter 9, underscoring this genre's capacity to transcend time and space when capturing and evoking crises. Non-fiction is addressed in chapters 10 and 11 by Silvia Pellicer-Ortín and Julia Kuznetski, respectively. The former offers a historical overview of life-writing narratives, connecting them to the concept of crisis, and reflects on concepts, such as *scriptotherapy* or the paradigm of Transmodernity, which provide valuable perspectives when reframing crisis as a transformative opportunity. Kuznetski's chapter addresses how women writers use the essay form to engage with crucial issues in our society, such as the climate emergency, technology and AI or systemic inequalities. Chapter 12, by Chiara Battisti, delves into the visual form of graphic narratives, providing a broad and accurate account of the gutter —the space left between panels— highlighting its role in both making the reader engaged with the story and evoking the fragmentation brought about by crisis. In a similar line, Ieva Astahovska explores visual forms in Chapter 13, particularly the role of art in addressing burning issues such as the climate crisis, by looking at artistic works that convey, for instance, the disappearance of native plants. The first part of the volume concludes with Chapter 14, in which Raphael Kabo looks at science fiction, described as a defining form for crisis, addressing issues such as capitalist expansion, ecological collapse and neoliberal alienation.

The second part of the volume is divided into three sections, the first of which —
II.I, *Political and ideological crises in a historical perspective*— delves into how
literature has played a role in articulating, challenging and influencing different
politics and ideologies. Fabio Forner (Chapter 15) focuses on 15th century
literature to address its potential when mediating political tensions, especially
through rhetorical skills. Harvey Wiltshire (Chapter 16) highlights how
Shakespeare's plays subtly engage with the Elizabethan succession crisis at a time
when open discussion of the issue was forbidden. Ian Ward (Chapter 17), also
drawing on Shakespeare's oeuvre, examines how depictions of Elizabeth Sawyer's
case and Shakespeare's portrayal of witches in Jacobean England contributed to
the intensification of the demonic crisis during the period. Paul Majkut (Chapter
18) discusses how crises in 1666, proclaimed as the annus mirabilis by John
Dryden, led to a transformation in literary production and a more realistic and
naturalistic writing style. Leif Dahlberg (Chapter 19) analyses the literary
production of the Myrdals and how their rhetorical construction of crisis
contributed to shaping political arguments. Lastly, Robert Eaglestone (Chapter
20) examines the influence of the UK's Brexit-driven polarisation in literature,
ultimately underscoring how writing can become a polarised medium itself, as it
may reflect deepening divides.

The next section, II.II *War, migration and violence*, examines these intertwined
themes and their pervasive presence from different forms and cultural perspectives.
Eva Pérez Rodríguez (Chapter 21) provides a broad historical overview of the
representation of war in the context of the British Isles. Emrah Atasoy (Chapter
22) turns to Turkish speculative fiction, linking gender inequality and domestic
violence to the environment and the climate crisis. Helena Duffy (Chapter 23)
explores the representation of the Holocaust in French literature, focusing on the
ambivalent trope of the dog to reflect both humanisation and dehumanisation.
Film narratives are also included when exploring war and violence in literature, in
this case with Cecilia Beecher's take on the film *Belfast* (Chapter 24). Ilya Kukulin
(Chapter 25) underscores the profound impact of state politics on Russophone
literature, particularly following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Finally, Piret
Viires (Chapter 26) explores war in Estonian literature, focusing on different
genres, such as punk poetry and the novel, among which the striking case of Leo
Kunnas's novel *War 2023* (2016) could be highlighted, as it eerily predicted
elements of Russia's future aggression.

The third section, II.III *Values and identity crises*, explores the intersections of
these issues across diverse cultural and political contexts. Ksenia Shmydkaya
(Chapter 27) highlights the tension between utopian idealism and the practical
realities of achieving such ideals. Noelia Núñez (Chapter 28) turns to limit-case

texts and media narratives dealing with the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence and its representations in Spanish literature. Alexander Dmitriev (Chapter 29) explores the complex relationship between cultural memory and national identity in Ukraine and Russia, especially in the context of the ongoing war, and the narratives that shape each nation's identity. Ivan Stacy (Chapter 30) examines contemporary Chinese literature through the lens of affective crisis, drawing attention to literary representations of liminal states of consciousness. The liminality of consciousness evokes the notion of the threshold, already mentioned, and further developed in the next chapters and beyond. Izabel Brandão (Chapter 31) puts Brazilian women writers in the spotlight, examining heterotopic novels that approach the body as a border. The next two chapters by Bárbara Arizti (Chapter 32) and Eugenia Ossana (Chapter 33) focus on environmental injustice and Indigenous peoples' perspectives. Arizti draws attention to hopeful ongoing transformations in the context of Australia, mainly based on the paradigm of Transmodernity, as well as contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian writing. Ossana's analysis delves into African novels, intertwining historical and metaphysical tensions that challenge Western historical narratives.

241

Section II.IV, *Environmental crises and biopolitics*, is dedicated specifically to this pressing and urgent topic. Markku Lehtimäki (Chapter 34) reflects on the relevance of emerging forms that echo real (digital) communication as it is today, for instance, texts that simulate emails or social media feeds. Other crucial issues like biopolitics, gestational surrogacy and obstetric violence are dealt with by Antonia Navarro Tejero in Chapter 35. Through the analysis of literary depictions of these questions, the essay foregrounds how the intersecting forces of colonialism, capitalism, caste and patriarchy have shaped, and continue to shape, the experiences of marginalised women. Gender issues are also the focal point of Keitaro Morita (Chapter 36), whose case study analysis through the perspective of transecology offers a timely contribution to this emerging field. By linking environmental crises with the systemic marginalisation of trans bodies, this chapter effectively challenges heteronormative and cisgendered assumptions that keep shaping ecological narratives in the Anthropocene.

Finally, section II.V, *Technological crises and posthumanism*, winds up the second and final part of the volume, exploring the entanglements between humanity, technology and crisis. Amy Chan Kit-Sze (Chapter 37) interestingly connects posthumanity with Chinese mythology. The reflection of the contrasting views and understandings between China and the West regarding technology is particularly insightful, as it reinforces the argument that no single cultural or ideological perspective should dominate global discourse. Ivan Callus (Chapter 38) focuses on

speculative fiction, vulnerability and dystopia through the trope of the last man. He contends that the case study can be considered a foundational work that reshapes posthuman thought, and ultimately, literary understandings of crisis. Dystopian reflections are also the focus of Sidia Fiorato (Chapter 39), who connects the events in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to the current suppression of writing (and thought) caused by AI, mainly the generative technology ChatGPT. Daniela Carpi (Chapter 40) also addresses advanced technology and its infinite possibilities through varied forms, contending that literature facilitates our understanding and acceptance of the inevitable transition towards posthumanity. Lastly, AI concerns are also addressed in the last two chapters. Paula Carbone (Chapter 41) describes an actual experiment conducted at university level to explore the use of ChatGPT to work with literature and narrative texts. Additionally, Anders Hedman (Chapter 42) concentrates on certain reactions to AI that advocate for its deceleration and reconsideration through a "Pause Letter". Through a rhetorical analysis of the arguments posed in these reactions, the essay elucidates misconceptions and fallacies, reiterating the need to approach and use AI critically and responsibly.

In conclusion, *The Routledge Companion on Literatures and Crisis* sheds light on the multifarious connections between literature and crisis. Presenting a thorough theoretical framework and a wide variety of case studies, it brings together a diverse range of perspectives on the literary representation of crisis that contribute to ongoing debates about the relationship between literature and crisis, such as that of Lauren Berlant. More specifically, Berlant examines the way intimate tensions shape social existence, what is referred to as "the ordinary biopower" (2022: 19), highlighting how literature represents the complexities of living together amidst inconvenience and ambivalence. As for the relevance of this companion, one of its strengths lies in the nature of the text: it provides a comprehensive overview of the field of literature and crisis, mapping key debates, methodologies and future directions and consolidating heterogeneous strands of research into an accessible and coherent framework. Another notable strength of the volume is the exploration of both large- and small-scale crises from a wide transcultural perspective, using several methodologies and literary forms. In fact, another key contribution is the inclusion of multiple forms of literature, including innovative forms such as digital media texts. Even if the focus on these emerging narratives is not very extensive, it still allows for a thorough analysis of the way literature shapes and is shaped by crisis, also setting ground for further research. Moreover, while the volume addresses literature and crisis across a wide temporal scope, future works could narrow their focus to specific historical periods, which would allow for a deeper analysis of the topic. Lastly, another relevant insight of the volume is its focus on hopeful views when facing moments of crisis. This envisioning of possible ways out

of crisis becomes essential in our current context, as hope is what links and reconciles humanity (Han 2024: 29). Collectively, the volume constitutes a detailed and comprehensive reference that makes a highly relevant and original contribution to the academic investigation of crisis and its representation in different literatures. Thus, it will undoubtedly attract literary scholars in general, and those working on encompassing fields of study in particular, for instance, cultural and trauma studies, postcolonialism, ecocriticism and ecofeminism, among others.

Acknowledgements

Works Cited

BERLANT, Lauren. 2022. *On the Inconvenience of Other People*. Duke U.P.

BUTLER, Judith. 2012. "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation". *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26 (2): 134-151. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.26.2.0134>

HAN, Byung-Chul. 2024. *El espíritu de la esperanza.* Trans. A. Ciria. Herder Editorial.

MARÍA ÁNGELES TODA IGLESIA
Universidad de Sevilla
mtoda@us.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2115-428X>

Continuing in the same line of gender- and class- inflected archival research undertaken in her previous work, *The London Lock Hospital in the Nineteenth Century: Gender, Sexuality and Sexual Reform* (2014), Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz presents a study of the institutions that attempted to contain "sexually deviant" working-class women in Victorian and Edwardian Cambridge. A lecturer at the University of Málaga, Romero Ruiz has published extensively on the history of sexuality in Victorian England and brings her specialisation and close reading of contemporary documents to produce a text that can contribute significantly to several areas of nineteenth-century studies, particularly those concerned with the interworking of gender, power and class.

These areas are outlined in the introduction, as the author explains how she builds on James Smith's 2008 term "architecture of containment", drawn from studies of Irish Magdalen Laundries, as well as on earlier studies on prostitution and reform such as Finnegan (1979) or Mahood (1990). The book centres both on the history of specific institutions in Cambridge, thus contributing to studies on Victorian reform legislation and regulation, and on the construction and reality of the figure of the "fallen woman" in the same period, an issue that has long been an object of interest for feminist and gender studies (since, for instance, Nead 1988). Additionally, close attention is paid to the oft underestimated element of class which is so crucial to understanding Victorian issues. This perspective is especially present in how Romero Ruiz reads both the women's lives and the attempts to

"contain" their behavior, partly in relation to the conflict between working-class and middle-class moralities. For this purpose, she draws on studies of the Victorian poor. A final —and to me very valuable— contribution of the volume is to the growing field of studies on Victorian and Edwardian material culture and its neo-Victorian representations, often through the lens of "thing theory" (Sattaur 2012; Arias and Pulham 2019; Maier et al 2022), as I will explain below.

The introduction sets up institutions, gender and class as centres of interest, providing a brief context to Cambridge in the nineteenth century and to the two jurisdictions —the town and the university— which will interact in the development of the institutions that will be discussed in each of the chapters: the university-run Spinning House; the Cambridge Poor-Law Union Workhouse, dependent on commissioners and parishes from the town; the Cambridge Gaols; and finally the Cambridge Female Refuge, where both town and gown were involved. A brief contextualisation of prostitution in Cambridge completes the introduction. However, what is missing is a definition of the concept of prostitution itself. It seems to me a concept too loaded to go unexamined, particularly as the essay applies a gender studies perspective; even the term (sex work or prostitution?) has been the object of heated argument and painful division within feminism. While it is crucial to insist, as the author does, that sex work was an intermittent, complementary source of income for many young female workers of the period, an analysis of the patriarchal power structures that give rise to the institution of prostitution, going beyond brief references to the "separate spheres" theory, would have been pertinent. Similarly, some problematic uses of language, such as frequent references to the objects of this "containment" as "girls" —even given the fact that many were teenagers— and the occasional fall into Victorian terminology, as in "hardened prostitutes" without quotation marks, might have benefited from revision.

The first chapter establishes the history and organisation of the Cambridge Spinning House, which came to be specialised in imprisoning, with a view to reformation, young women accused of soliciting students or of "riotous" or "scandalous" behavior. Romero Ruiz's thorough analysis of the regulations governing the Spinning House provides a fascinating glimpse of the material conditions of life in these institutions. Her study of the Committal books and of contemporary censuses does much toward individualising the conditions, ages, origins and jobs of the women who were subsumed under the category of "fallen". Of particular interest to me was the access to the voices of these women as witnesses in an inquest held after the death of one of the inmates "of rheumatic fever, caused by a violent cold caught at the spinning house" (2022: 39); the witnesses vividly describe the lack of fire, the dampness of the beds and the cells and the drafts

coming from the broken windows. Judith Butler's theories of precariousness and vulnerability are here appropriately applied to the relations of power which governed the inmates' lives, and the author emphasises the differences in the punishment applied to the undergraduates and to the women in cases of sexual misconduct, as well as the blurred lines between patrolling working-class women's behavior in general and prostitution in particular.

The second chapter, "'Fallen Women's' Makeshift Economy: The Cambridge Poor-Law Union Workhouse" develops this conflation of prostitutes and working-class women, emphasising the theme of poverty and its stigma. It provides a full account of the British Poor Law's origins and the workhouse system to frame the specific institution whose archives are analysed. Once more, the wealth of specific detail can be invaluable to students of Victorian and Edwardian material culture — and to authors of neo-Victorian novels: "the inmate's diet was based mainly on bread and gruel, potatoes, and suet or rice puddings. To these, soup, cheese and broth were added, depending on the day of the week" (2022: 63). Attention is returned to the specific issue of "deviant" women in the workhouse at the end of the chapter, in which the related issue of single or abandoned mothers is developed through a careful study of the Cambridge register of births and the proceedings against the fathers of these "illegitimate" children. Chapter 3, briefer than the rest, similarly discusses the Victorian prison system in general and Cambridge Gaols specifically, and centers on the petty crimes for which women defined as prostitutes came to be imprisoned —since prostitution itself did not constitute an offence since 1824 (2022: 43)— as well as providing significant data such as the very young age of many of the offenders.

It is in the last chapter, "Domesticating the 'Fallen': The Cambridge Female Refuge" where the central themes of the study, which occasionally compete for attention, are most clearly and successfully brought together. Romero Ruiz here discusses institutions whose objective, beyond spatial containment, is to reform and recycle women involved in prostitution, bringing them within the domestic scene "in a place of confinement with characteristics like those of a middle-class home with the values of protection and isolation from peril" (2022: 104). Framing the analysis within Foucauldian theory, the author reads the Cambridge Refuge as an example of the exercise of power to create "docile bodies" (2022: 111) and emphasises the ideas of vulnerability and precarity in the situation of the inmates, particularly through the institution's emphasis on isolating and policing them as sources of possible contamination for both the university and the city. The medical examinations (also present in other institutions discussed), as well as the physical separation between the premises and the city, between the women and their friends or relatives, and between the women themselves, are read as elements in exerting

247

this power. Through the meticulous analysis of the Annual Reports, the chapter not only presents the day-to-day patterns of regulation and discipline, but contributes a wealth of material detail. Readers may find the list of prices paid for the different items washed, ironed and starched, or sewn by the inmates, which even specifies, "Cotton or thread will be charged if not sent" (2022: 121). Such tasks are presented as part of the attempt to guide the women toward traditional female (and heavily underpaid) working-class occupations that would be beneficial to the middle-class economy: building on theories of resistance and resilience such as Sarah Bracke's (2016), Romero reflects on the destinations and further life choices of those who left the Refuge, both the "successes" —whose letters from outside she quotes with due caution— and those who chose to break away from the control and dependency of the center. The changes brought on in the last years of the nineteenth century by the growing involvement of middle-class women with the Social Purity Movement, and by the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which raised the age of consent, are also analysed in terms of how they led to a less punitive, more reformist treatment. The final emphasis is on the persistent clash of values between working-class and middle-class attitudes on sexual work or prostitution.

248

The volume thus provides valuable information as to the internal history of Victorian institutions and how they shape, and are shaped by, Victorian middle-class ideologies of gender and class. Its exhaustive archival work gives further specificity and nuance to the growing understanding of women's history in the mid and late nineteenth century, as well as to the history of the institutions employed to control and police working-class bodies.

Works Cited

Arias, Rosario and Patricia Pulham. (eds.) 2019. *Tracing the Victorians: Material Uses of the Past in Neo-Victorianism*. Special Issue of *Victoriographies* 9 (3).

Bracke, Sarah. 2016. "Bouncing Back: Vulnerability and Resistance in Times of Resilience". In Butler, Judith, Zeynet Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay (eds.) *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Duke U.P.: 52-75.

Butler, Judith. 2006. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso.

Finnegan, Frances. 1979. *Poverty and Prostitution: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York*. Cambridge U.P.

Mahood, Linda. 1990. *The Magdalens: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century*. Routledge.

Maier, Sarah E., Brenda Ayres and Danielle Mariann Dove. (eds.) 2022. *Neo-Victorian Things: Reimagining Nineteenth Century Material Cultures*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Nead, Lynda. 1988. *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain*. Blackwell.

Sattaur, Jennifer. 2012. "Thinking Objectively: An Overview of 'Thing Theory' in Victorian Studies". *Victorian Literature and Culture* 40 (1): 347-357. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150311000428>.

Smith, James M. 2008. *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment.* Manchester U.P.

249

Notes for contributors

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal published twice a year by the Department of English and German Philology, University of Zaragoza, Spain. In addition to the printed version of the journal, current and back issues of the journal are available online at the following website:

https://papiro.unizar.es/ojs/index.php/misc

Miscelánea publishes articles on English language and linguistics, on literatures written in English, and on thought, cinema and cultural studies from the English-speaking world.

General format and style guide

All manuscripts should follow the style guidelines of the 7th edition of the *American Psychological Association* (APA) Style unless otherwise specified.

How to contribute

Contributions, in English or Spanish, should neither be published nor considered for publication elsewhere.

The recommended length for articles is **6,000** to **8,000** words.

Authors are expected to upload their anonymous contributions on the journal webpage.

An abstract of no more than 200 words should also be provided, together with five key words and a translation into Spanish when possible.

Authors should consult and follow our journal's Code of Ethics before submitting their manuscript.

Non-discriminatory language should be endorsed throughout manuscripts, making use of inclusive expressions and avoiding gender and racist-biased references.

Authors are encouraged to indicate whether the research data used in their studies take sex and/or gender into account in order to identify possible differences that may result from it.

Reviews are also accepted of books that are of general interest in the field of English studies and that have been published within the last four years (recommended length: **1,500** words). They should not only be a mere description of the contents of the book, but should also provide an explanation of its contribution to the field within which it belongs. Reviews will also be refereed.

Notes (brief reports on language, literature, history and lexicography) are also accepted.

Invited (non-refereed) contributions from leading scholars will be acknowledged as such.

There will be no restrictions placed on authors' use of their material for reprints or other publications as long as their first publication is acknowledged.

Reviewing process

Papers may be published if they receive favourable reports from reviewers who are specialists in the area. Every article is evaluated anonymously by a minimum of two referees, one at least belonging to a university other than that of Zaragoza. Reviewers will not be apprised of the authorship of these articles. The authorship of the reports will also be confidential, though their purport may be communicated to the contributors concerned if so desired.

Reviewers will be required to weigh up the articles that are sent to them and make out as soon as possible a written report describing the article in terms of the points itemized in an evaluation form. In the case of articles that have not been accepted or need revision, an additional report will be made out indicating the reasons for non-acceptance, or the changes to be made as the case may be.

Selection of contributions

The criteria for selecting contributions will be: their global interest and originality, their theoretical and methodological rigour, the development of a well defined

thesis, the quality of their style and the general observance of the norms required of work of an academic nature. The papers submitted should evince serious academic work contributing new knowledge or innovative critical perspectives on the subject in question. Articles that are of a merely popularising nature will not be accepted.

Although every effort will be made to publish contributions that have received favourable reports, the Editors reserve the right to make a further and final selection when the number of contributions with favourable reports is in excess of the number of articles that can be conveniently published in one issue of the Journal. In the case of partially negative reports as well as positive ones on the same article, the final decision will lie with the discretion of the Editors, who will weigh up the reports and the general interest of the subject matter of the article. Additional reports may also be sought.

The articles submitted should stick to the Publication Guidelines included in this volume (see below). Manuscripts not conforming to these guidelines will be returned to the authors for revision. The Editors may correct clerical or factual errors and introduce stylistic corrections without further notice.

For additional information, contact the Editors, Silvia Pellicer Ortín, Pilar Mur Dueñas and Oana Maria Carciu at the following address or via e-mail:

255

Silvia Pellicer Ortín (literature, film and cultural studies)

Pilar Mur Dueñas (language and linguistics)

Oana Maria Carciu (reviews)

Revista *Miscelánea*
Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Pedro Cerbuna, 12
Universidad de Zaragoza
50009 Zaragoza
SPAIN

miscelanea@unizar.es

PUBLICATION GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Citations

Double quotation marks should be used for citations. Single quotes may be used to draw attention to a particular item in the text. Italics are used for foreign words, or for emphasis. References in the text to publications should include the author's

surname, the year of publication, and, if necessary, page numbers, as in the following examples:

As Bachelard claims, while past memories are important, "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (2004: 5, emphasis added), which raises a question about the quality of living.

According to Shaw, the works belonging to this genre are concerned with either reflecting imaginatively, responding directly or dealing with the socio-cultural, economic and racial consequences that followed the UK's exit from the European Union (2021: 4).

…language always fulfils three communicative functions (Jewitt et al. 2016).

…this idea has been rejected by several authors (Reger 2017; Evans 2015; Cochrane 2013).

As Suárez Orozco suggests …. (in Inda 2014: 34).

Should part of the original text be omitted, this will be made clear by inserting […], NOT (…).

Should the emphasis be in the original text, this will be explicitly indicated as "emphasis in original". Should the emphasis be added by the author, "my emphasis" should be added: (Bordwell 2006: 73, emphasis in original).

Bibliographical references

Bibliographical references should be included in alphabetical order at the end of the manuscript and under the heading WORKS CITED. In the Works Cited all references used should be included and not more.

Authors' full first names should be used unless the authors themselves customarily use only initials. Set the author's surname(s) in small caps (e.g. JOYCE, neither Joyce nor JOYCE).

References to two or more works by the same author in a single year should be accompanied by a lower-case a, b, etc. after the year of publication, both in the reference list and in citations in the text. If two works by the same author are cited, but in one of them there is a second author, the latter will go after.

HYLAND, Ken. 2017a. "Metadiscourse: What is it and Where is it Going?" *Journal of Pragmatics* 113: 16-29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2017.03.007>.

HYLAND, Ken. 2017b. "English in the Discipline: Arguments for Specificity". *ESP Today* 5 (1): 5-23.

HYLAND, Ken and Feng Kevin JIANG. 2021. "'Our Striking Results Demonstrate…': Persuasion and the Growth of Academic Hype". *Journal of Pragmatics* 182: 189-202. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.06.018>.

References to books should include the publisher's name, and references to articles in journals should include volume, issue number (if necessary) and page numbers. Titles of books and journals will be written in italics. Titles of articles and of book chapters will be placed in double inverted commas.

The DOI should be included for all references that have it (see https://doi.crossref.org/simpleTextQuery).

Monographs:

Author's Surname(s), Author's first name(s). Year. *Title in italics*. Place: Publisher.

Nagel, James. 2015. *The American Short Story Handbook*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

Author's Surname(s), Author's first name(s). (Year of 1st edition) Year of edition actually used. *Title in italics*. Place: Publisher.

Bauman, Zygmunt. (2005) 2017. *Liquid Life*. Cambridge, Malden: Polity.

Editor's Surname(s), Editor's first name(s). (ed.) Year. *Title in italics*. Place: Publisher.

McNamara, Kevin R. (ed.) 2014. *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.

First Author's Surname(s), First author's first name(s), Second author's first name(s) Second Author's Surname(s) and Third author's first name(s) Third Author's Surname(s). Year. *Title in italics*. Place: Publisher.

Pahta, Päivi, Janne Skaffari and Laura Wright. (eds.) 2017. *Multilingual Practices in Language History: English and Beyond*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Author's Surname(s), Author's first name(s). Year. *Title in italics*. Trans. Translator's initials. Translator's surname(s). Place: Publisher.

Atwood, Margaret. 2017. *El cuento de la criada*. Trans. E. Mateo. Barcelona: Salamandra.

Chapter or article in a monograph:

If only one chapter or article has been used:

Author's Surname(s), Author's first name(s). Year. "Title in double inverted commas". In Editor's surname(s), Editor's first name(s) (ed.) *Title of monograph in italics*. Place: Publisher: 00-00.

Leonard, Suzanne. 2014. "Escaping the Recession? The New Vitality of the Woman Worker". In Negra, Diane and Yvonne Tasker (eds.) *Gendering the*

Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity. Durham and London: Duke U.P.: 31-58. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1131fr9.5>.

If two or more chapters/articles have been used:

Author's Surname(s), Author's first name(s). Year. "Title in double inverted commas". In Editor's surname(s), Editor's first name(s) (ed.): 00-00. (The reference of the edited book should be written, in full, as a separate entry).

Molina-Guzmán, Isabel. 2014. "'Latina Wisdom' in 'Postrace' Recession Media". In Negra, Diane and Yvonne Tasker (eds.) *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity.* Durham and London: Duke U.P.: 59-80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1131fr9.6>.

Negra, Diane and Yvonne Tasker. 2014. *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity.* Durham and London: Duke U.P. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822376538>.

If the book is a compilation of another author's works:

Author's Surname(s), Author's first name(s). (Year of 1st edition) Year of edition actually used. In Editor's surname(s), Editor's first name(s) (ed.) *Title in italics.* Place: Publisher.

Wilde, Oscar. 2017. In Donohue, Joseph (ed.). *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Vol. 10: Plays 3: The Importance of Being Earnest; 'A Wife's Tragedy' (fragment).* Oxford: Oxford U.P.

If the author of the collection and of the short piece being cited are the same

Author's Surname(s), Author's first name(s). Year. "Title in double inverted commas". In *Title of monograph in italics.* Place: Publisher: 00-00.

Oates, Joyce Carol. 2004. "Curly Red". In *I Am No One You Know: Stories.* New York: Harper Collins: 3-20.

Article in a journal:

Author's Surname(s), Author's first name(s). Year. "Title in double inverted commas". *Name of journal in italics* number (volume): 00-00. DOI (if given).

Lu, Xiaofei. 2011. "A Corpus-Based Evaluation of Syntactic Complexity Measures as Indices of College-Level ESL Writers' Language Development". *TESOL Quarterly* 45 (1): 36-62. <https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2011.240859>.

Article in a journal special issue:

Author's Surname(s), Author's first name(s). Year. "Title in double inverted commas". *Name of special issue in italics.* Special issue of *Name of journal in italics* number (volume): 00-00. DOI (if given).

ADAMI, Elisabetta. 2018. "Styling the Self Online: Semiotic Technologization in Weblog Publishing". *Social Media as Semiotic Technology*. Special issue of *Social Semiotics* 28 (5): 601-622. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2018.1504713>.

Citations on electronic sources:

AUTHOR'S SURNAME(S), Author's first name(s). Year (if given). "Title in double inverted commas". Information about print publication (if given). <Information about electronic publication>. Access information.

MORRIS, Regan. 2018. "Is #meToo Changing Hollywood?". *BBC News* (March). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43219531>. Accessed March 18, 2022.

If no author is given, begin the entry with the title of the document, inserted in alphabetical order with the rest of the references.

"The return of Sir Thomas Phillipps' Italian manuscripts to Italy". 2021. *Institute of English Studies* (blog). (July 2). <https://englishstudies.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2021/07/02/the-return-of-sir-thomas-phillipps-italian-manuscripts-to-italy/>. Accessed March 18, 2022.

Films:

DIRECTOR'S SURNAME(S), Director's first name(s). Year. *Title in italics.* **Production Company.**

ROSS, Matt. 2016. *Captain Fantastic*. Electric City Entertainment.

Television shows, series and limited series:

CREATOR'S SURNAME(S), Creator's first name(s). Year(s). *Title in italics.* **Broadcast studio.**

WALLER-BRIDGE, Phoebe. 2016-2019. *Fleabag*. BBC Three and Amazon Prime Video.

The following norms should also be taken into account:

- Keywords should be written in lower case, unless they are proper nouns and they need to be separated by a comma (not a semicolon). A full stop needs to be included at the end.
- Endnotes, which should appear before the Works Cited list, should be as few and short as possible, and their corresponding numbers in the main text should be typed as superscripts.

- Additional comments should appear in between long dashes: (—) rather than (-); —this is an example—, leaving no spaces in between the dashes and the text within them.
- There should be no full stops after interrogation and exclamation marks.
- Inverted commas should never appear after punctuation marks (e.g. "this is correct", but "this isn't.").
- Current (CG Times or Times New Roman) typefaces should be used, and special symbols should be avoided as much as possible.
- "&" should be avoided whenever possible.
- Generally speaking, punctuation and orthography should be coherent (British or American style) all through the article. For example: "emphasise/ recognise" rather than "emphasize/recognise"; "colour/colour" rather than "colour/color".
- Authors are encouraged to divide their articles into entitled subsections. Capitalizations in such subsection headings should follow APA guidelines.
- In the case of co-authored articles, the specific contribution of each author will be indicated in the manuscript. This section will be added before the Works Cited list.
- Funding agency/agencies and project code(s) should be indicated in the Acknowledgements section (not as an endnote) and should be placed before Endnotes.

EXCHANGE POLICY

Miscelánea welcomes exchanges with other scholarly publications. Please write to:

> *Miscelánea* (intercambios)
> Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana
> Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
> Universidad de Zaragoza
> 50009 Zaragoza (Spain)

The basic exchange rate for periodical publications is established on the basis of annual volumes. Quarterly, bi-monthly or monthly journals, or book series editors, may agree to establish other rates or complementary exchanges.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Miscelánea was awarded the Quality Seal for Excellence of scientific journals granted by the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT), a

scientific body pertaining to the Spanish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Competitiveness, in 2016 (renewed in the 2025 call, 13/11/2025).

Miscelánea is indexed or abstracted in the following databases and directories:

* ABELL (Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature)
* BEJES (Bibliography of European Journals for English Studies), published by the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE)
* CARHUS Plus+
* DIALNET, Portal de Difusión de la Producción Científica Hispana
* DICE, Difusión y Calidad Editorial de las Revistas Españolas de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas
* Directory of Electronic Journals, Newsletters and Academic Discussion Lists, published by the Association of Research Libraries Washington, DC, USA
* DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals)
* EBSCO Publishing
* ERIH (European Reference Index for the Humanities)
* ERIH Plus
* Index Copernicus International
* ISOC, Revistas de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades del CSIC
* LATINDEX, Sistema Regional de Información en Línea para Revistas Científicas de América Latina, el Caribe, España y Portugal
* Linguistics & Language Behavior Abstracts
* MIAR 2023
* MLA International Biography
* MLA List of Periodicals
* RESH, Revistas Españolas de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas del CSIC
* ROAD Directory of Open Access Scholarly Resources
* SCOPUS (Elsevier)
* SJR. Scimago Journal & Country Rank
* ULRICHSWEB

Página web: <https://papiro.unizar.es/ojs/index.php/misc>
Cuenta de Twitter: @MiscelaneaUZ
Cuenta de Bluesky: @miscelaneauz.bsky.social

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS