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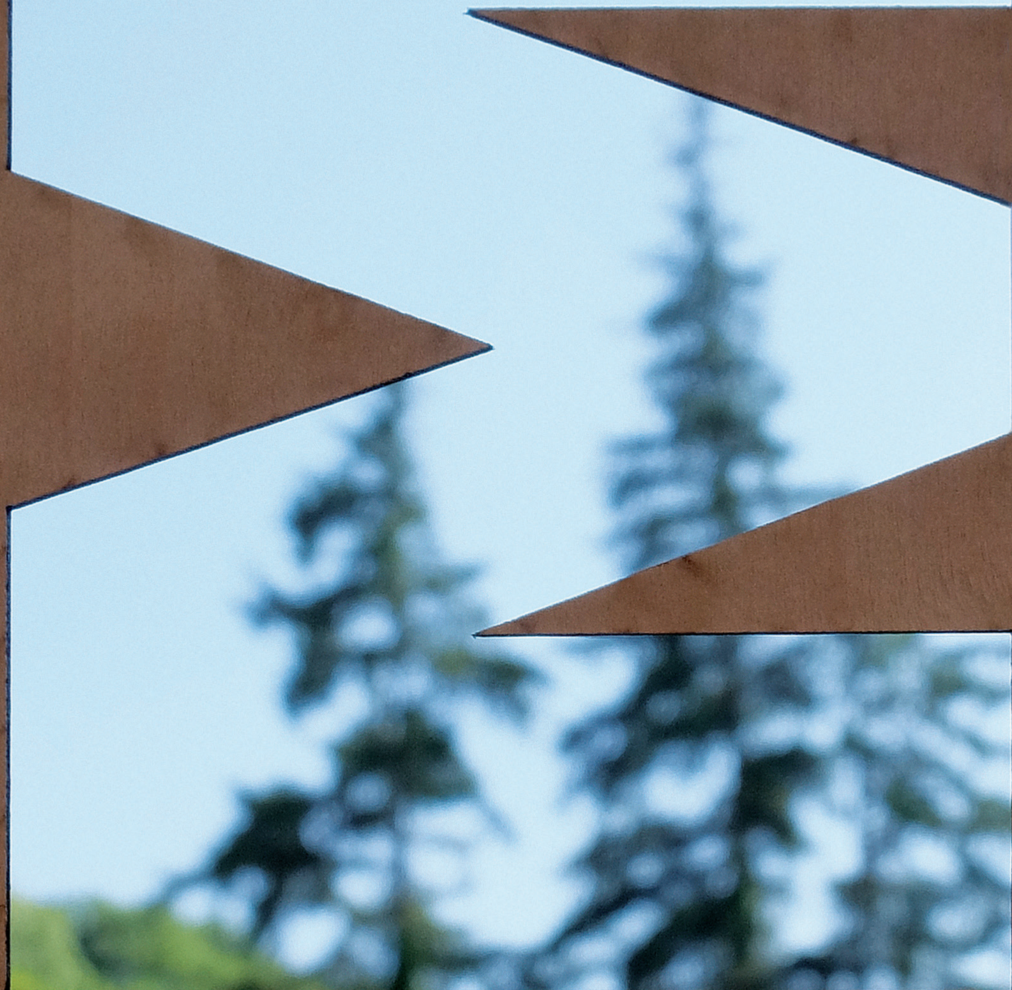

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DECONSTRUCTING THE TEXTUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE FATHERS IN THE FANTASY PICTUREBOOK *ONE DAD, TWO DADS, BROWN DAD, BLUE DADS* (1994)

DECONSTRUYENDO LA REPRESENTACIÓN TEXTUAL DE LOS PADRES EN EL LIBRO ÁLBUM DE FANTASÍA *ONE DAD, TWO DADS, BROWN DAD, BLUE DADS* (1994)

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the linguistic and visual choices used by the writer and the illustrator in order to create meaning in the fantasy picturebook *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads* (1994), written by Johnny Valentine and illustrated by Melody Sarecky, which features a gay family.

The analytical tools employed in this study to deconstruct meanings in the said picturebook are Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Social Semiotics and Painter et al.'s (2013) model to read visual narratives in children's picturebooks. The analysis concentrates on the textual and compositional metafunctions in order to observe the intersemiotic relationship between verbal and visual meanings and their realizations through various linguistic and visual modes. The methodology is qualitative-descriptive.

One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads reveals that both visuals and written text narrate the story, although it is the visual that is given a predominant role on the page due to its size, the location of the characters and the frames. The analysis shows that this is a picturebook in which having two fathers is represented as non-normalized, although they perform their family duties as they are expected to because they do the same things that other fathers do.

Keywords: children's picturebooks, multimodality, Systemic Functional Grammar, two-father families.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo explorar las elecciones lingüísticas y visuales utilizadas por el escritor y el ilustrador con el fin de crear significados en el libro ilustrado donde aparece una familia gay *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads* (1994), escrito por Johnny Valentine e ilustrado por Melody Sarecky.

Las herramientas analíticas empleadas en este estudio son la Semiótica Social Visual de Kress y van Leeuwen (2006) y el modelo de Painter et al. (2013) para leer narrativas visuales en libros álbum con el fin de deconstruir significados en el libro ilustrado mencionado. El análisis se centrará en la función textual y composicional para observar la relación intersemiótica entre los significados verbales y visuales y sus realizaciones a través de diversos modos lingüísticos y visuales. La metodología es cualitativa-descriptiva.

One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads revela que tanto las imágenes como el texto escrito narran la historia, aunque es lo visual lo que tiene un papel predominante en la página debido a su tamaño, la ubicación de los personajes y los marcos. El análisis muestra que se trata de un libro ilustrado en el que tener dos padres se representa como no normalizado, aunque realizan sus actividades familiares de manera esperada pues hacen las mismas cosas que el resto de los padres.

Palabras clave: libros ilustrados, multimodalidad, gramática sistémica funcional, familias con dos padres.

1. Aims and Scope of the Study

Literature for children not only contributes to introducing children to literacy but also to their process of socialization and the development of their ideology. The competences of reading and writing are developed with children's picturebooks (Soto Reatiga 2017). Moreover, the fact that picturebooks are full of cultural references promotes children's acquisition of cultural competences (Nikolajeva and Scott 2001; Arizpe et al. 2013; Evans 2015). This has an effect on the way children understand the world and incorporate cultural patterns while they learn (Painter 2018).

In addition, children have to acquire multiliteracies and need to learn strategies to understand how meaning is created by the combination of image and words. In this sense, children have to explore both modes. Following Hoster Cabo et al., "[t]he picturebook is a place of communication where readers perceive visual as well as verbal signs. Furthermore, readers are invited to explore them, thus making their own hypothesis regarding the picturebooks' meaning" (2018: 91).

One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads (1994), written by Johnny Valentine and illustrated by Melody Sarecky, has been chosen as an example of a fantasy book used to portray a gay family. The story is simple: a girl asks questions to a boy who has two blue dads in order to see if they can do the same things as fathers who are not blue and to know how they became blue. This picturebook is designed for 4–8-year-old children to open them up to the idea of different types of fathers: the combination of a different colored dad, a traditional family and a family with two dads helps children to compare different types of dads in order to discover that they are not that different in the end.

Moreover, this picturebook has been chosen because it comes within the first of the different textual strategies proposed by Sunderland and Mclashan (2012: 162-170) for the promotion, acceptance, understanding or celebration of families with same-sex parents: the 'different' strategy "where having two Mums or Dads is conceptually recognised as different by the child" (Sunderland and Mclashan 2012: 165). Additionally, these authors propose the 'backgrounding' strategy: "[t]hese books do not address the issue of gay sexuality directly or even indirectly, but rather issues surrounding the family or personal life, which are not specific to gay families" (Sunderland and Mclashan 2012: 168); and the 'gay' strategy, where "gay sexuality is discussed explicitly, in part through the device of explaining the word to the child in the story" (Sunderland and Mclashan 2012: 163).

The purpose of this study is to deconstruct the way gay families are represented as different from both the linguistic and visual points of view, paying attention to the textual metafunction of the picturebook. In this sense, the aim is to discover the intersemiotic relationship between visual and linguistic meaning and their realizations through various modes.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: section two presents a literature review, section three offers an analysis of the picturebook, concentrating on the textual metafunction, section four contains the discussion and section five sets out some conclusions.

2. Literature Review

Language and other resources in multimodal or multisemiotic phenomena such as websites or videos are called 'semiotic resources', 'modes' and 'modalities'. Following Thibault (2000), Ventola and Moya Guijarro (2009) and Parodi (2012), among others, I understand that all texts have a multisemiotic nature.

The theory of multimodality and multimodal discourse analysis (hereafter MDA) has been developed in recent decades. O'Halloran (2011: 120) specifies: "MDA

itself is referred to as 'multimodality', 'multimodal analysis', 'multimodal semiotics' and 'multimodal studies'". Hestbæk Andersen et al. state that:

> 'Multimodality' and 'mode' have also been used rather loosely and defined rather perfunctorily. We can say, as Gunther Kress does in *Multimodality* (2010), that multimodality is a phenomenon rather than a discipline —the phenomenon that communication integrates a range of means of expression simultaneously. But perhaps this is not entirely correct, because other disciplines use other terms for the same phenomenon, like intermediality and multisensoriality. So, 'multimodality' is also a disciplinary position, an approach to the study of the phenomenon that hails from linguistics and semiotics. (2015: 101)

Children's picturebooks are multimodal, i.e. the image and the written text interact in the creation of meaning. The relationship between the written text and the visual to create meaning in these books has been studied by scholars such as Lewis (2001), Painter (2007, 2008), Unsworth and Ortigas (2008), Serafini (2010), Unsworth (2014) and Moya Guijarro (2014, 2019a, 2019b).

The model of visual semiotics proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) is based on the metafunctions that Halliday proposed in Systemic Functional Linguistics, i.e. ideational, interpersonal and textual (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). These metafunctions pay attention to ideational meanings (the way realities are represented in texts), interpersonal meanings (the social relations between characters and with the readers) and textual meanings (the way texts are coherent and establish relationships with their context). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) refer to the metafunctions as representational, interpersonal and compositional.

Multimodal discourse analysis allows readers to explore the relationship between the image and the written text in order to deepen their understanding of the construction of meaning. The textual function refers to the written mode and the compositional function refers to the visual one, following van Lierop-Debrauwer (2018: 82): "Although words and pictures in picturebooks always convey meaning together, each of the two sign systems has its own potential in contributing to the story, in expressing temporality, spatiality, narrative perspective, and characterization".

Regarding the textual metafunction, I will refer to theme (i.e. the first element in a clause) and rheme (i.e. what follows the theme) when analysing the written text, following Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 64): "The theme is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context".

The textual analysis is relevant to see the characters who appear in a prominent position in the written text and to analyse if the written theme coincides with the visual one. Mathesius defines these concepts in the following way:

> The element about which something is stated may be said to be the basis of the utterance or the theme, and what is stated about the basis is the nucleus of the utterance or the rheme. [...] The basis of the utterance (the theme) is often called the psychological subject and the nucleus (the rheme) the psychological predicate. (1975: 81)

Themes can be marked when they do not coincide with the subject in a declarative sentence, when there is a subject before the verb in an imperative, when there is a complement before the finite in a polar interrogative or when we find a non WH-subject in a WH-interrogative (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). In addition, Daneš (1974: 118-123) proposes three types of thematic progression (TP): a) "Simple linear TP", where each rheme becomes the theme of the next sentence; b) "TP with a continuous (constant) theme", i.e. we find the same theme in different clauses but the rheme is different; and c) "TP with derived Ts": the text has a general theme and the different themes derive from that general theme although they are not the same.

I will also concentrate on the compositional metafunction in this article because it integrates ideational and interpersonal meanings by illustrating how meanings are packaged into units of information on the page. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 177), there are three main types of composition in multimodal texts: a) 'Information value': the place in which elements are located, for example, from left to right, from the top to the bottom or from the centre to the margins, can add a determined value; b) 'Salience': the different elements of a composition which are designed to catch the readers' attention, for example, appearing in the first or in the second place, the size of an element, the colour contrast or sharpness; and c) 'Framing': the presence or absence of frames that connect or disconnect elements of meaning by whether they go or do not go together in the making of meanings.

The layout of the page shows how the written language and the visual cohere to express meanings. An analysis of the main principles of composition and the distribution of the information value allows the deconstruction of the relationships between the different elements in the visual by observing different aspects such as the placement of elements on the right (new information) and on the left (given information) and the size of the images and the frames (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). In addition, the elements in the upper part of the layout function are considered as 'ideal', whereas those in the lower position function are 'real'.

Following Painter et al. (2013), layouts can be complementary when the written text and the visuals appear in their own space, indicating that they have a different role in the construction of meaning. Moreover, layouts are integrated when image and words come together.

The size of elements also contributes to the foregrounding of characters; a small character placed near the bottom of the page is given less importance than those that are large and centred. As regards framing, images are 'unbound' when there is no margin enclosing them, i.e. the only boundary is the page edge. In contrast, 'bound' images are set within a page margin, which separates readers from the story.

Each unit of information in a visual text is considered a 'focus group' (Painter et al. 2013: 91). A focus group can be placed around the centre in various ways, or it can be repeated in a series across the image (iterating). Iterating focus groups can be a) centrifocal, when they are placed around the centre, and within this option, centrifocal centred when the centre of the space is filled or centrifocal polarized when different elements are opposed on a diagonal, vertical or horizontal axis; or b) iterating, when elements are repeated across the image, normally in regular lines.

3. Analysis

One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads is a clear example of a fantasy book, as we can see from the title. The two fathers are referred to as blue, a colour traditionally associated with men. In this way, from the beginning of the book having two fathers is presented as non-normalized in the sense that it is highlighted that Lou's (the blue dads' son) fathers are different from other fathers due to their colour. This picturebook starts representing one dad at the top and two dads at the bottom. The next page specifies that one is a brown dad and the others are blue. The three of them appear walking with their dogs.

The two blue dads are shown from the start as having different styles. One is wearing casual clothes, sport shoes, sunglasses and has a moustache while the other, placed on the right of the page, is wearing blue trousers, a white shirt and brown shoes. The representation of the fathers as blue is highlighted from the very beginning of the story, where the word 'blue' appears several times. It is significant that it is capitalized, so that readers can immediately identify that they are not conventional fathers.

The fathers are referred to as dads or as blue dads throughout the book, with the exception of illustration 8, where one of the dads is referred to with pronouns in order to make clear that the action of cooking is done by only one of them: "My dads both play piano, and one of them cooks. (He makes wonderful chocolate cream pies)".

3.1. Exploring Information Value and the Representation of the Fathers

In this picturebook, the double-page spread is considered as a single layout unit with a clear division between left and right, the right showing the most important

part of the information. Whenever Lou and the girl asking him questions throughout the book appear, they are on the right page because they introduce new information: either the girl asks new questions, or Lou offers her an answer that provides her with new information. However, there are two exceptions to this pattern of organising the information value of the images, one at the beginning and one at the end of the story: 1) in illustration 3 Lou and the girl are on the left and the blue fathers on the right, which highlights the latter; 2) in illustration 15 a new girl called Jean appears in the story; the fact that she appears on the right helps to emphasize her.

In illustration 3, Lou points to the blue fathers with his left hand while he says:

> "I do!
> My name is Lou.
> I have two dads
> Who both are blue".

These words show that the written rheme is in the visual on the right, as a way of giving importance to both fathers. This is the moment when Lou confirms that he has two blue dads.

Illustration 3 in the book is the second time that the two blue dads are represented together. The dad wearing smart clothes in the previous visual is wearing the same clothes, but here he is touching his tie with one hand and holding a smart hat with the other as a sign of greeting. The other blue dad, who is on the right in contrast with the one presented on the previous page (who was on the left), is wearing grey trousers, shoes and a jacket, but he is also wearing a red t-shirt as in the previous visual. He is saying 'hi' with a simple arm gesture. Here he is not wearing sunglasses and instead of a moustache he has a beard, which is a sign of masculinity. This is the first page where Lou appears, and we can see that he has black hair and that the colour of his skin is black. This shows that the book is not only about a two-father family but also about a family in which there are people of different racial origins. This contributes to promoting the integration of people from different races. Combining race and sexual orientation in a picturebook like this helps to foreground differences in families and the importance of acceptance of and respect towards these differences.

In this illustration, pets have a significant role. There is a cat behind the legs of the father with the beard and a dog between Lou and the father with glasses. Lou's t-shirt is red and white, i.e. a mixture of the colours of the t-shirt and shirt of the two fathers, and a clear way of pointing out the relationship among the three characters. Lou has one arm on his chest while the other arm is pointing to the fathers on the next page. This is significant because it guides readers' attention to the fathers, who are given importance by appearing on the right page. At the same

time, Lou is looking at the girl who expressed her surprise at the existence of blue dads on the previous page:

> "Blue dads?
> BLUE dads!?
> I don't know who
> has dads that are blue!"

In illustration 4, the father with the beard is at the bottom of the page, showing that his body is blue. The other father is at the top of the page, combing his blue hair. The next illustration shows the child who narrates the story asking Lou the following questions: "'What is it like to have blue dads?' I said./ 'Do they talk? Do they sing?'" Next to the girl's head is a bubble with the heads of the two dads singing and some musical notes coming out of their mouths. In this visual, the cat between the two children clearly indicates a division between them. In fact, Lou is situated on the right of the page, the place of new information, emphasizing that he is the character who will have to answer the questions asked by the girl on the left.

In illustration 5 the father with the beard is holding a dish of cookies while the other one is lying in bed eating a cookie. As on the previous page, he is not wearing glasses but they are visible on the bedside table and in the previous visual next to the mirror. The right page of illustration 5 is very important in terms of the relationship of meaning between the written text and the visual, because we find the following questions next to an image of the father: "Do they work? Do they play? Do they cook? Do they cough?" The first and third questions appear next to the father with glasses; the second and fourth appear next to the father with the beard. It is significant that it is the same dad (the one with glasses) who is represented doing the two productive activities, working and cooking, illustrated on the left next to the question on the right. In contrast, the other father, the one with the beard, appears playing and coughing on the right, while the written question is on the left. In this illustration, the characters appear in the same line as the written text, and there is a zigzag pattern that links both fathers at the same time with the father with glasses on the left and the one with the beard on the right.

Illustration 6 shows physical contact between the two fathers and Lou: they are shown very close to each other (Lou is between the two dads). The father with glasses is hugging Lou, and the other father is just touching his head with one hand while touching the dog with the other. It seems that the father with glasses is more affectionate than the father with the beard. Traditionally, cooking and open expressions of affection are associated with women. In this sense, it is remarkable how the father who hugs Lou and cooks is portrayed, in that he also works and is actually the one visually represented working outside the home.

Next, Lou and the girl are represented walking one after the other over the curb, followed by the cat. On the next two pages we find the girl on the right, with a gesture that shows that she is thinking. The written text reflecting what she is thinking about appears above her:

> "My dad can stand on his head", I told Lou.
> "My dad plays me songs on his purple kazoo.
> He even knows how to make chocolate fondue!
> Can blue dads do all those things too?"

In illustration 7, on the left, there is a visual showing the girl's father doing all the things mentioned in the text: he is standing on his head, playing songs on a kazoo and making chocolate fondue. There are different vectors between the father and the other page, where the girl is just thinking: the father's feet are pointing to the written text, and the chocolate fondue is clearly framing the image of the girl on the next page.

In the following illustration (8), Lou's dads are represented doing two very different actions: the father with glasses is on the right-hand page above the written text coming out of the kitchen carrying the chocolate cream pie he has just made. He is wearing an apron and a chef's hat. On the left-hand page, the father with the beard is playing the piano next to the dog, whose tail appears on the right-hand page, next to the written text where Lou explains that cooking is only done by one of his dads.

Illustration 9 shows the blue dads standing on their heads; they are clearly joined by vectors from the heads to the feet. The father with glasses is playing with some balls on his feet while the father with the beard is holding a newspaper that covers part of his body. Lou and the girl appear on the right of illustration 9. This time Lou has the cat around his neck with its tail between the two children pointing towards the girl who always asks questions, specifically towards one of her hands that is inside a fishbowl and towards the question she is asking, which appears above both children:

> "What I would like to know now",
> I went on to say
> "is, just how did your dads
> end up looking this way".

The following visuals in the picturebook illustrate the different suggestions that the girl has for both dads being blue, something that she considers very strange. The written text is located above a washing machine with both fathers inside on the right of illustration 10. The left of this illustration shows two pictures of both fathers being children and already blue. These visuals are reinforcing the message expressed by the written text:

> "Did they go through the wash
> With a ballpoint pen?
> Or were they both blue
> Since the young age of ten?"

In illustration 11, there are two more questions with possible suggestions for the dads being blue. In this case, the father without glasses is shown drinking blueberry juice as a boy, below the written text on the left page. He appears next to the dog and surrounded by a few toys. He is joined by vectors to the father on the right of the illustration, above many blue toys and carrying an airplane in his right hand:

> "Did they drink too much
> blueberry juice as young boys?
> Or as kids, did they play
> With too many blue toys?"

Then, as usual in this picturebook, Lou offers an answer to the girl's questions in an illustration (number 12). In this case, the written text on the left page is placed at the top of the page above the fishbowl that appeared previously in the book:

> "Just where did you get
> all these questions!?" Lou said.
> "How did *such* explanations
> pop into your head?
> They were blue when I got them
> and blue they are still.
> And it's not from a juice
> or a toy, or a pill".

Lou is with the girl on the right page; the cat is again between them, and his tail surrounds a photograph showing Lou with his two dads. The written text with Lou's explanation about why both fathers are blue also appears at the top of the page, as in the previous case:

> "They are blue because —well—
> because they are blue.
> And I think they are
> remarkable fathers —don't you?"

In illustration 13, almost at the end of the book, both dads are represented all in blue against the sky, hanging from a balloon. It is the father with glasses who is on the left page looking at the readers. There are vectors between him and the written text that appear in the left-hand corner of the illustration, where Lou's statement clearly confirms that his dads are unusual because they are blue:

> "Yes, my dads both are blue,
> and although you may try,
> it is hard to see blue dads
> against a blue sky".

On the right-hand page, the father without glasses is looking at a red bird that appears right in the middle of the illustration. On his right, the dog is hanging from a balloon, looking at the readers showing surprise. Finally, the last colored element on the page is a green bird in the corner of the right-hand illustration, next to the dog. The two colored birds and the dog contribute to highlighting the blue colour of both dads and the rest of the page, which is also blue.

The next illustration, number 14, shows Lou's dads in the centre of the page, surrounded by other dads who are brown, white or green. At the bottom of the page we find the written text with Lou's words expressing the normalization of his family:

> "But except for that problem,
> our life is routine,
> and they're just like all other dads—
> black, white, or green".

At the end of the book green dads are introduced. The two children appear again on the right of illustration 14, clearly foregrounded looking at each other. In the background there is a green dad holding a frog in his hand. In this case, the written text is at the top of the page, and it expresses the girl's surprise about the existence of green dads:

> "Green dads? GREEN[1] dads!?
> That I never have seen.
> Now I never have seen
> a dad who was green!"

The book ends with the introduction of a new character in the story depicted in illustration 15: a girl who has green dads. The girl who recognizes having a green dad is on the right, confirming that she is introducing new information in the picturebook. It is significant that she is wearing red trousers and a white shirt, the colours of Lou's t-shirt. This is a way of connecting both characters whose fathers are of different colours. The fact that she has a thematic/prominent position in the visual text corresponds to the topical theme in the written text:

> "I have!
> My name is Jean.
> My dad's not blue.
> I have two dads
> who both are green".

Moreover, Jean is emphasized because she is a new character in the story, saying that she has a green dad. In this sense, it is observed that the idea in this fantasy book of foregrounding dads of different colours is present from the beginning to the end of the story.

The fact that she introduces new information in the story through the written text corresponds to her position in the layout: her presence as a character bringing new information is reinforced the first time she appears, on the right side of the layout, because she is with Lou and the girl who always asks questions —Jean is on the right and Lou and the girl on the left. There is physical space between Jean and the other two children, whose arms are touching. Finally, she is represented alone on the right side of the page layout, in the very last illustration of the book. The representation of the girl moving away, giving her back to the readers and showing only part of her face, contributes to showing that this is the end of the story, as the written text also makes clear:

> "I'd love to let you take a look.
> But we've run out of room now, in this little book".

Jean, Lou and the girl who has asked questions throughout the book appear on green grass in illustration 15 as a way of pointing out the new topic that has just been introduced in the story: the fact that Jean has green dads. In illustration 15, the written text is also at the top of the visual and Jean appears alone. The hand of the new girl points to the ground as a way of closing the story. The written text makes clear that explaining aspects of green dads would require another book (see the previous quotation).

3.2. Contrasting the Position of the Fathers in the Illustrations and Portraying their Normalization

The father with the beard is on the right in several illustrations (3, 5, 6, 13, and 14) while the one wearing glasses is on the right in several others (illustrations 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, and 11), so both dads appear in the prominent position throughout the picturebook. However, the fact that the dad with glasses is the one who cooks (illustrations 5 and 8) and works outside the home (illustration 5) suggests that he is given more importance. Moreover, the written text states that he is the one in charge of cooking, which suggests that there is a clear division of tasks as traditionally happens in heterosexual couples. This contrasts with the way that the father with the beard is represented: there is no linguistic or visual reference to him working outside the home; he is represented playing with the pets (illustration 5), offering the other dad some biscuits (illustration 5) and playing the piano (illustration 8). Consequently, he is more connected with less productive activities

than with working and cooking, and his expression of affection towards Lou is less open than that of the other dad (illustration 6).

Although both dads are different from most dads because they are blue, they are represented visually doing normal actions such as cooking and working, so that they can be seen as a normal family. In this sense, this picturebook contributes to the construction of two-father families as normalized, which will benefit the socialization of the child in this kind of family as being like any other child. Being blue is considered by Lou a fact in illustration 12. Moreover, apart from accepting them as they are, they are referred to as remarkable, an adjective with positive connotations:

> "They are blue because —well—
> because they are blue.
> And I think they are
> remarkable fathers —don't you?"

It is interesting that the normalization of the life that Lou lives with his two dads highlighted throughout the story contrasts with the fact that he refers to them being blue as a problem in illustration 14:

> "But except for that problem,
> our life is routine,
> and they're just like all other dads—
> black, white, or green".

3.3. Exploring the Patterns Combining the Written Text and the Visual, Framing and Focus Patterns

In most cases in this picturebook, the written text is located at the top of the page centred in such a way that it is given weight. The most general pattern is a complementary vertical layout. There are only five illustrations where the written text appears below the visual, which gives the visual more importance. In other cases, the text is next to the visual. For example, the right-hand side of illustration 5 shows written questions next to the illustrated actions that the fathers are doing: "Do they work?" appears next to the father who is working and "Do they play?" appears next to the father who is playing with the dog.

As regards framing, the visuals in this book are unbound because the image extends on the illustration without any specific margin. The only boundary is the page edge. In this way, attention is given to each of the specific moments represented between the child and the fathers. I agree with Painter et al. (2013: 105) that "[t]he depicted characters are less constrained by their circumstances [...] and the story world is more opened up to the reader".

The main focus pattern found in this book is iterating aligned because "[…] the elements are nearly always organized in fairly regular 'lines'" (Painter et al. 2013: 111). However, there are examples of centrifocal polarized focus patterns in some cases where the child and one of the fathers represented on two sides of the page are joined by different vectors (illustrations 11 and 13); also when the two fathers are represented as children and one of them is drinking blueberry juice and the other is playing with blue toys (illustration 11).

3.4. Analysing Theme and Rheme

Taking into consideration the theme-rheme structure of the written text, it is observed that most of the themes are unmarked (78.43%): they are the subject in declarative sentences; 'Blue dads', 'they', 'my dads' or 'my dad' constitute 31.37% of the themes; 'I' is the theme in 11.76% of the cases. In this sense, we find examples of constant themes (Daneš 1974), which is a way of reiterating given information so that the child can follow the plot, for example the WH-word as the theme in WH-questions such as "What is it like to have blue dads?" These represent just 7.84% of the total number of themes. Finally, the finite + subject is the theme in a polar interrogative clause, such as: "Do they talk? Do they sing?" These make up 27.45% of the examples analysed. Simple themes are the most common, as Table 1 shows.

Themes	Absolute values	Values in percentages
Simple theme	41	80.40%
Multiple themes	10	19.60%
Total number	51	100%

Table 1. Types of themes

The rest of the themes are marked[2], as evidenced by the addition of textual themes such as 'but' or 'and'. The following example shows that the fronting of the attribute 'blue' reinforces the continuity of the fathers being blue: "They were blue when I got them and **blue they are still"**. The examples of marked themes appear at the end of the book; one example is the child referring to the fact that the fathers are blue as a problem:

> **"But except for that problem,**
> our life is routine,
> **and** they're just like all other dads—
> black, white, or green".

Finally, once the possibility of fathers being green is introduced, the fronting of the object 'that' and the repetition of 'I never have seen' highlights that this is a new idea for the child who has asked Lou questions throughout the book:

> "Green dads? GREEN dads!?
> **That** I never have seen.
> **No,** I never have seen
> a dad who was green!".

The written theme coincides with the visual one: when the theme is 'I', the visual shows Lou or the girl who asks him questions, and when the theme is the fathers, they appear in the visual. Out of the thirty pages in the book, both fathers appear together in fourteen cases, 46.66%. If we pay attention to the position of the fathers on the page, both appear on the right the same number of times (seven each), which gives them equal importance. Both fathers are visual themes whenever they appear foregrounded on the page because of being on the right, in the centre or for their size.

4. Discussion

This book highlights the importance of tolerance, no matter how different people in general or fathers in particular are, in this case whether they are blue, green, etc. The representation of a colored dad, of homosexual parents, of a traditional family and the discussion among the children makes clear that all fathers can do the same things, no matter how different they are.

However, it is also observed that this picturebook offers a very clear example of both dads having different roles because the same dad is represented cooking twice in the visuals (illustrations 5 and 8). The fact that the dad with glasses is represented on the right, coming from the kitchen with a cream pie in his hand, while the other is playing the piano, clearly shows the division of tasks (illustration 8). There are different vectors between the two dads that reinforce the relationship between them. In addition, representing the dad with the beard playing the piano with his back turned while the one who has been cooking appears coming out of the kitchen towards the sitting room suggests that the father with glasses has more importance and a more active role in the family.

This book is clearly framed within the 'different' strategy (Sunderland and Mclashan 2012: 165) because it uses the metaphor of the two fathers being blue to highlight that they are different, although they can do the same things that straight fathers can do. In this picturebook, Lou is questioned by another child, a girl of a similar age as Lou, about his two blue fathers and about the fact that they

are different. When the girl explains what her father can do, she appears on the right-hand page with the written text above her head, and the father is illustrated performing the different actions he can do on the left-hand page:

> "My dad can stand on his head", I told Lou.
> "My dad plays me songs on his purple kazoo.
> He even knows how to make chocolate fondue!
> Can blue dads do all those things too?"
>
> "Do you think dads are different,
> because they are blue?
> My dads both play piano,
> and one of them cooks.
> (He makes wonderful chocolate cream pies)".

The representation of both fathers as blue is a textual strategy used to foreground them throughout the story and make them salient to the audience; in this sense, color is understood as a social phenomenon (Pastoreau 2008; van Leeuwen 2011). Following Painter et al. (2013: 35), "repetition of a colour may be used cohesively as a kind of visual rhyme to link different parts of a narrative". Consequently, the blue colour is a textual strategy used to give cohesion to the story. Making explicit that both fathers are blue suggests certain characteristics: blue is traditionally associated with men and pink with women. Using blue for both fathers is connected with their masculinity. Highlighting that the different parts of their bodies are blue makes explicit that their masculinity as gay men is also a characteristic of their personality:

> "They both have blue hair,
> that's the colour it grows.
> Blue arms and blue fingers. Blue legs and blue toes".

In the previous examples, the idea being pointed out is that gay dads are as good as straight dads. Lou makes clear that his fathers can do what other fathers do although they are blue. In this sense, this picturebook refers to both dads as non-normalized only in the sense that they are represented as blue. The word "gay" is not used; however, Lou's friends ask him all sorts of questions to see if his fathers do the things other fathers do:

> "Do they work?
> Do they play?
> Do they cook?
> Do they cough?"

In fact, Lou's answers to the questions that the girl asks him about his dads contribute to the construction of his family as normal due to the normal actions that they engage in. The answers provided help to normalize both blue fathers by pointing

out that they work, play and laugh as any other father does. The written text consisting of Lou's answers to the girl's questions appears at the top of the page:

> "Of course blue dads work!
> And they play and they laugh.
> They do all those things", said Lou.
> "Did you think that they simply
> would stop being dads,
> just because they are blue?" (p. 6)
>
> "I have never seen either one stand on his head.
> But I'm sure they both could
> …if the need should arise". (p. 9)

The last visual shows the two blue dads with the child holding hands being followed by two dogs. Ending the book in this way highlights that Lou's family is a happy family similar to any other, with the exception of both fathers being blue. The normalization of both fathers is foregrounded in this book in the multimodal combination of the written and visual text.

Pets appear throughout the book: in the visual where we find the brown dad at the top of the page and the two blue dads at the bottom, the three are represented next to a dog. The role of pets throughout the story serves to connect characters and to show affection. The fact that pets appear in different visuals contributes to the continuity of the story. In illustration 3, both pets are used to establish connections between the characters on both pages.

This picturebook contributes to the normalization of two-men families, because the child emphasises that the two dads can do what other fathers do, no matter that they are blue. Consequently, this book contributes to the broadening of children's gender schemas (Campagnaro 2015; Soler Quiles 2015; Coats 2018). This will have an effect on their ideology and on their socialization because children will see different family patterns, in this case two-men families, as natural as traditional woman-man families.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the textual and compositional metafunction in *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads* (1994) reveals that both the verbal and the visual modes contribute to the construction of meaning and to the representation of a two-father family using the fantasy strategy of portraying both fathers as blue. The normalization of the life of the two fathers portrays this family type as similar to others, with the exception of both fathers being blue.

Generally, the visuals illustrate the information that appears in the written text. In this sense, image and word have a complementary layout. Moreover, the visuals show both fathers in prominent positions, which contributes to giving them equal importance in the child's life and in the development of the story.

The visual representation of the two fathers suggests that they have different personalities and different roles when taking care of the child, e.g. it is significant that the child points out that only one of the two fathers cooks. In this sense, the picturebook illustrates a combination of differences and normalization: the two fathers are portrayed as different from other fathers because of being blue, but their uniqueness in the picturebook does not prevent them from representing a standard family and doing their corresponding duties as fathers. In addition, there are clear differences between them in their clothes and in the division of tasks. However, Lou's comments make it clear that apart from being blue they are like any other family.

Although the idea of Lou's fathers being different is present in the title and from the beginning of the picturebook by being represented as blue, it is emphasized that both fathers are normalized because they are represented, verbally and visually, as being able to do the same things that other fathers can do. Consequently, two-father families are promoted and presented in an egalitarian way. In this sense, this book may contribute to the socialization of children because they can perceive same-sex families in a normalized way. In fact, this book contributes to broadening children's gender schemas and to opening their ideology to different types of families.

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Notes

1. Capital letters appear in the original text.

2. The examples of marked themes appear in bold.

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HOW DO PLURILINGUAL TRAINEE TEACHERS VIEW THE CLIL CHALLENGE? A CASE STUDY

¿CÓMO PERCIBEN LOS PROFESORES PLURILINGÜES EN FORMACIÓN EL RETO AICLE? UN ESTUDIO DE CASO

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Abstract

The Valencian region is a Spanish autonomous community with a long-standing tradition in bilingual education. However, as opposed to some other Spanish regions, attention towards the linguistic education system from the point of view of research has been scarce. On this basis, the present investigation seeks to analyze the plurilingual education system of the Valencian region currently in force from the perspective of trainee teachers.

To this end, a study has been conducted with three focus groups. The narrative produced by the participants has been analyzed taking into consideration four major dimensions, namely plurilingual programs, teacher training, methodology, and resources and materials. In this analysis, the main idea underlying each dimension has been identified and then the information has been synthesized in flow charts that broadly represent the information conveyed by the groups.

The results obtained evince a lack of initial and continuous teacher training in plurilingual issues, a reality which translates into a low level of linguistic competence and methodological lacunae, as well as a lack of tailored-made teaching materials. There is thus an urgent need to revisit major aspects of the plurilingual programs and bring about certain changes that could contribute to their improvement and consolidation.

Keywords: plurilingual education, CLIL, trainee teachers, evaluation, quality.

Resumen

La Comunitat Valenciana es una comunidad autónoma española con una amplia tradición en educación bilingüe. A pesar de ello, y a diferencia de la mayoría de las otras comunidades, la atención prestada al modelo educativo lingüístico desde la investigación ha sido escaso. Por ello, la presente investigación pretende analizar el sistema educativo plurilingüe valenciano vigente desde la perspectiva de los maestros en formación.

Con este fin, se ha llevado a cabo un estudio con tres grupos focales. Se ha realizado un análisis de la narrativa de los participantes teniendo en cuenta cuatro dimensiones principales, a saber, los programas plurilingües, la formación de los maestros, la metodología y los recursos y materiales. En el análisis se ha identificado la idea principal que subyace a cada dimensión y luego se ha sintetizado la información en diagramas de flujo que, en líneas generales, representan la información transmitida por los grupos.

Los resultados obtenidos evidencian una falta de formación inicial y continua del maestro en cuestiones relativas a la educación plurilingüe, realidad que se traduce en una baja competencia lingüística y lagunas metodológicas, así como en una falta de materiales didácticos apropiados. Por lo tanto, es necesario revisitar aspectos importantes de los programas plurilingües y realizar ciertos cambios que puedan contribuir a la mejora y consolidación de estos.

Palabras clave: enseñanza plurilingüe, AICLE, maestros en formación, evaluación, calidad.

1. Introduction

The 21st century is witnessing an unprecedented change in education. The breaking down of barriers between societies, globalization and the free movement of citizens around Europe, among others, are some of the driving forces behind this change. This educational context is additionally characterized by the introduction of foreign languages as languages of instruction in the curriculum, mainly English, and by the use of active methodologies that invite the learner to adopt a participatory role in the learning process. Thus, in this new educational scenario, bilingual education has become one of the main teaching approaches and, therefore, the teaching model followed by an increasing number of schools, both nationally and internationally. This aspect responds to a strong commitment on the part of governments not only to increase the level of foreign languages among citizens, but also to contribute to a united, but at the same time multicultural Europe, and promote the European economy across the board.

The proliferation of this teaching model has aroused great interest in the scientific community, with Spain being one of the nations with the highest scientific production in Europe (Aleixandre Agulló and Cerezo Herrero 2019). A large part of the research carried out in Spain has focused on the evaluation of current bilingual and plurilingual programs, according to the model applicable in each autonomous region. Studies such as Travé González (2013) or Lancaster (2016) in Andalusia; Pérez Cañado (2017) in Andalusia, Extremadura and the Canary Islands; Arocena Egaña et al. (2015) in the Basque Country, a study conducted in collaboration with the Dutch province of Friesland; Pladevall-Ballester (2015) in Catalonia; Lozano-Martínez (2017) in Cantabria; Durán-Martínez and Beltrán-Llavador (2016) in Castilla and León; Fernández et al. (2005), Laorden Gutiérrez and Peñafiel Pedrosa (2010), Fernández and Halbach (2011) in Madrid; Bolarín Martínez et al. (2012), Lova Mellado et al. (2013), Alcaraz-Mármol (2018) in Murcia; or the research project coordinated by Cerezo Herrero (2019) in the Valencian region, among others, are some representative examples of studies at a national level that evaluate programs from the perspective of different stakeholders, mainly teachers, students and parents.

However, there are hardly any studies that analyze the programs from the point of view of trainee teachers, who happen to be an essential element in ensuring the continuity and good results of these programs in the future. Only the study conducted by Amat et al. (2017), which addresses the learning of science in English in pre-primary and primary education, provides a complete sample of pre-service teachers. On the other hand, beliefs are paramount when it comes to determining behavioral patterns. As Hüttner et al. (2013: 270) point out, "beliefs are viewed as inherently dynamic constructions of the learning and teaching endeavours". Thus, the degree of acceptance of a pedagogical practice will be largely determined by the teachers' beliefs (Arocena Egaña et al. 2015). In the case of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) programs, the perception of trainee teachers will allow us to know how the bilingual (or plurilingual) programs are playing out and what further steps need to be taken in order to tackle any detected deficiencies.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this article is to describe the perceptions that pre-service teachers in pre-primary and primary education have of the plurilingual programs implemented in the Valencian region. Despite there being three curricular languages (English, Spanish and Valencian), in this paper we will only focus on English as a language of instruction. The results are expected to help understand the linguistic educational reality in this particular region and to offer solutions to possible issues that trainee teachers may have encountered in view of their imminent incorporation into the teaching profession.

2. Literature Review

Bilingual education has made a huge impact on Spanish education in terms of foreign language teaching. The low results obtained in the Eurobarometer 2012 (European Commission) regarding the citizens' proficiency in foreign languages or the need to comply with the European mandate 1+2 (White Paper 1995) have prompted the updating of language policies at a national level. In this sense, following the European trend in bilingual education, CLIL has been adopted as the main teaching approach to overcoming this linguistic deficit.

The acronym CLIL was coined in 1994. As the name suggests, CLIL integrates the acquisition of new curricular content with foreign language learning. In linguistic terms, it seeks to provide learners with more real exposure to the foreign language, encouraging thus a more natural and communicative type of learning. This runs counter to some previous traditional language teaching models in which the language itself was the object of study (Fernández et al. 2005; Mehisto et al. 2008; Lova Mellado et al. 2013; Nieto Moreno de Diezmas 2016). We therefore move away from a pure "teaching English" scenario to a new one in which the language is not an end in itself, but a means to teach academic content and promote real communication (Laorden Gutiérrez and Peñafiel Pedrosa 2010). In this regard, this teaching approach aims to achieve a type of additive bilingualism (Baker and Wright 2017), that is, to incorporate an additional language to the linguistic repertoire of the student. Language is therefore conceived as a communication tool and as a means to access academic content.

Ideally, CLIL contexts use methodological principles based on cooperation among peers and also make greater use of visual and manipulative material, body language, gestures, and a variety of resources that can make up for the deficit in foreign language knowledge and allow access to curricular content (Baker and Wright 2017). To this end, the key to success lies in providing students with the correct scaffolding to ensure the acquisition of academic content (Bolarín Martínez et al. 2012). This requires specific and differentiated teacher training since this teaching approach demands specific competences that can help integrate the language with the new curricular content, thus ensuring that both are acquired successfully. As such, it can be argued that bilingual or plurilingual education is a challenge for teachers since it brings about methodological, curricular and organizational changes (Lova Mellado et al. 2013; Pérez Cañado 2016).

Notwithstanding this, the fact that no single blueprint can be attached to CLIL (Pérez Cañado 2012) and that it has been categorized as an umbrella term

(Mehisto et al. 2008), so that it can draw on different methodologies, makes it a hazy concept (Halbach 2008), as it does not offer a teaching *recipe*. In the words of Cenoz et al. (2014: 247), "the scope of CLIL is not clear-cut and, as a consequence, its core features cannot be clearly identified". It is, therefore, essential to analyze the current teaching programs and see how teachers understand its methodology and how it is being transferred into the classrooms in practice.

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that, in the case of Spain, legislative decentralization in educational matters has led each autonomous region to propose its own linguistic model. In regard to the Valencian region, the autonomous government has decided to implement a plurilingual teaching model that integrates the foreign language with the official and co-official languages, Spanish and Valencian, respectively. To this end, in 1998, by means of the Order of 30 June, the basic requirements, criteria and procedures for the implementation of bilingual programs in schools were established and English became compulsory from the first year of primary education to the end of secondary education. Subsequently, in the Order of 30 July 2008, a plurilingual education program was set up in some schools, allowing for the introduction of the English language in the second cycle of pre-primary education. One year later, the Order of 19 May 2009 established the regulations for the implementation of an experimental program whereby 80% of the pre-primary education curriculum was to be taught in English by means of a CLIL pedagogy, 10% in Valencian and the remaining 10% in Spanish.

Decree 127/2012 of 3 August 2012, which regulates plurilingualism in non-university education in the Valencian region, established for the first time two plurilingual programs: PPEV (Plurilingual Education Program in Valencian) and PPEC (Plurilingual Education Program in Spanish). Both of them make it compulsory for one subject to be taught in a foreign language (English). Afterwards, through Decree 9/2017, which was later ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, a linguistic model was established whereby the presence of the foreign language (English) was diminished, whereas Valencian was enhanced. At present, Law 4/2018 of 21 February, which regulates and promotes plurilingualism in the Valencian education system, is the one that regulates and promotes the Valencian plurilingual educational system. It stipulates a minimum time of 25% for the teaching in each one of the official languages throughout compulsory schooling, including the foreign language course and, at least, one curricular area, subject or non-linguistic subject taught in each of the languages. In the case of the foreign language, the percentage ranges between 15% and 25%.

3. Design of the Study

A qualitative study has been carried out using focus groups. It purports to find out the perceptions of trainee teachers in pre-primary and primary education regarding the structure and functioning of the plurilingual educational system in force in the Valencian region. In particular, we intend to delve into issues such as the learning of the foreign language and the acquisition of academic content, the role of families, teachers' training needs, methodological aspects that characterize CLIL programs, the functionality of textbooks, etc. The research questions that we will try to answer are as follows:

— How do pre-primary and primary trainee teachers perceive the current linguistic reality of the Valencian region?

— What training needs do the participants identify?

— How do the participants perceive the training needs of pre-primary and primary teachers?

— What is the perception of the participants regarding the use of teaching resources and materials in the CLIL context of the Valencian region?

3.1. Participants and Metaconcerns

A total of 25 pre-service teachers aged between 22 and 31 participated in the study. They were divided into three focus groups. Focus groups 1 and 2 were made up of pre-service teachers who had no previous teaching experience. Focus group 3 comprised pre-service teachers who had been working in a plurilingual context in the Valencian region between four months and one year. All participants had completed a two-month work placement in public, charter and private pre-primary and primary plurilingual schools. As far as gender is concerned, focus group 1 comprised three men and seven women; focus group 2 consisted of one man and six women; and focus group 3 was made up of two men and six women.

The sample was selected taking into account that the participants needed to be bilingual trainee teachers, so they were selected on the basis of their profile. All of them had done their work placement in different pre-primary and primary schools in the Valencian region. Likewise, at the time when this study was conducted, all of them were studying an official MA in Bilingual Education. The specific data of the participants can be seen in Table 1.

	BA in Pre-primary Education	BA in Primary Education	Another BA	Training in bilingual education	CCEI[1]	CCEV[2]	Work experience in plurilingual education
Focus Group 1	3	5	2	7	3	9	0
Focus Group 2	1	6	1	5	0	0	0
Focus Group 3	4	5	1	3	1	1	8
Total	8	16	4	15	4	10	8

Table 1. Focus groups specific data

As for the metaconcerns of the study, we have focused on four main dimensions which are in turn divided into different sub-categories according to the main areas of interest that have been addressed in the interviews (see Table 2).

DIMENSIONS			
Plurilingual programs	**Teachers' training**	**Methodology**	**Resources and materials**
Benefits	Motivation	Coordination and organization	Functionality
Results	Difficulties	Use of the L1/L2	Use of textbooks
Teachers' outlook	Linguistic needs	Students with special needs	
Students' satisfaction	Methodological needs		
Influence of social context	Teachers' competence		
Role of the families			
Plurilingualism decree			

Table 2. Dimensions of the study

Within the teaching programs dimension, we have focused on internal and external elements of the programs that are contributing to the shaping of the plurilingual education system. In the training dimension, an attempt has been

made to go more deeply into the preparation of pre-primary and primary teachers who use the foreign language as a medium of instruction and the training needs that arise both at the beginning and on a continuous basis. The methodology dimension is of utmost importance, since the success of the program largely depends on it. Methodology is not only incumbent upon the teacher within the classroom, but also upon the school, which oftentimes is responsible for making decisions regarding the methodology to be followed, and the teaching staff, who are responsible for coordinating their actions and shaping their teaching efforts jointly. Therefore, it has been deemed important to ask about coordination and organization in the schools, the use made of the L1 and L2 and how students with specific educational needs are dealt with. Finally, with the dimension of resources and materials, we seek to know the functionality of the resources used in the classroom, as well as the participants' perception concerning the use of textbooks in CLIL pre-primary and primary programs.

3.2. Techniques, Procedure and Analysis

As far as the study techniques are concerned, an interview was conducted with each focus group. A focus group is a technique through which a group of people are interviewed in depth on very specific aspects. It is a semi-structured interview whose objective is to encourage interaction through conversation about the object of study at a given time and to capture the way of thinking, acting and feeling of the people who participate in the group (Sandoval Casilimas 2002; Álvarez-Gayou Jurgenson 2009).

Data were collected through audiovisual and written means. For this purpose, there was a moderator who asked the questions and redirected the conversation if necessary; a secretary who collected the information in writing and made a summary at the end seeking the participants' agreement with the information gathered and, when needed, adding further information; and a supervisor who was responsible for checking the proper functioning of the electronic devices used to collect the data (recorder and video camera).

The procedure followed was that reported by Carmona Rodríguez et al. (2014), in which the following stages are identified:

— Selection of research objectives.
— Selection of the most suitable participants based on the following criteria: pre-service teachers with a BA in Education and currently studying a MA in Bilingual Education, either without teaching experience or between four months and one year of teaching experience.

— Preparation of questions and documents (informed consent).
— Data analysis through triangulation and a systematic consensus model.
— Experts' meeting for analysis of results.
— Conclusions.

The analysis of the content followed a systematic approach seeking the greatest possible objectivity. For this purpose, a process comprising the following stages (Álvarez-Gayou Jurgenson 2009) was carried out:

1. Data gathering through focus groups.
2. Recording and note-taking of the main points approached in focus groups.
3. Data transcription.
4. Data coding. Different dimensions were established based on the objectives of the study. Markers were used to highlight codable elements.
5. Data organization. Axial coding was employed to organize the data and establish different categories.
6. Data verification. Through investigator triangulation, the data compiled were reviewed and the results of the coding process were discussed. Additionally, when concluding each focus group session, a summary of the main points covered was made, so that the participants could verify the information.
7. Final report. After a consensus was reached by all researchers, a final axial coding was performed and a final report was written.

The researchers who participated in the content analysis belong to different academic disciplines, namely Philology, Psychology and Education, although they all have experience in the area of education. Through this procedure, we have been able to filter and approach the reality of the object of study (Vallejo and Finol de Franco 2009).

The data stemming from each dimension (units of analysis) were analyzed and an inter-rater reliability consensus was reached at a later stage. This consensus was transformed into a key idea of each dimension and flow charts that synthesize the information were drawn. The information shown in the flow charts was agreed upon by the researchers on the basis of the axial coding, taking into account three main parameters: (1) the internal consistency of the discourse; (2) the frequency with which comments or key ideas are registered; and (3) the extent to which the key ideas presented are shared by the participants. In this case, flow charts representing the data obtained from the three focus groups have been used in a way that interrelationships among the groups can be established in order to interpret the results gathered in each dimension more accurately (Huber 2003).

4. Results and Discussion

Following the four dimensions previously described, namely plurilingual programs, teacher training, methodology, and resources and materials, we will now analyze the results of the study. Each dimension will be headed by the key idea stemming from the inter-rater reliability analysis. Based on the participants' narrative, different flow charts will also be presented showcasing the relationship between the content items that have been identified, which correspond to ideas agreed upon and commented on by the vast majority of the participants. Likewise, some supporting verbatim statements taken from the interview corpus will be shown as examples.

4.1. Plurilingual Education Programs

Key idea: *Greater mastery of the L2 can be achieved without compromising content acquisition. Teacher training, family support and context-sensitive stimuli are key to learning and content acquisition.*

As can be seen in Figure 1, pre-service pre-primary and primary school teachers believe that plurilingual education programs allow students to broaden their competence in L2 through a more practical and communicative type of teaching, which has been empirically demonstrated in several studies (Admiraal et al. 2006; Dalton-Puffer 2011; Merino and Lasagabaster 2018; Pérez Cañado 2018; Martínez Agudo 2019, among others). However, they recommend that the presence of languages should be balanced in the curriculum and that instruction should begin at an early age because of the cognitive benefits it brings, which is in line with Van de Craen et al. (2007).

Similarly, they consider that the use of active methodologies and teaching innovation tools should be the driving force behind these programs. There is also a perception of insecurity and discomfort on the part of teachers, especially those who are older than 50 years old, which they attribute to a lack of training. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of respondents agree that mathematics should not be taught in the foreign language, perhaps because this subject requires a broader cognitive capacity on the part of the students. On the negative side, there appears to be a lack of coordination among teachers, and students with different language proficiencies are placed in the same class. Some participants also highlight as negative the interference that may occur among the three languages to which pupils are exposed.

As regards the learning of content, which is considered a cornerstone of bilingual education (Coyle 2008), they believe that there is very little time for so much content, especially if we take into account that the teaching is conducted through

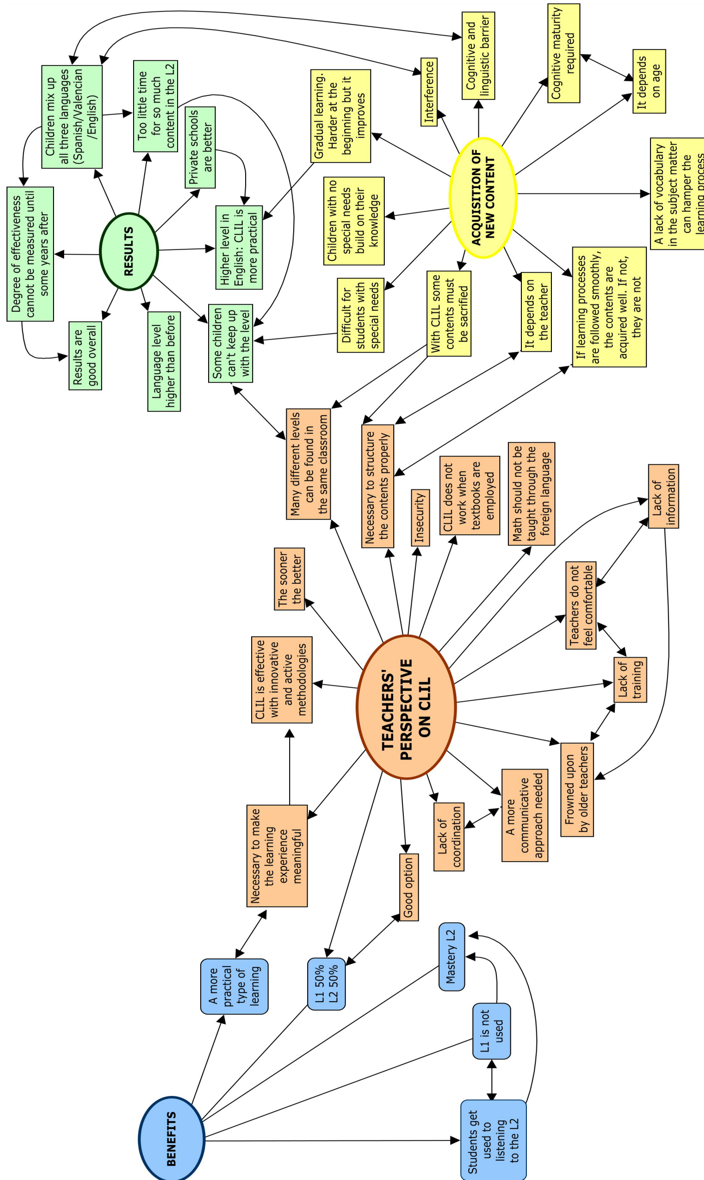

Figure 1. The plurilingual programs (1)

a foreign language, which is an added difficulty. This is why, on many occasions, curricular content is sacrificed. As Alcaraz-Mármol (2018: 51) describes in her study regarding primary school teachers' views on the CLIL approach, learning content in the L2 is not "as deep and detailed for students as the same content in the L1". However, the participants do not consider that students should have greater difficulty in acquiring new content if the appropriate methodology is followed and classes are adapted to the age and cognitive maturity of the students. However, the lack of domain-specific vocabulary can be a major stumbling block.

Student 1: *The problem is not the content, but the methodology employed to teach that content.*

Student 2: *The problem sometimes lies in the fact that domain-specific vocabulary is not pre-taught. This makes it difficult for students to access new content.*

In general terms, the informants have the impression that private schools have more solid programs because of the freedom they have when it comes to managing them and because of their decision-making capacity when hiring teachers in accordance with their teaching needs. Likewise, the respondents point out, as also shown in the studies by Merino and Lasagabaster (2018), Pérez Cañado (2018) or Martínez Agudo (2019), that the linguistic results of plurilingual programs cannot be measured immediately. They need a prior piloting timespan that can help gauge their long-term effects.

As shown in Figure 2, the participants emphasized the lack of motivation and the general negative attitude of most primary school students towards plurilingual programs, which contrasts with the positive results obtained in other studies based on the perception of in-service teachers (Bolarín Martínez et al. 2012; Lova Mellado et al. 2013; Pladevall-Ballester 2015; Durán-Martínez and Beltrán-Llavador 2016), school board members (Laorden Gutiérrez and Peñafiel Pedrosa 2010), students (Pladevall-Ballester 2015; Lancaster 2016), and even in studies on motivation in CLIL contexts (Lasagabaster and López Beloqui 2015). However, they also stress that this perception depends largely on a number of factors, namely, the educational stage, the school, the teacher, the age of students and the parents.

The role of the families is considered extremely important. Rather than as a source of support for content acquisition, they are seen as motivators and facilitators of resources or stimuli that favor learning, including language learning. However, the participants also highlight as negative the impossibility for some parents to help their children, as they lack knowledge of the foreign language. Nonetheless, they also consider that this role should be assumed by the schools themselves. In the same vein, they value the social context as another source of support and the fact

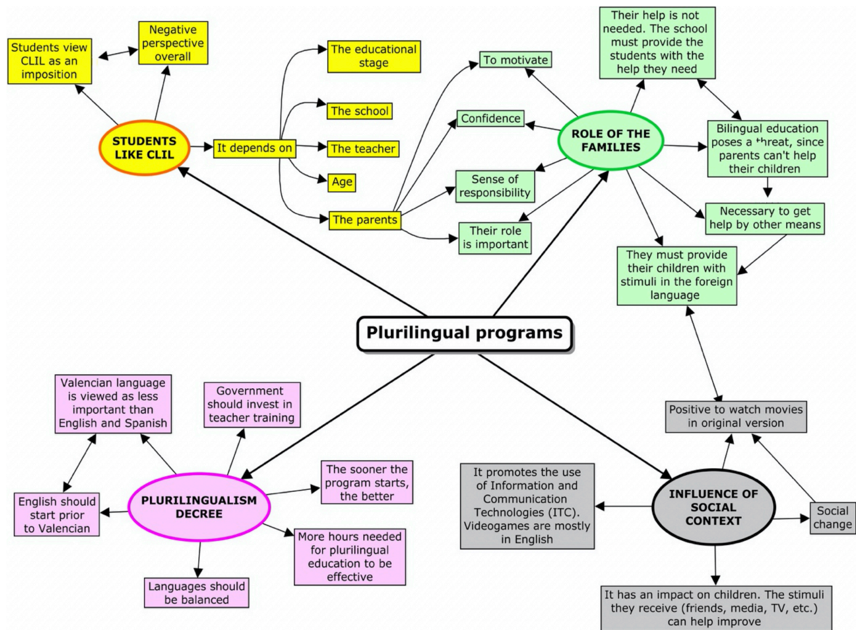

Figure 2. The plurilingual programs (2)

that students can access multiple original resources in different formats, especially multimedia ones, which can turn out to be highly motivating.

Finally, as we have already mentioned, the participants maintain that the plurilingual project of the Valencian region should be implemented at an early age. However, they are not in agreement as to the number of teaching hours that should be attributed to each of the languages. Whilst half the participants think that they should be given equal status, the other half are of the opinion that Spanish and English should be prioritized over Valencian. They concede that the use of the Valencian language is constrained to some Spanish provinces, diminishing thus students' job opportunities at an international level. What is more, some of them even regard teaching Valencian as some kind of punishment. Conversely, they consider that there are insufficient hours devoted to English for effective learning to take place and that this language is more useful for the future, as it opens more doors to globalization and international mobility.

Student 1: *All three languages should have an equal weight in a plurilingual program.*

Student 2: *I think that Spanish and English should be prized over Valencian. What do we need Valencian for? To speak here?*

Student 3: *It is unfair. International schools, for instance, do not have to teach Valencian language.*

4.2. Training

Key idea: *Teacher training and motivation are essential, so more sound training initiatives on an initial and continuous basis are required, both at linguistic and methodological levels.*

In agreement with Coyle et al. (2010) and Lasagabaster and Ruiz de Zarobe (2010), teacher training is considered a key factor for the proper implementation of plurilingual programs. The participants maintain that teachers who are older or work with groups having difficult or problematic students lack motivation, which they regard as a key element for lifelong learning. Additionally, students cannot be motivated if teachers lack enthusiasm towards their teaching practice. Without self-motivation, teachers will be unsuccessful when trying to motivate their own students.

The greatest training necessity that they detect is linguistic, especially oral skills, since they consider that the English proficiency that most of the teachers possess is insufficient for the type of teaching that they do. This result is commensurate with the study coordinated by Cerezo Herrero (2019) in the Valencian region with in-service teachers. The participants in our study state that most teachers make mistakes in English because of their low competence in the language, a problem that is attributed to the Degrees in Teaching because of the limited specific training they offer, an aspect that has already been denounced by Fernández et al. (2005) and Madrid (2012). Likewise, they also emphasize that a language competence certificate does not necessarily make a teacher linguistically competent.

Student 1: *I am under the impression that you pass a C1 English exam because you become familiar with that exam format and, as a result of that, you pass the exam.*

Student 2: *There is much more involved in learning a language than just passing an exam.*

Therefore, they agree that an oral test in the foreign language should be required prior to starting to teach, an aspect which has also been stressed by Halbach and Lázaro (2015). Unfortunately, informants report that most teachers are compelled to resort to their L1 on a regular basis, coinciding with the results of Fernández and Halbach (2011) and Nieto Moreno de Diezmas and Ruiz Cordero (2018).

Figure 3. Training

Continuous learning is thus a must if a teacher is to be successful in his or her teaching endeavor. Otherwise, the learning of curricular content could be jeopardized.

As a rule, the participants seem to be more concerned about language training than methodological training, which, as Amat et al. (2017) argue in the case of science, can be attributed to the challenge of having to teach a curricular area in English. However, in line with Alcaraz-Mármol (2018), methodological training is as important as linguistic training. Moreover, this major concern regarding their language proficiency does not respond faithfully to the methodological tenets that govern CLIL, since there is a tendency to avoid master classes in which the teacher is the primary source of linguistic input. Rather, CLIL opts for a type of training in which the students take an active role in building their own knowledge (Pavón Vázquez and Rubio 2010). This is why, matching the results of the study conducted by Durán-Martínez and Beltrán-Llavador (2016), the need for language training seems to be relegated to a second place over time and greater importance is attached to methodological training and the design of teaching materials. Notwithstanding this, the participants do believe that methodological training should be geared towards new methodologies and information technologies. Both the methodological and linguistic training needs should be determined by each school.

Despite the lack of training offered by the Administration, the interviewees consider that most in-service teachers, with the exception of those who show greater resistance due to age or other reasons, show a willingness to continue training. Likewise, they show awareness of their limitations, even though they regret that their prospects of professional advancement are constrained by the lack of training courses tailored to their needs. This means that they have to pay for their own training, which they consider inappropriate and undesirable. Moreover, it should be added that the training requested in most cases involves stays abroad so as to improve their language skills, something that in most cases is difficult to obtain due to the limited number of places offered.

4.3. Methodology

Key idea: *Good organization and coordination of schools, regardless of the type of school (public or private), is necessary to make the methodology used in CLIL settings effective and adaptable to the learners' needs.*

Figure 4 shows the importance of coordination and organization for the correct implementation of the CLIL approach. It is noteworthy how the type of school has a significant effect on these two principles. Most participants state that public schools are better organized, as they have a greater number of resources at their disposal, while those that are best coordinated are private schools, especially because teachers are often involved in interdisciplinary projects that help establish

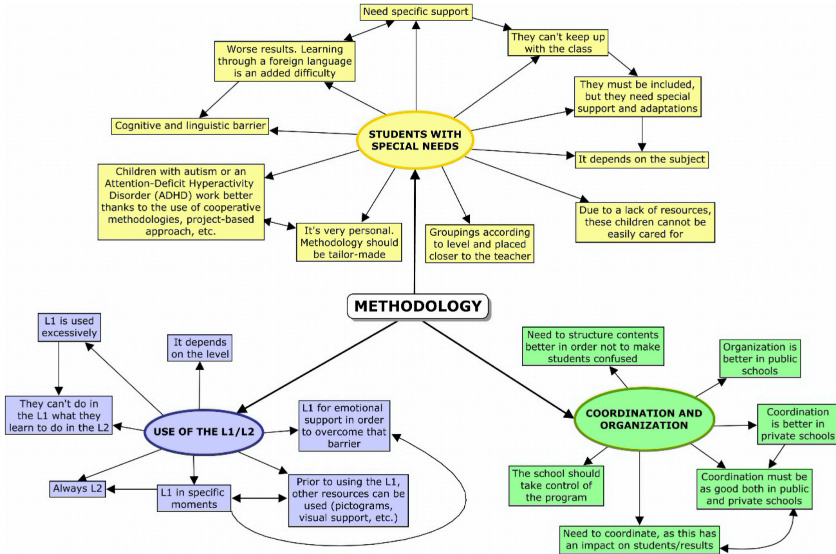

Figure 4. Methodology

links between different curricular areas. Nonetheless, they concede that there should not be major differences between public and private schools in terms of coordination and organization. Otherwise, these could have a negative impact on the students themselves and their learning outcomes.

In this section relating to methodology, the participants once again express their concern about the excessive use of the L1. They consider that there are other teaching strategies that can be put into practice prior to using the L1. However, some informants also admit that students' age is a key factor in this regard and that emotion is difficult to convey through the L2. There are thus certain occasions when the use of the L1 would be justified. There is also the fear that the acquisition of knowledge through the L2 will later make it difficult to be used in the L1 because of a lack of domain-specific vocabulary in the L1.

Lastly, there is general agreement among the participants that students with special educational needs or learning difficulties are at a disadvantage when the foreign language is used as a language of instruction, since it creates a linguistic and cognitive burden. They feel that, in these cases, the foreign language should be introduced in certain subjects and with the corresponding adaptations and

resources. The lack of adapted CLIL materials, however, makes it difficult to cater to the needs of these students. Consequently, methodology must be customized, and these children should be placed closer to the teacher and grouped with other children who have similar academic capabilities.

Student 1: *They do not have the same capacity as other children to learn a new language. It is even difficult for them to learn in their own language...*

Student 2: *There are not enough teachers to cater to the needs of these students. It is virtually impossible to attend to different learning abilities in the same classroom, even if teachers try with all their might.*

On a more positive note, in the case of learners with autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), the participants state that these learners benefit more from the methodology employed in the classroom than from the language learning process. Nonetheless, the effective teaching of learners with special educational needs remains one of the greatest challenges to be tackled in CLIL.

4.4. Resources and Materials

Key idea: *In CLIL settings, the textbook should only be used as a reference or support tool. The teacher and the students should have an active role in which the materials selected support the activities but are not at the core of the methodology.*

Figure 5 shows the resources and materials dimension. As can be observed, despite the large current supply of CLIL materials (Tragant et al. 2016), participants criticize the use of textbooks for their rigidity. Hence, the difficulty in adopting a methodology in keeping with the patterns governing the CLIL approach. Teaching through textbooks leads to a lack of motivation on the part of both teachers and students and kills the teacher's creativity. Textbooks also tend to be rather theoretical and make teachers dwell in their comfort zone, as they do not have to worry about designing activities that cater to the students' needs best. Additionally, the participants do not think that textbooks provide the necessary Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) that characterize the CLIL approach, an aspect that has been empirically demonstrated (Romeu Peyró et al. 2020). Textbooks can actually be replaced by information technologies. Resources and/or materials are only reported to be appropriate if they have been properly adapted. Therefore, the informants are of the opinion that teachers need to prepare their own materials despite the additional workload involved.

Student 1: *You don't need to think or do anything. It's like: "I have everything I need here. This activity looks good to me and I think I cover that objective…"*

Student 2: *A textbook is just words. It is mainly used to read, memorize, and write. That's it. They don't make you think. However, children learn by doing.*

Student 3: *With information technologies, I don't think textbooks are necessary.*

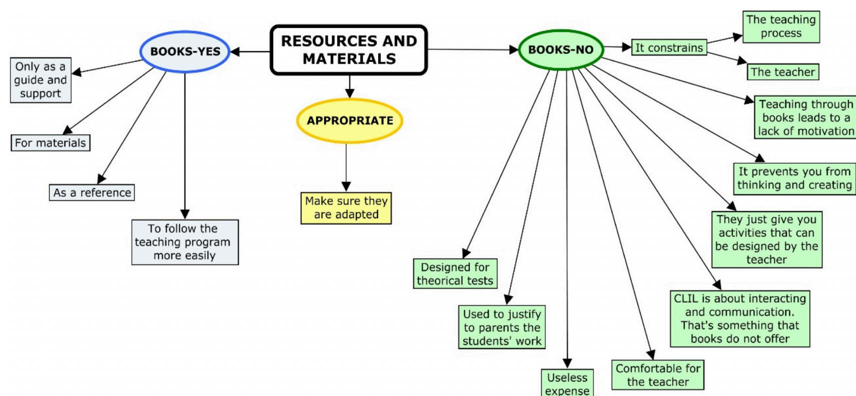

Figure 5. Resources and materials

The participants only regard the textbook as appropriate support or guidance for new teachers, or just to follow a teaching program more easily, but they generally agree that the textbook constrains both the teacher and the teaching process. They concur that CLIL involves interaction and communication, something that a textbook does not provide. They conclude that its main role is just to justify to parents the work done by the learner, but it is an unnecessary expense. However, it is noteworthy that other studies show that the textbook is considered to be an essential element when working with younger students (Lozano-Martínez 2017), as well as when structuring the lessons (Moore and Lorenzo 2015). Nonetheless, trainee teachers partaking in our study praise a type of teaching free of textbooks in order to make the learning experience more meaningful and attractive.

5. Conclusions

The main objective of this study has been to find out the perceptions of pre-primary and primary school trainee teachers about plurilingual programs in the Valencian region. Understanding the nature of these programs from the point of view of would-be teachers is essential for making future decisions and adjusting the available resources and efforts to new emerging realities. Although the plurilingual system in the region is organized around three languages (English, Spanish and Valencian), in this article we have focused on English and how the teaching of curricular content through this language is framed within the current plurilingual model.

In general terms, the first conclusion that can be drawn from the results obtained is that, after a work placement in pre-primary and primary plurilingual schools as part of their Master's training, the participants describe a reality that is very similar to that depicted in other studies carried out with other stakeholders, mostly in-service teachers. Pre-service teachers perceive plurilingual programs as an opportunity to improve the general foreign language proficiency of students and, therefore, to become more internationally competent. Consequently, most of them view positively the teaching of the majority language, i.e. English as opposed to Valencian.

Teacher training is undoubtedly the main element that can ensure continuity and guarantee the quality of plurilingual programs. Although additional training is required on a continuous basis, the participants emphasize that the number of specialized courses offered at university should be greater. As a result, it can be concluded that the curricula of Degrees in Teaching should be updated in order to adapt to this new educational reality. To this end, each didactic area should devote a small proportion of its time to teaching how to integrate the acquisition of specific academic knowledge with the foreign language.[3] Each area requires different teaching approaches and strategies, as well as domain-specific vocabulary. For this reason, we consider that each of them should have a unique and non-transferable training aimed at plurilingual teaching.

This training structure organized according to different curricular areas should subsequently be maintained in continuous training courses and combined with stays in other schools so as to create synergies and contribute to the construction of a collaborative network of bilingual/plurilingual teachers. This would make it possible to create a direct learning experience in the classroom and, in the case of stays in foreign schools, to improve the foreign language. To this effect, it is necessary to sign new agreements with other schools and allow teachers to carry out extended stays to make sure that the experience does enhance the set of competences required of plurilingual teachers.

Based on the data obtained, we would establish three main measures that require urgent attention or investigation. On the one hand, teacher profiles should be established for the recruitment of teachers in public schools. A B2 accreditation in English and being in possession of the training certificate issued by the Department of Education do not guarantee the suitability of the teacher's academic profile. A specific examination should be established for the different curricular areas so that the candidates can demonstrate both their linguistic and methodological knowledge. This would also make it possible to bridge the gap between public and private schools.

On the other hand, it is deemed necessary to change textbook-based CLIL settings. Textbooks are still mostly mere translations of other textbooks originally

written in L1. Moreover, as it transpires from the study by Romeu Peyró et al. (2020), most textbooks seem to focus almost exclusively on the development of LOTS (Lower-Order Thinking Skills) and, to a very limited extent, HOTS (Higher-Order Thinking Skills). It follows that teachers are compelled to spend a great deal of time developing their own teaching materials, thereby forcing them to neglect other fundamental issues such as training.

Finally, students with special needs constitute one of the major challenges of this training. At present, their integration into plurilingual streams (especially when the foreign language is used) seems to be a challenge that most teachers do not know how to handle. This is why immediate research is needed in order to promote an inclusive type of education that guarantees that all students can access plurilingual programs on equal terms.

Among the main limitations of this study, it is worth mentioning that the results obtained are based on the perspective of pre-service teachers and that their opinions correspond to a work placement period as part of their Master's training. Likewise, the study is restricted to the Valencian region, so the results cannot be extrapolated at a national level. However, the present study may inspire similar research studies in other Spanish regions. Scarcity of empirical data in the Valencian region makes it necessary to carry out further scientific studies in order to scrutinize the current plurilingual educational system and help fine-tune future initiatives.

Authors' Contribution

Dr. Rosario García-Bellido was responsible for the methodological design of the study and the data analysis process, as well as for drawing the diagrams with the results of this analysis. Dr. Enrique Cerezo Herrero carried out the literature review, conducted the focus groups interviews and interpreted the study data on the basis of the existing literature.

Notes

1. Certificate issued by the Regional Department of Education that includes both linguistic and methodological training in English.

2. Certificate issued by the Regional Department of Education that includes both linguistic and methodological training in Valencian.

3. It must be taken into account that in Degrees in Teaching the students have to demonstrate a certain level of English before they are awarded the diploma, so this proposal is feasible and could contribute to this end.

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EDUCATION AND FEMALE AGENCY IN THE GARDEN: DORIS LESSING'S "FLAVOURS OF EXILE"

EDUCACIÓN Y AGENCIA FEMENINAS EN EL JARDÍN: "FLAVOURS OF EXILE" DE DORIS LESSING

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Abstract

Doris Lessing's recent centenary brought opportunities to look at her works with fresh eyes. This is also the case with Lessing's interest in education (Cairnie 2008; Sperlinger 2017), especially that of children in their transition to youth. This paper argues that this was an interest with which Lessing consistently concerned herself in both her fiction and non-fiction writings. Using the corpus of her African short stories as a primary reference framework, this paper studies "Flavours of Exile" (1957), a short story in which a family's vegetable garden becomes a learning space for informal experimentation. The story is used by Lessing as a platform to raise her concerns about the education of the female subject in the historical context of decolonisation.

Keywords: Doris Lessing, African short stories, colonialism, education, garden.

Resumen

La reciente celebración del centenario de Doris Lessing ha supuesto la oportunidad de dedicar nuevas miradas a su obra. Esto es así con respecto a las aportaciones críticas existentes sobre el interés de Lessing por la educación (Cairnie 2008; Sperlinger 2017), sobre todo en niños y niñas en procesos de transición hacia la

adolescencia. Este artículo muestra que, para Lessing, dicho interés es constante y se observa a lo largo de su obra, tanto de ficción como de no ficción. Tomando el corpus de los relatos africanos como marco principal de referencia, este artículo estudia "Flavours of Exile" (1957), un relato donde el huerto familiar se transforma en espacio informal de experimentación, y es para Lessing un vehículo para dar paso a sus preocupaciones por la educación del sujeto femenino en un contexto histórico de descolonización.

Palabras clave: Doris Lessing, relatos africanos, colonialismo, educación, jardín.

An orchard of pomegranates/ With all choicest fruits.
The Song of Solomon.

My vegetable love should grow/ vaster than empires, and more slow.
Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress".

1. Introduction

The short story "Flavours of Exile" (1957),[1] included in Doris Lessing's African Stories, illustrates how the female adolescent protagonist tackles her experiences in the educational sphere of a colonial setting in the former Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Informal, contextual, constructivist and self-regulating learning processes come together as she engages with her sensations and feelings, which lead her to explore love, sensuality and family relationships. The complexities of colonial supremacy and the questioning of the beliefs involved in alternative political practices run parallel to these learning processes. In the story, the outer and the inner spaces are liminal spaces (Achilles and Bergmann 2015) which are entangled both physically and metaphorically (Louw 2010a). In an anecdote in her autobiography (Lessing 1995; Louw 2010a), Lessing describes how a little tree plant would grow again and again from a crack in her bedroom floor in her African family home. Lessing's mother would repeatedly try to get rid of it, while Lessing saw it as a sign of nature's insistence that eventually the house would be naturally integrated into the bush within the vastness of the landscape (Louw 2010a: 167). When preparing this article, I had the opportunity to see Leonora Carrington's "The Pomps of the Subsoil",[2] a pictorial depiction of a similar phenomenon as that described by Lessing. Here the sapling grows out from a white piece of cloth on the ground in the centre of the painting. Surrounding the force of soil and moisture, three female figures (the Pomps) gather around the solitary sapling in a ceremony of contemplation, as if in ecstasy. Not surprisingly, Carrington's and Lessing's childhood education had some common elements, as

both the painter and the writer left behind their formal education, family homes and countries in order to explore their personal and public artistic potential.[3]

This paper explores the importance of place in the formation of learning experiences (Klein 2018) and takes the study by Tom Sperlinger (2017) on Lessing's pedagogical intention (reflected in *Mara and Dann*) as the basis for an analysis of the story "Flavours of Exile". The analysis also relies, among others, on the contributions by Victoria Rosner (1999), Pat Louw (2010a), and Dennis Walder (2008) on the representation of tensions in power relations in the inner and outer spaces in Lessing's fiction. I explore the pedagogical turn in Lessing's narrative fiction, bearing in mind that "Flavours of Exile" and other works feature children who witness tensions between the coloniser and the colonised, and who constantly face challenges within their sometimes oppressive family environment, as well as other challenges from their external settings (either from the natural space or the surroundings of the family home, including the orchard and garden). Particularly in "Flavours of Exile", Lessing focuses on the educational aspects of the transition from childhood to adulthood, where the environment is of crucial importance.

2. Children and the Pedagogical Intention in Lessing's Works

Children are a pervasive presence in Lessing's work. I refer not only to *African Stories*, but also to the *Children of Violence* series; *The Fifth Child*; *Ben, in the World*; *Love, Again;* and *The Sweetest Dream*, where Lessing evokes the signs and traces left by traumatic episodes in the lives of children and adolescents (Arias 2012; Watkins 2015). Rosario Arias (2012) stated that the marks of both the violence of war and the failure of the communist dream to radically transform social structures are constant themes in Lessing's narrative. This is particularly visible in the lives of children whose past has been tainted by a historical violence transmitted through generations. Sperlinger argued that Lessing's concern for education is "intrinsic to Lessing's writing […] always about how we know the world, including the difficulty of learning to 'read' it. Her fiction thus develops in how it 'teaches' as well" (2017: 309). In my view, this inclination shows Lessing's interest in dealing with education in childhood and adolescence from the early days of her literary production.[4] Childhood and adolescence are treated as life cycles when vulnerability is expressed, and where the strength is found to act on the basis of reflection and discernment, identifying the points that need to be reinforced to overcome the difficulties that arise. In fact, Lessing often dealt with issues related to pedagogy in one form or another as part of her personal motivation and of her identity as a writer.[5] Lessing linked "the function of storytelling" (1999:

5) to education (6), storytelling being "a repository of information, used to instruct the young: along with entertainment comes the message" (7). In her "Introduction" to the collection *Kalila and Dimna: Bidpai Fables Told by Ramsay Wood* (1998b), Lessing highlighted the need to encourage people to read, particularly the young. She expressed a similar concern in her article "An Evening with Doris Lessing" (1998a), where she showed her concern for the current educational and cultural "lower standards" (1998a) as regards reading and teaching about reading. In *Problems, Myths and Stories* (1999), as well as in her speech when she received the *Prince of Asturias Award for Literature* in 2001 (now called *Princess of Asturias*), Lessing expressed her amazement at the lack of knowledge of fundamental texts, such as the Bible, on the part of the new generations. Similarly, an article entitled "The Tragedy of Zimbabwe" (2004) is one example of the texts that show Lessing's interest in activities related to the promotion of reading and education. In the article, she condemned Zimbabwe's government for having "denied [people] proper education" (Lessing 2004: 235), and added that to provide reading materials for students and teachers was a necessity for people who "hungered for books" (Lessing 2004: 235). Furthermore, this interest runs parallel to her awareness of the ways in which people connect and identify with other beings in nature (García Navarro 2003: 121; Gruia 2016: 211-212). I intend to show the construction of various forms of learning, aimed at encouraging personal agency, which is presented in the family garden and orchard in "Flavours of Exile". This should be taken as a cross-border, interactive cultural space, where the young protagonist experiences transformation processes and life transitions. It is worth enquiring here about how learning experiences are treated in Lessing's texts; and also about the pedagogical intention of a text where one's young educational experience is reframed based on a personal negotiation of the ways of looking at, engaging in, and transforming that experience (Dewey 2008). My interest lies in exploring the value of the orchard as a space that informs Lessing's assessment of the transition from childhood to the subsequent life periods, given the "phenomenological quality of places as central to meaning making" (Klein 2018: 5). This should take into account the physical and emotional implications of the aforementioned transition, and the forms in which learning is constructed, transmitted, rejected and re-signified in one of Lessing's African Stories.

In "Flavours of Exile", the experience of an anonymous protagonist aged 13 unfolds half-way between the inner and outer spaces of the family home (the house and the vegetable garden). It is in these spaces that tensions, challenges and new perspectives on the perceptions of herself and of those around her arise. The family vegetable garden is an important place for acquiring new knowledge, removed from traditional formal education. It appears as a potential space both for education and resistance (Li 2009), where power relations operate and reorganise the

individual's gaze and attention towards the world around the protagonist. According to Cajetan Iheka, post-colonial narratives share a common feature, namely being "histories of dispossession into the otherwise tranquil space of order, leisure, and green aesthetics" (2018: 665). For Iheka, this anti-pastoral feature can be applied to some of Lessing's works, including *The Grass Is Singing* (665). Louw, for her part, argued that Lessing's African short stories contain both pastoral and anti-pastoral elements (2010b). In the case of "Flavours of Exile", in addition to the anti-pastoral element, there is a critical intention (2010b) which, in my view, involves the protagonist's resistance and determination. This critical intention can be seen in the representation of the transition from childhood to adolescence in informal spaces, relying on an autodidact's contextual, constructivist, and pedagogical perspective (Vigotsky 2014). This is done via an introspective, intimate process that has consequences for the family and for the public environment in which the young girl is immersed. In this process, things gradually gain a representative capacity that makes it possible to evaluate and re-signify the experience (Dewey 2008). No reference is made in this story to formal education; instead, education occurs in a family setting, the initial socialising space *par excellence*, an informal context of which the garden is a part. This space is adjacent to the house and is a fragment of fenced-in nature; it is also connected to the vast wild, black space colonised by the white man. The outer world disclosed in the story includes the neighbours: William, aged 15, and his parents, the MacGregors, who frequently visit the family and are invited to walk around the garden and the orchard cultivated by the girl's mother. The family vegetable garden is therefore a liminal, creative place of passage between the house and the rest of the world, where the girl apprehends its potentialities to construct informal forms of learning. This is also the case for Tommy and Dirk in the short story called "The Antheap" (1994d)[6] in which, as noted by Julie Cairnie, the two children learn lessons in a different way to those structured traditionally in formal education (2008).

3. Decolonising the Garden

After the notion of space has been introduced, the story is concentrated on the passing of time, specifically a few days when the young protagonist decides to observe the sprouting process of a pomegranate tree isolated in a corner of the orchard. The story describes the protagonist's inner world as she observes this process. Her thoughts are centred on the sprout that slowly wends its way towards becoming a pomegranate fruit, as an avenue for exploring connections between herself and the outer world. Being receptive to the growing process of the pomegranate, she probes new paths for relationships with other members of the

community: her family (primarily her mother) and William. By taking the opportunity to spend time on her own every day, the young girl appropriates time and space within the edible garden as an interactive place where both public and personal issues are to be negotiated from now on. At first sight, the story presents a set of organic material (Hunt 2000) grown in a family-owned piece of land. Lessing introduces a place in the open air, albeit "fenced off from the Big Field" (1994a: 124),[7] where self-produced goods are grown and sometimes shared with other members of the community (124). With its "fabulous soil" (124) and its watering well, the orchard produces "carrots, lettuces, beets" (124). Striking plant colours and fragrances are described, such as "purple globes of eggplant and the scarlet wealth of tomatoes" (124). Botanical species coexist in a splurge of golden and green colours that enhance the characteristic hues of lemon, banana and pawpaw trees (124). There is also a perception of "sun on foliage, of evaporating water" (124). The abundance of sensorial elements provides the narrative with a sensual quality. As noted by Terry Eagleton (1990: 13), the mixture of smells, textures and sounds resonates on the body and the mind, leading to a (conscious or unconscious) encounter with the aesthetic experience, which involves passions, emotions and affects (Highmore 2010: 121). As well as providing an image of wealth and vigour, the value of the orchard lies in its utility, another reason why it can be admired both privately and publicly. It is also presented as a place for entertainment, and as a shelter in the face of possible external adversities (Vande Keere and Plevoets 2018: 24). This is evoked in the lyrical notes interspersed in the narrative ("sun on foliage, […] the wealth of tomatoes"). But the initial near-elegiac tone is blurred as the daughter reveals there is an immense (not spatial, but affective and emotional) distance between her and the other protagonist, her mother. The initial descriptive splurge awakens and stirs the senses, which is in stark contrast with the first reference to the mother: "For her, that garden represented a defeat" (Lessing 1994a: 124). At that point, the narrative's temporal trajectory moves back; historical time and the story's time become separated. The allusion to the mother figure immediately introduces a narrative thread about the sense of belonging and the value of memory, of loss, of the possibilities that enhance people's lives and of how they experience and modulate those possibilities.

As noted by Michele Slung, "the very first story was about a garden" (2012: 9). For Gilles Clèment the garden denotes the principles of human settlements and sedentarisation (2019). This long-term fondness developed between humanity and plants is presented in "Flavours of Exile" through a nameless adolescent girl who not only recounts her present experience but also a part of her mother's story. Her account evokes her mother's past life in Persia (now Iran), where she had kept her own house and garden. The garden was watered by small canals that also helped keep the house cool. It also had an orchard with "roses and jasmine, walnut

trees and pomegranates" (1994a: 127), a private paradise on a farm owned by her mother's English family in the Middle East. Like the original garden mentioned in Genesis (Marco Mallent 2010: 252; Alexander 2012: 116; McGregor 2015), reminiscent of mythical arcadian harmony, the garden of these colonists encompassed elements that evoked beauty and well-being. The garden is also suggestive of Virgil's and Homer's gardens, and of gardens depicted in paintings from different periods and cultural traditions, including *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch, the vegetable and fruit gardens by Brueghel, as well as the gardens depicted in the Safavid and Qajar traditions (Caygill 2006). The creative potential of the orchard and the garden takes on an additional dimension when these spaces are conceived of as being of the soul, as Saint Teresa of Ávila did, "as a celebration of its intelligence and of its full being" (Lottman 2015: 238). These environments have also been presented as places for finding oneself, such as the *hortus deliciarum* of Herrad of Landsberg and Christine de Pizan. Indeed, in *The City of Ladies*, De Pizan reflected on the construction potential of gardens as "fertile ground, where fruits of all kinds flourish and fresh streams flow, a[s] place[s] where every good thing grows in abundance" (1999: 7). Taken as a symbolic representation of paradise on Earth (Farahani et al. 2016: 5), Lessing's mother's Persian orchard evidenced her desire to have her dreams fulfilled, which her later life in Africa would fail to do.

The Oriental experience of the protagonist's mother, rooted in the Persian garden that had provided the family with a variety of fruit and vegetables, was emulated by the four pomegranate trees she planted in the African orchard. To this immigrant woman in her struggle to live in her new homeland, the African soil became the depositary of a personal dream, the opportunity for an exotic dream to come true: "Why not pomegranates here, in Africa? Why not?" (Lessing 1994a: 127). However, not only was African soil inadequate for fruit and vegetables to successfully grow and develop their full flavour, but it caused pomegranate trees to dry out or be devoured by ants, except for one forgotten pomegranate tree, standing solitary by the wild gooseberry plants (127). Although the protagonist's mother felt "defeated" by the orchard, her desire to find the exact flavour and fragrance of the fruit and vegetables enjoyed in Persia and in the metropolis grew stronger. This may be indicative of both her difficulty in detaching herself from the past and her zeal for achieving the perfect hues (Giesecke and Jacobs 2012: 8) expected in the orchard edibles. The African soil shared with the Oriental soil the strong, hot climate and the nutrient-rich irrigation water. Nevertheless, for this white, middle-class mother from the colony who had settled in Africa, the soil seemed inadequate and could not provide the nuances of flavour of the fruit and vegetables produced in England. The Oriental soil for the protagonist's mother was perhaps an idealised forever-lost paradise, which she had abandoned for a way

of life away from everything she had ever known. Persia had been the place with which she identified and where she had developed her sense of belonging to the group and to the nation. In this way, the political significance of Lessing's story is twofold: it provides the perspective of the colonising subject, represented by the mother, who cannot find her place outside the metropolis; and the perspective of the subordinate, represented by the protagonist girl in her transition to adolescence, segregated from the community cohort (Worth and Hardill 2015) until she reaches adulthood (Gaitán in Voltarelli 2017: 278). While the mother's nostalgia about her place of origin is linked to her recognition that she belongs to a privileged group, she is unable to identify with the space (interior/the house/exterior), the culture and the way of life of the original African community. For example, her exclamations that the gooseberries in her orchard "are not gooseberries at all" because they are not "real English gooseberries" (Lessing 1994a: 125) are symptomatic of the fact that she has become uprooted in the process of voluntary displacement; it is a coloniser's dream, bringing with her those eminently true and pure values and customs regarded as her own, including the flavour of food. This can be seen in the mother's interest in availing herself of fruit cans from England,[8] which had been made possible by the advances in means of transport and communication, "the marvels of civilization" (125) typical of a modern household (Pérez 2012); and in her attachment to exoticism, derived from her status as a colonising subject, as shown in her attempt to plant species from other latitudes (such as pomegranate trees, which she had grown during her stay in Persia).

It is worth highlighting that nostalgia goes hand-in-hand with progress in the story. Indeed, nostalgia can be seen in the mother's yearning for Home and a way of life she believes to have been lost forever, in the same way as she lost her Persian house and garden when her family decided to move to Africa (Lessing 1994a: 126). The garden, as a representation of the world (Cooper 2017: 3), is a defeat, as we now know. Nostalgia (Walder 2008; Watkins 2015: 32) is the result of the metaphysical desolation felt by the mother, and is also linked to the survival conditions faced by the family in a territory perceived as being hostile, a place where the mother's ideals and aspirations are thwarted. Within this arduous processing of nostalgia, the daughter starts to recognise her mother's hard work, as she "toiled and bent over […] the exhaustless plenty of the garden" (Lessing 1994a: 125), thanks to which the family are able to enjoy various kinds of food. The young protagonist displays no guilt, unlike other female characters created by Lessing, such as Martha Quest, Janna Somers, Sarah Durham, Julia Lennox and Lessing herself, who referred to guilt as a constant presence in her relationship with her mother from an early age. Interestingly, the publication of "Flavours of Exile" in 1957 coincided with the death of Lessing's mother. In the same year Lessing returned to Southern Rhodesia for the first time since she had left for

London in 1949 (Arias 2012). In "Flavours of Exile", the young protagonist's express recognition of her mother's effort in looking after the orchard may be interpreted as reflecting Lessing's recognition of her own mother. The observation made by the young girl in the story goes beyond the revelation provided in Lessing's autobiography: "As usual I pitied her for her dreadful life […] returned to my very earliest self, the small girl who could see how she suffered" (1995: 203). In "Flavours of Exile", the mother's effort, and perhaps also her sadness after having previously pictured herself enjoying a vast property in Africa with garden spaces, led her to regard her colonial experience as a failure. This experiencing of their lifepath as a failure is shared by Lessing's other female protagonists (Markow 2013). One of the consequences was that the protagonist's mother stopped trying to keep the orchard in optimal condition. For example, she decided not to grow certain species, such as peas, as meticulous attention was needed to grow them successfully (Lessing 1994a: 125). Having given up trying to look after them, wild gooseberry bushes grew in their place, under which the girl and William MacGregor laughed, quarrelled and "ate (gooseberries) together" (125). Furthermore, the protagonist's father commented on the great effort required to cultivate certain crops, which did not go unnoticed by the girl. While he chewed some peas when the family were sitting at the table, he "grumbled" (125) and said that the wealth of their family was water, as it was the true gold that made it possible to have the abundance they enjoyed (125). The father eats and grumbles that water is gold, the element that makes the peas grow. He does not say a word about the peas' flavour. But the girl appreciates that the peas are grown not only because of water, but because her "mother toiled and bent over those" beds of peas (125). In my view, it is, again, a hint of the homage Lessing is paying her mother through this young protagonist. These references are a reminder that Lessing often mentioned her parents in her writings. As Lessing related in her autobiography, her parents became engaged while her father was convalescing at the hospital where her mother was working as a nurse (1995), her father being "a minor official" (1994a: 127), a former combatant who was mutilated in World War I. The couple's life, which was marked by traumatic war experiences and their survival away from England, was vibrantly depicted in *Alfred and Emily* (2008), even though at the end of the novel Lessing reinvented the events related to her parents' lives. The text presents an "Emily" for whom moving to her African house involved facing her worst fears as an immigrant after her life in Persia where, in her daughter's words, her parents had lived "unfortunately, for too short a time" (1994a: 127). To my mind, the words of the young protagonist of "Flavours of Exile" constitute a statement of filial recognition (of the mother figure) within Lessing's search for the "good-will" love discussed by Freire (in Romão 2019).

The family orchard as a fragrant, colourful whole plays a significant role in terms of how children are educated and self-educated in informal spaces. It is interesting to note that food and the mother are inseparable in the story; the mother connects with her origins and her past through this edible life that she grows in a small plot of land with the purpose of feeding her family. However, the daughter is clearly aware (as Lessing herself was) that she has a different origin to her mother's and father's. To acknowledge this, the narrative voice chooses a meaningful connection between the young protagonist and her environment: hers is an "inheritance of veld and sun" (Lessing 1994a: 126). Thus she feels that she is the beneficiary of an inheritance that distinguishes her from her parents from the outset. Her self-recognition makes her the true protagonist in her search for agency while, at the same time, it differentiates her from her mother who is incapable of accepting her status of self-exile, separated from her place of origin, repeatedly looking "backwards" (Bazin 2008: 117). This creates a vast distance between her and her daughter. Even though the daughter lacks recognised status within the social structure networks (Gaitán 2014; Romão 2019), she does not wish to have a role that relegates her to the domestic sphere. Nor does she want to be the product of oppressive forms of family-based and informal education, as is the case for girls in other stories by Lessing such as "Old John's Place" (1994c) or "Plants and Girls" (1994b). Her decision to travel the road to emancipation drives her to symbolically leave by moving away from the core of her home, from the laws, contradictions and the burden of the unsatisfied desires of her parents. Her journey takes her to a corner of the orchard where she will spend days by the pomegranate tree, under a beating sun (1994a: 129), practising a form of observation that will lead her to the centre of herself.

At this point it is worth recalling the third event that marked Lessing's personal and literary life in 1957. *Going Home* was published that year, after the aforementioned journey. Nostalgia pervades this autobiographical book that narrates the author's first visit to Southern Rhodesia eight years after she had left for Europe. Roberta Rubenstein argues that nostalgia entails an experience of temporal separation with the object of longing, particularly when referred to an existential state characteristic of adulthood (2001: 4-16). As claimed by Jenny Diski, even though Lessing had left Africa years before, she "was a farm girl, [missing] the landscape, the skies, the veldt, the sunrise, the animals, the smell after rain" (2015: 13-16). In terms of remembrance of, and longing for, that lost place, Walder points out that, for Lessing, Africa was a place of suffering where she learnt different lessons, and was also a place "[that] transcend[ed], as it put […] into perspective, the human condition" (2008). The return home became a constant exercise in negotiation between the love for the place where she belonged, nostalgia, and the recognition that she would not be able to re-live what she had

already experienced, even if she could return. As noted by Susan Watkins, in *Going Home* Lessing "conceives 'home' as a wandering site of nostalgia, exile and alienation" (2015: 33). Here the space and the landscape are the fabric where human and non-human life become entangled; where the tensions between the colonising and the colonised societies and the ensuing challenges are managed (in the midst of the political independence of the colony, within the then newly created Central African Federation). Lessing, a witness of the upsurge of decolonisation and of the appearance of new nation-states, endowed the young protagonist of "Flavours of Exile" with converging features resulting from her hybrid cultural origin, a sign and "irretrievable condition of a post-colonial modernity" (Chennells in Watkins and Chambers 2008: 4). Showcasing the wealth of this cultural and ethnographic heritage is in stark contrast with the grieving process experienced by the mother in "Flavours of Exile". This grief is inseparable from the physical materiality (Moss 2009: 9) embodied by the orchard and her daughter, who approaches the pomegranate tree full of curiosity and desire, but is also exiled, at least temporarily, in this liminal space removed from traditional education frameworks that she has made her own. This is where the unequal relationship between the girl and her mother —the latter caught up in a nostalgic and authoritarian discourse— is brought into question. The protagonist focuses on an experience that becomes geographically located in the space which she gradually appropriates for herself throughout the story (Moraru 2018). At this point she has to learn how to handle the relationship with her mother and, beyond that, how to approach her own sensuality.

4. An *Exploratorium* for Female Agency

The analysis so far reflects a story with links to coming-of-age narratives. The period evoked in "Flavours of Exile" spent by the family in former Persia and the narrative time of the story connect the transition space between childhood and other developmental stages. I refer to the girl's passage into menarche, which occurs in parallel with the events in the vegetable garden. In the absence of a formal educational environment, this space is a centre of discoveries or *exploratorium* (Gardner 2013: 201) where the protagonist undergoes various experiences and gradually makes decisions as she finds herself and others. In this way, the natural and the social converge in the orchard, a domesticated natural space, and the perspective in Lessing's pictorial narrative turns to the pedagogical value of the vegetable garden as an educational space where the adolescent engages in a cultural and learning activity, both as an observer of and a participant in a living, ever-changing environment. Here, a bush or a tree becomes "sanctuary,

safety, a place to hide", as in Haggith and Ritchie's words, since they allow children to rely on "a primitive instinct to take shelter in […], to den up under them" (1998).[9] The orchard is, therefore, a site rich in educational potential, a *Thinker Tool* (Gardner 2013: 229) used to observe the functioning model of the world. It is also a hiding place in which to experience new sensations, and a watchtower where the girl can stand while the time of learning and change elapses and she enters a different developmental physiological, psychological and emotional stage (Prendergast 2000). It is through this slow but firm approach, which involves both determined observation and a time for waiting, that the experience of discovery (Eisner 2002; Bárcena Orbe 2005: 69) and self-discovery remains whole and uninterruptedly unfolds (Cassano 2014: 11). This is achieved when the girl develops her ability to be an *I*, a subject who becomes increasingly aware of how she feels and what happens to her. Furthermore, by presenting the adolescent in the external space, observing how the orchard responds to natural cycles (as reflected in the sprouting of the pomegranate, for example), Lessing allows her to decide on how she wants to behave, instead of being in an "'orderly' public space" (Richardson and Rofel 2018: 534) and (only apparently) subordinated to her mother's orders and decisions. Following the afore-mentioned scene in which the girl and William eat gooseberries while they are lying under a bush looking at the sky, the description is interrupted by some conclusive words: "It intoxicated us" (Lessing 1994a: 125). The girl is shown to be engaged in emotional development, immersed in a new current of emotions after she discovers that she has fallen in love with William. Like Lessing herself, the girl is an heiress of sun and veld, and her infatuation with William brings "a promise of warmth and understanding [she] had never known" (1994a: 127) as well as a "tightness" in her chest (127), which leads her to look for shelter by the pomegranate tree. The girl's longing is a cry (Byatt 1998: vii) for emotional completion ("My beloved is mine and I am his", as written in *Song of Solomon* 2:16), to be embodied in experiences of transformative learning that need to be integrated by the child. The possibilities of preserving innocence are juxtaposed with the girl's pursuit of solitude. It is not by chance that she becomes interested in the solitary pomegranate tree, "a tough, obstinate-looking thing" (Lessing 1994a: 128). Even though this is a luxuriant vegetable garden, the protagonist is not portrayed as an ideal, endearing plant hunter (Brickell 2006: 11), nor as a seeker of solace, oblivious to everything around her, as Miranda was in Virginia Woolf's "In the Orchard". The girl makes her decision to remain firmly by the pomegranate tree to observe the fruiting process, learning to experience her sensuality by being on her own, feeling free under her tree and feverish as she remembers William's blue-eyed gaze. Thus, she associates the shape of the sprouting pomegranate with women's breasts, and the red colour of the pomegranate grains with "the red of blood" (Lessing 1994a: 128).

In an age when decorum was taken as a sign of propriety, conforming to social conventions, the young girl nevertheless acknowledges the stirring of her sensual awakening. Surrounded by images of blood and evoking William's physical beauty, she feels that the orchard is "haunted by William" (Lessing 1994a: 128).[10] Through rich descriptions of the edible garden, the story depicts the girl seeking new paths to give meaning to her experience, as when she tastes "the tiny crimson seeds [whose] warm, sweet juice flooded [her] tongue" (128). The narrative flow, redolent with sensuous images, portrays a girl who feels "more than a little mad" (128) in the exploratory voyage of her feelings during her coming of age for William and for a new negotiation of family relationships. The sprout, as a "tiny teacher of tenacity" (Haggith and Ritchie 1998), challenges the girl to observe these lessons (Rapp 2007: 15). She passes the days in conscious observation and, while ignoring William's response to her romantic projection (Lessing 1994a: 129), she calls herself "mad" (129) and adds that she feels "ashamed that that marvellous feverish world should depend on a half-grown boy in dusty khaki, gripping a piece of grass between his teeth as he stared ahead of him" (129). The girl senses that making the transition from child to woman comes with the loss of innocence. As she immerses herself in the changing nature of the orchard, accepting and internalising the challenges of her transition, her identity is transformed. Her agency increases while she resists the norms that derive from her protective education, and from the disparaging way in which her mother treats her. While the silence about the physiological changes undergone by the girl is clear, it is also true that she wants to grow (as does her mother). The difference between them is that the mother is trapped by an unsatisfied desire for growth, a vacuum resulting from not belonging, whereas the girl does not experience this frustration. The daughter is focused on an introspective process and delights in contemplation. She does not reject the orchard's disorder which is to be found in the physiological transition she is about to face (Lively 2017: 128). She awaits her development promising new possibilities which she hopes will be productive, as was the case with the long-awaited bud of the pomegranate.

The idea of the orchard as an experiential *hortus deliciarum*, with optimal conditions for the young protagonist's educational and spiritual growth, becomes more apparent as the story advances. Lessing gives her the opportunity to find her own tree of knowledge, this unsubmissive pomegranate tree that has resisted heat and solitude and, after being abandoned by those who planted it, has sprouted up again. This fact amazed herself, her family and her neighbours, as it was both unexpected and striking. The girl is also an unsubmissive plant[11] who sits in the shade of this tree in order to read both the world and herself. She seeks to find a model in a world that she considers to be an educational, socialising space, where she gradually constructs and recognises an identity that she wants to claim for

herself, unlike her mother who regards the world as an unchangeable compartmentalised place. It is worth mentioning that this family garden is not radically dismissive of its Arcadian status and, more importantly, of hope. Hope emerges as the narrative progresses, most clearly towards the end of the story, because the girl receives the joy (Scafi 2013) brought about by her decision to turn her spatial and sensuous appropriation into a strategy to claim her own territory, both in physical terms and in terms of her relationship with her mother.

5. Conclusion

Reading "Flavours of Exile" over half a century after its publication, and with the resonance of Doris Lessing's recently celebrated centenary, is an experience that should be approached as one would approach the plants growing in an orchard or a garden, such as that portrayed in the story. We may read this story with an open mind and curiosity to what it may bring. With this young protagonist Lessing is not being predictable. Similarly to what the curious eye sees when we visit an orchard or a garden, although we may not appreciate it at first, there is life everywhere, more movements of insects, plants and soil than the human eye can meet, all of which give life to the orchard's inhabitants. Lessing offers a protagonist who learns to observe and listen to the course of life in this territory around her and intimately, a space where wild life and humanity stems. Placed in the context of Lessing's African Stories, it remains an extraordinary piece of narrative fiction in a variety of respects.

An audacious example of a girl's desire to grow up within a stifling atmosphere (regardless of it taking place in the open air), this story has the ability to surprise, as educational and cultural notions are contested in the portrayal of a girl's pursuit for agency through self-discovery and self-education. The story is set in the context of the colonial past entangled with a postcolonial subjectivity that problematizes variables such as time and space. The protagonist is invested in building up a life that confronts her parents', which was traversed by the burdens and suffering they endured as white settlers living a historical timeline impacted by colonial past and the signs of a decaying Empire, from which it was (for them) impossible to escape. In the story, her present and future life should be shaped out of the influence of the imperial past and, as with her pomegranate tree, far from the place this story emerged. The young protagonist is subject to a certain degree of oppression, but also reaches out for emancipation. She was born in the periphery, and the setting in which she is immersed pushes her to leave in order to become independent, just as Lessing did when she left Africa to settle in London in 1949. This open-ended story epitomises Lessing's conception of the transition process from childhood to

adulthood as intertwining passages from innocence to maturity. Lessing demolishes ideas of correctness by presenting a girl who is not as dependent on her parents' control and direction as she would be expected to be due to her age and isolation in the community that she inhabits. While she is preparing to recognise and experience her own sensuality, she gets to know herself and recognises the world around her. In this observing and learning process, she evaluates, decides and prepares to manage the scope of her relationships with others, including those with William and her mother. To fulfil her narrative purpose, Lessing presents the family garden as an Eden-like educational space, a metaphor for a classroom that is home to the development of learning and teaching processes, as well as vital processes that reflect different cognitive, physical and emotional experiences. In this space, the protagonist learns the texture of the fabric of which her environment is made. Furthermore, she learns about the world and herself. Lessing's pedagogical intent was visible from her early narrative works, and has a clear, strong presence in this story, which has not been studied from this point of view before. I hope that rereading Lessing's African Stories, and specifically this short story, will widen the scope of the existing critical contributions on Lessing's corpus of African Stories and on the pedagogical turn in her narrative works.

Notes

1. Originally in *The Habit of Loving* (1957) and later in *The Sun between Their Feet. Collected African Stories. Volume Two* (1973 and 1994). This article uses the 1994 edition. More recently, "Flavours of Exile" was included in the volume *The Garden of Reading. Contemporary Short Fiction about Gardens and Gardening* (2012), edited by Michele Slung.

2. Carrington's painting is currently on display at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, England.

3. According to Joanne Moorhead, Carrington's cousin and biographer, Lessing was Carrington's favourite writer (2017).

4. Elsewhere, I have discussed the close relationship between Lessing's desire to acquire a solid knowledge base and the development of her identity as a writer. The interpretation provided was that she decided to consciously create a cultural education for herself that would compensate for the fact that she had left formal education at the age of 14. This would make up for any possible shortcomings and reinforce her learning process with a view to becoming a professional writer (see García Navarro 2019).

5. See http://www.fpa.es/en/princess-of-asturias-awards/laureates/2001-doris-lessing. html?especifica=0.

6. First included in *Five* (1953) and later in the collection entitled *This Was the Old Chief's Country* (1994).

7. Capitalised in the original.

8. This was increasingly more common as of 1957, close to the end of

rationing after the Second World War. See https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/Rationing-in-World-War-Two/.

9. For further understanding of trees and gardens traditionally seen as sanctuary, see, for example, Cooper (2017: 2-12), and Sewald and Freuler (2019: 135-146).

10. The presence of the uncanny also appears in other stories in the same collection, such as "Girls and Plants". For further knowledge on the uncanny, see Arias (2012).

11. I use the same word of the work "Unsubmissive Plant" by Remedios Varo. In the painting (1961), Varo, who was a colleague and great friend of Carrington's, highlights, as Carrington did, the importance of a small plant in bloom. In Varo's painting this is done in contrast to a landscape of mathematical formulae.

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REWRITING THE WESTERN: TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSIONS AND GENDER FLUIDITY IN SEBASTIAN BARRY'S *DAYS WITHOUT END*

REESCRIBIENDO EL WESTERN: DIMENSIONES TRANSNACIONALES Y FLUIDEZ DE GÉNERO EN *DAYS WITHOUT END,* DE SEBASTIAN BARRY

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Abstract

The present essay will explore the Irish writer Sebastian Barry's transnational rendering of the American West in his novel *Days without End* (2016), emphasizing his representation of neglected western questions and realities and his revision of traditional western tropes and archetypes. Barry's approach to the American West in *Days without End* moves beyond the regional and national imagery of this territory, revealing its international and hybrid properties and its multiple and overlapping cultures. It is argued that Barry's recreation of a different reality from the traditional western monomyth of masculinity, individualism, and Anglo-American conquest allows him to challenge classical frontier narratives and to address international and transcultural issues, such as gender fluidity. The novel, whose main protagonist and narrator is a poor, homosexual Irish immigrant, embraces a different West, questioning romanticized versions of the westward expansion and drawing interesting connections between the Irish immigrants in this region and the Native Americans. Overall, *Days without End* may be viewed as an acute depiction of the transnational dimension of the American West, proving the power of the Western to overcome its traditional formulaic and mythic boundaries and to travel across global spaces.

Keywords: American West, Sebastian Barry, transnational, frontier mythology, revisionism, gender.

Resumen

El presente artículo explora la lectura transnacional que el autor irlandés Sebastian Barry realiza del Oeste norteamericano en su novela *Days without End* (2016), haciendo hincapié en su representación de temas y realidades del Oeste tradicionalmente relegados al olvido y en su revisión de los tropos y arquetipos del "western". A la hora de retratar el Oeste en *Days without End*, Barry va más allá del imaginario regional y nacional de este territorio, mostrando sus características internacionales e híbridas y sus culturas múltiples y superpuestas. Se argumenta que la recreación de Barry de una realidad diferente al tradicional monomito "western" de masculinidad, individualismo y conquista anglo-americana, le permite cuestionar las narraciones clásicas de la frontera y abordar asuntos internacionales y transculturales, como la fluidez de género. La novela, cuyo principal protagonista y narrador es un irlandés pobre y homosexual, muestra un Oeste diferente, poniendo en cuestión las versiones románticas de la expansión hacia el Oeste y trazando interesantes conexiones entre los inmigrantes irlandeses en esta región y los nativo-americanos. En conjunto, *Days without End* puede considerarse como un retrato agudo de la dimensión transnacional del Oeste americano, mostrando el poder del "western" para superar los tradicionales límites del mito y del género o fórmula y viajar a través de espacios globales.

Palabras clave: oeste americano, Sebastian Barry, transnacional, mitología de la frontera, revisionismo, género.

1. Introduction: Transnationalism in the American West and Barry's Revision of Frontier Mythology

The expansion of transnationalism in literary and cultural studies has certainly contributed to the increasing consolidation of critical perspectives focused on the global dimension of certain regions whose cultural iconography has achieved a powerful impact on an international audience. Such is the case of the American West, which was often built upon a history of cultural transfers, multinational features, and global flows. As Janne Lahti has claimed, the "West was international before it became national, and it became known and placed in a global context of empires, markets, epidemics, and knowledge before it was claimed by the United States and its brand of settler colonialism" (2019: 17). Similarly, Rio and Conway have argued that the "transnational dimension of the West is already present in the origins of a territory with borders and boundaries characterized by violence, cultural exchange, transculturation and heterogeneity" (2019: x). The imagery of the American West has traveled across national borders, challenging traditional

reductionist interpretations of western stories and films as quintessential 'American' cultural products and revealing the transnational implications of the western experience. For example, Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper have stated that the international appeal of western films may be explained in part by "the potential for historical experiences of one culture to resonate with the audiences of another" (2014: xiv). Contemporary approaches to the American West and the Western are increasingly embracing a postregional dimension or postwestern perspective that emphasizes the dynamic and transnational ingredients of western motifs and themes. As Susan Kollin has claimed, "postwestern studies work against a narrowly conceived regionalism, one that restricts western cultures of the past and present to some predetermined entity with static borders and boundaries" (2007: 11). In fact, the case for transnationalism in western American studies has been promoted by a growing number of scholars in the last few decades. This is the case of Neil Campbell, who has pointed out that "to examine the American West in the twenty-first century is to think of it as always already transnational, a more routed and complex rendition, a traveling concept whose meanings move between cultures, crossing, bridging, and intruding simultaneously" (2008: 4). Similarly, Steven Frye has argued that "this remapping of the West, which preserves but enriches the regional and geographic model with concepts of movement that can be charted along ethnic, economic, and cultural lines, has led to a more complete understanding of the American West as a locus point for an international imaginary" (2016: 3-4).

A transnational perspective seems particularly appropriate when approaching Sebastian Barry's *Days without End* (2016), a story that shows how the conventions and tropes of the Western can be rewritten to account for otherness, transculturation, globalization, and the revision of frontier mythology. Barry locates the American West in a transnational context, linking western tropes and Irish historical and contemporary issues and deconstructing notions of exceptionalism related to the frontier experience as a quintessential American phenomenon. *Days without End* is the seventh novel by this acclaimed Irish writer and the fourth one dealing with a member of the McNulty clan. With this novel, Barry was awarded for the second time the prestigious Costa Book of the Year Prize. Its main protagonist and narrator, Thomas McNulty, is an Irish immigrant who flees to America as a thirteen-year-old orphan to escape the Great Famine, participating in the Indian Wars and in the Civil War. The novel opens with McNulty recounting his experiences as a seventeen-year soldier in Missouri in 1851. This character, according to Barry himself, grew out of a reference his grandfather once made to a past relative who fought in the Indian Wars ("An Irish Immigrant"). Although Barry's novel is mostly set in the Old West, this narrative departs from traditional cowboy mythology and romanticized versions of the conquest and exploration of

this territory. In fact, *Days without End* challenges archetypal frontier mythology, complicating classical constructions of the American West and opening iconic western tropes up to transnational reconceptualization. It is a novel where Barry, rather than perpetuating myths, interrogates them. He rejects the traditional western rhetoric of conquest, masculinity, individualism, and Anglo-Saxon power to focus instead on neglected stories and identities in the western imaginary. As Neil Campbell has stated, "The novel imagines and performs the West and America *differently*" (2018: 232, emphasis in original).

Despite its frontier setting and its immigrant protagonist, *Days without End* cannot be regarded as a conventional novel about immigrants in the Old West who believe in the dream of westward hope and its mythology of plenty and promise. Certainly, as Jeffrey Wallmann has put it, "the cultural mythology underlying westerns is the American Dream, which for the most part derives from the myth of the New World" (1999: 17). However, Thomas McNulty, the protagonist of Barry's novel, is not depicted as an ordinary immigrant escaping from poverty in Europe and longing for economic success and self-realization in an open land where everything could begin afresh. Instead, McNulty represents an important departure from the West's expectations of masculinity, ethnocentrism, economic success, and individualism. In fact, he shares many traits of 'otherness' because he is a homosexual Irish immigrant who, together with his partner (John Cole), adopts a Sioux girl (Winona) in the American West of the mid-19th century, a heterosexual and racist territory.

In *Days without End* Barry connects Ireland and the American West, addressing the Irish role in the exploration and settlement of the frontier. Memories and traumas of fateful events in Ireland, in particular the Great Famine, are transferred and brought into the country of settlement. The relocation of past legacies and experiences to a new social, geographical, political, and cultural context leads to dynamic transfers and transnational affiliations that reshape monocultural approaches of classical frontier narratives. In the novel, McNulty's Irish origin introduces a series of issues that condition his experience as an immigrant in the American West. First of all, as a survivor of the Great Famine, McNulty is traumatized by hunger, whose lethal consequences he has suffered in his own family: "my sister and mother perished. They perished like stray cats, no one caring much. But the whole town was perishing" (2017: 29). In fact, on his way to America, he emphasizes the power of hunger to deprive individuals of their human features: "We were a plague. We were only rats of people. Hunger takes away what you are. Everything we were was just nothing then" (2017: 29). Hunger in the novel also acquires a transnational dimension because it is not limited to the Irish immigrants. Although Barry himself has noted that "as Irish people only reading

Irish history, sometimes we think we have the copyright on hunger" ("An Irish Immigrant"), he does not hesitate to portray in his novel the impact of hunger beyond Irish borders. Thus, the American West is not free from starvation, as illustrated by the Sioux, who are deprived of food by the federal government —"if they was waiting on government victuals they starved" (2017: 99). The recurrent images of starvation extend to McNulty's experiences in other parts of the United States, questioning the cultural mythology of the American Dream. Particularly haunting is the scene in a prisoner war camp in Andersonville (Georgia) during the Civil War where both Union captives and their guards are all starving: "They got precious little to eat theyselves so it's skeletons minding skeletons somewhat. They ain't withholding food, they ain't got any" (2017: 197).

In Barry's novel, the trauma of hunger coexists with recurrent images of dispossession, suffering, and death in the promised land. So, it may be argued that *Days without End* challenges the mythic rhetoric of America and the West, in particular as the land of opportunity, rejecting romanticized versions of this land for the Irish. The dream of westward hope and its mythology of plenty and promise is replaced in the novel by the emphasis on the fight for survival. In fact, Thomas McNulty, a survivor of the Great Famine, has to survive other traumatic experiences in America, such as the Indian Wars or the Civil War, and he has to reinvent himself against a context of painful ordeals where the Irish move from being victims of anti-Catholic bigotry and racism to becoming involved in the oppression of the Native Americans. The epic journey of McNulty and his partner across the American West allows Barry to illustrate the clash between frontier mythology and the reality of survival in this place, a region where the main characters are dehumanized by war, poverty, and racism. As Neil Campbell has stated, the novel portrays the West as "a brutal and unforgiving place of racial violence, genocide, gender inequality, and cruel disappointment" (2018: 238). The trope of the West as the land of new beginnings and regeneration is present in the novel, but it is reconceptualized by Barry, who cuts away foundational national frontier mythology. Significantly enough, in Barry's novel, Thomas McNulty, once in the United States (he had arrived there via Canada), goes from the West, Missouri and California, to the East, settling finally in Tennessee. This inversion of the traditional direction of the quest for the American Dream, the historical movement toward the West, can be regarded as a symbolical exposing of the artificiality of the myth of the American West.

Days without End reshapes a legacy of frontier writing inherited from authors such as James Fenimore Cooper, Owen Wister, or Zane Grey, deconstructing mythological archetypes and stories that evoke an overly romanticized era. In this sense, it is worth remembering that the mythologized representation of the

West is a transcultural phenomenon, appropriated by multiple narratives beyond the US borders. In fact, Barry's novel undermines the vision of the American West as a place of romance and adventure popularized, for example, by earlier Irish authors, such as James McHenry, Dillon O'Brien, or George Jessop, and, in particular, by Thomas Mayne Reid, whose Wild West antirealistic fiction transcended national canons, illustrating the power of western mythology and imagery to travel beyond the Atlantic. Despite the obvious differences between Reid's best-known western novel, *The Headless Horseman* (1866), and Barry's *Days without End*, both narratives share a relocation process of legacies of the Irish past to the frontier setting. Thus, whereas Reid's novel inserts Irish folklore and myth into a romanticized portrait of the West (Naughton and Naughton 2013: 148), Barry's approach to the frontier is permeated by elements of Irish history and culture that interact powerfully with western imagery, contributing to reconfiguring classic tropes and to a transcultural dialogue about the Irish immigrant experience of the American West.

2. Victims and Victimizers of Settler Colonialism

Days without End focuses on the army experiences of Thomas McNulty, depicting the army basically as the only way out from famine for the Irish immigrants: "The only pay worse than the worst pay in America was army pay. And they fed you queer stuff till your shit just stank. But you were glad to get work because if you didn't work for the few dollars in America you hungered. Well, I was sick of hungering" (2017: 2). Enlisting in the army at that time often meant a deeply distressing trial for Irish immigrants like McNulty because it involved participating in traumatic events such as the Indian Wars or the Civil War. As Camila Franco Batista has argued (2017: 103), we may talk about the intertwining in the novel of two traumatic experiences, the Great Famine and war in America. The army also often meant a way for the Irish to earn citizenship, a strategy to counter the social and cultural discrimination they encountered in the United States, illustrated by "Irish not need to apply" postings. As Peter O'Neill has argued, "the combination of Catholic religion, Irish ethnicity, utter poverty, and massive numbers" made the "Famine Irish" regarded as "a threat to the racial hierarchy of the United States during the mid-nineteenth century" (2017: 2). According to historical records, about 42 percent of the new army recruits in 1850-51 were Irish, and of 183,659 soldiers who enlisted in the army after the Civil War, 38,659 had been born in Ireland (Dungan 1993: 42). As soldiers, the Irish took part in the conquest of the West, becoming instruments of a painful process of colonization and destruction. Barry himself has talked about the "historical

sorrow of an Irish person, himself essentially a native person, an aboriginal person, by a great trauma having to go to America, joining an Army that was engaged in the destruction, erasure and removal of a people, the Native American people, not unlike himself" ("An Irish Immigrant"). Several scholars have also emphasized the problematic and complex relationship between the Irish soldiers and the Native Americans during the westward expansion. Marguerite Quintelli-Neary, for example, has talked about a "curious, schizophrenic blurring of racial boundaries", with Irish soldiers in the Indian Wars making "their warrior status known as they marched into battle to the sounds of Irish music… while, at the same time, many of them established a bond with the very same Native Americans, intermarrying with them" (2004: 47-48). Barry's novel does not only limit to reveal the contradictions of the Irish involvement in the extermination of the original inhabitants of the West, but it also exposes the tragic irony of their role during the American Civil War. About 200,000 Irish soldiers fought in this war, most of them (about 150,000) enlisted in the Union army (Rodgers 2008). Barry's novel highlights the inner incongruity of the Irish involvement in this war, a conflict where there are Irish-American companies on both sides calling out the same battle cries and fighting against each other: "The Irish Rebs are shouting too, shouting filthy things in Gaelic. Then we reach each other and it is all wrestling, punching, and stabbing" (2017: 173). The land of opportunity for these immigrants, with a common traumatic past of hunger and dispossession, becomes the site of a fratricidal fight where ethnic bonds are sacrificed in the name of survival. In general, in its approach to Irish identity, Barry's novel rejects one-dimensional portraits, tending to integrate polarities, such as those represented by the Irish soldiers fighting for the Union and the Irish Rebs. In fact, ambivalence may be regarded as the dominant feature in Barry's portrayal of the Irish, with an emphasis on duality, contradiction, and ambiguity, as illustrated by the narrator's description of the archetypal Irishman: "He may be an angel in the clothes of a devil or a devil in the clothes of an angel but either way you're talking to two when you talk to one Irishman" (2017: 27). This ambiguity extends to different traits of the Irish character, as exemplified by McNulty's evaluation of the courage of the Irish soldiers: "An Irish trooper is the bravest man in the field and the most cowardly" (2017: 27).

Dichotomy, contradiction, and ambiguity are especially remarkable when Barry places his Irish characters in the Indian Wars. Certainly, the western genre, in general, contains a dualistic dimension because it is both an example of a narrative of settler colonialism, similar to other colonial narratives, and it is also a unique genre, linked to the peculiar US history of expansion and settlement. In the case of Barry's novel, this dichotomous condition becomes even more acute due to the particular interaction of the Irish immigrants with the native

inhabitants of the colonized American West. The novel certainly suggests an affinity between the Native Americans and the Irish based on the fact that both groups represent dispossession and dislocation. Both communities are victims of settler colonialism, and their common link is symbolically expressed in the novel by Thomas McNulty's choice of John Cole, a young man with Indian ancestors, as his partner in love and their adoption of a Sioux child. Barry himself has spoken about his personal identification with the Native Americans during his youth in Ireland: "when I was very young, I did, […] like a lot of young people do, I made a strong connection between myself […] and Native America. I grew my hair down to my waist when I was 19 at Trinity College the first chance I got. The only thing I ever played on the stage […] I was cast as Tonto" ("An Irish Immigrant"). Both groups share common features of 'otherness' and oppression, as objects of an English colonial discourse that establishes their ethnical inferiority. As historian David Harding has noted, "as the English incursion into Ireland closely predates that of North American colonization, it can be seen as a dress rehearsal for the subjugation of Native Americans" (2005: 37). Marguerite Quintelli-Neary has alluded to the solidarity of a Native American tribe towards the Irish during the Famine: "the Choctaw tribe of Mississippi, which was forced to leave its ancestral home and undergo a forced march to Oklahoma in 1830, […] collected funds and sent relief money in the 1840s to an unknown people who were starving on a remote island off Europe" (2004: 49). However, the empathy between the Irish immigrants and Native Americans, based on their common condition as an American underclass, was often more a theoretical assumption than a reality. The Irish were involved in the ethnic cleansing against the Native Americans in the West, moving from excluded to excluders in a process where racism and bigotry against a more vulnerable group often worked as an instrument to gain social and cultural acceptance in the New World. In fact, there are several historical examples of the unfair treatment of the Native Americans by Irish officers during the settlement process (Dungan 1993: 43-45). Similarly, Barry's novel portrays the Irish-American soldiers as perpetrators of brutal attacks against the Indians during the western colonization. Neil Campbell, for example, has used the term "uncanny kinship" (2018: 242) to refer to the relationship between both groups. Thomas McNulty and some of his Irish comrades in the army will participate in massacres against the Native Americans, leaving behind their historical role as victims to become victimizers. McNulty himself seems to be aware of the ironic implications of their active participation as instruments of colonization and extermination in the promised land when he juxtaposes their role in the American West with that of Oliver Cromwell's soldiers in Ireland in the 17th century: "When that old ancient Cromwell come

to Ireland he said he would leave nothing alive. Said the Irish were vermin and devils. Clean out the country for good people to step into. Make a paradise. Now we make this American paradise I guess. Guess it be strange so many Irish boys doing this work" (2017: 263-264).

The novel underscores the soldiers' cruelty against the Native Americans: "It was just women and children all around us. Not a brave among them" (2017: 37). With this emphasis on the atrocities of the army, Barry departs from traditional frontier mythology to vindicate historical accuracy in the depiction of the expansion to the West. Barry is aware that the myth of the American West is often based on stereotypes and cultural representations where those who represent the 'Other', like the Native Americans, are deprived of their human features. Dehumanizing the 'Other', as David Sibley has claimed, "is one way of legitimating exploitation and exclusion from civilized society" (1995: 10). The profound ethnocentric bias of frontier mythology justifies the annihilation of the Native Americans in the name of progress and civilization, extending the trope of a 'savage war' to refer to the Indian Wars. Barry has acknowledged his use of historical sources to write about these wars, drawing connections with his research for a previous novel, *A Long Long Way* (2005), focused on the horror of World War I for the Irish troops: "I read for a year because, of course, you can't completely make it up. […] And sometimes when I was reading, you know, I must confess that I lost heart. And I thought, I just can't. I can't actually do this. […] It reminded me of when I was trying to write about the Irish soldiers in the First World War" ("An Irish Immigrant"). Barry was particularly influenced by the Sand Creek massacre in 1864, and he even admits that one of the characters, presumably Captain Silas Sowell, is based on an army officer who refused to participate in the massacre: "the terrible orders, and the terrible outcome, and the efforts of a man called Silas Soule —I tried to honor him by having him in the book with a different spelling" ("An Irish Immigrant"). The novel highlights not only the cruelty and inhumanity of the Indian Wars, but also their psychological impact on the main character, forced to admit the impact of evil on his own behavior: "I was affrighted and strangely affronted, but mostly at myself, because I knew I had taken strange pleasure from the attack" (2017: 37). The narrator realizes that their commitment to violence and brutality in the Indian Wars makes them face a sense of loss and an increasing dehumanization: "We didn't know where we were. We didn't for those moments know our own names. We were different then, we were other people. We were killers, like no other killers that had ever been. […] We were dislocated, we were not there, now we were ghosts" (2017: 38-39). In this way, the colonization of the American West acquires a traumatic dimension not only for its victims but also for those who, like McNulty and his Irish comrades,

participated in the extermination of the native population. We may even regard McNulty's narration of these cruel episodes as an attempt to expiate his own guilt by revisiting a traumatic past. As Camila Franco Batista has suggested, "he acknowledges that the war against the Indians had altered him and the other soldiers; they had ceased to be law men and became assassins" (2017: 109). In fact, the novel suggests that the border that separates the colonizer from the colonized is a contested and blurred line, questioning the traditional discourse of otherness in frontier mythology. To use Homi K. Bhabha's terms, we might even talk about the western frontier in Barry's novel as a place where "the place of difference and otherness, or the space of the adversarial […] is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional" (1995: 32). In fact, the white soldiers who seem to represent progress and civilization are very close to the primitiveness and the savagery they are supposedly bound to eliminate.

3. Neglected Gender Identities

In *Days without End,* Barry also challenges traditional cowboy mythology, vindicating the existence of other neglected western identities. The main characters' national and personal identity, with its emphasis on class, sexual, and ethnic divergence, disputes the truth of reductionist interpretations of this territory and its cultural iconography. The novel blurs boundaries not only between cultures and ethnic groups, but also between genders, revising traditional representations of gender roles in western films and literature. Barry paints a vivid picture of the frontier where transgressive sexual and gender activities put into question popular understandings and memories about the masculine, heterosexual Old West. Thus, fixed gendered identities are disrupted from the beginning of the novel and gender fluidity related to its main male protagonists becomes particularly striking in a genre that, as Jane Tompkins has claimed, "worships the phallus" (1992: 28). Although several authors have argued about the "implicit homoeroticism of many Westerns throughout the history of the genre" (Piturro 2013: 117), classic western archetypes of the hero have traditionally emphasized a version of masculinity where there is an overemphasis on toughness, dominance, individuality, and physical strength. Barry's novel reveals the existence of alternative and complex definitions of masculinity in the American West, departing from archetypal views of male heroes related to mythical views of the West and individualistic male cultural models. Certainly, Thomas McNulty does not epitomize traditional masculine features in frontier mythology. It is not just that he develops a romantic relationship with John Cole and adopts a Sioux girl, but he also embodies an unfixed gender identity. In fact, the novel explores gender fluidity because, in

McNulty's case, his desire to dress as a woman and his maternal feelings for Winona coexist with his stereotypically masculine involvement in brutal war episodes: "I feel a woman more than I ever felt a man, though I were a fighting man most of my days" (273). Fixed gender identities are disrupted from the very beginning of the novel, as illustrated by the drag show where rugged miners, who seem to represent archetypal masculine myths of the West, are transformed into romantic men devoted to dancing with men disguised as women: "They need the illusion, only the illusion of the gentler sex" (2017: 9). Through his cross-dressing with his lover John Cole for the miners of Daggsville (Missouri), the teenager Thomas becomes Thomasina: "Funny how as soon as we hove into those dresses everything changed. I never felt so contented in my life. All miseries and worries fled away. I was a new man now, a new girl. I was freed, like those slaves were freed in the coming war. I was ready for anything" (2017: 11). In fact, cross-dressing was not uncommon in the Old West, practiced either for practical reasons or to express non-conformism with one's assigned gender identity. As historian Peter Boag has noted, "cross-dressers were not simply ubiquitous, but were much a part of daily life of the frontier and in the West" (2011: 1-2). The issue of cross-dressing serves Barry to explore unconventional understandings of masculinity, homosexual love, and gender roles in the Old West. Once again, he questions frontier mythology, vindicating alternative ways of loving "in a world defined by masculine pursuits and western myth" (Campbell 2018: 245). Certainly, it is possible to draw connections between Barry's examination of queer lives in the American West and Annie Proulx's well-known story "Brokeback Mountain". Both stories revise the hyper-masculine and hyper-heterosexual classic version of the American West, a view that has prevailed in the popular imagination even in contemporary times. Even the success of the movie version of "Brokeback Mountain" in 2005 could not avoid that "popular audiences […] simply found it incongruous and therefore uproariously laughable that homosexuality could exist within what was popularly understood to be the classic West —not just as a place but as a culture represented by the iconic cowboy" (Boag 2011: 2). Barry's novel focuses on a time, the mid-19th century, in which, with the scarce presence of women, "the always unstable line dividing the homosocial from the homosexual —that is, dividing non-sexual male bonding activities from sexual contact between men— became even more blurred" ("Paradise of Bachelors"). The frontier provided its pioneers with an opportunity for reinvention, including the transgression of clear-cut gender norms and a fluidity of identity that challenged apparently stable binaries. In fact, Thomas McNulty and John Cole's love affair cannot be regarded strictly as an anomaly in the context of the western expansion. As stated in the article "Paradise of Bachelors", "as traditional notions of 'normal' gender roles were challenged and unsettled, men could display both subtly and openly the erotic connections they

felt for other men". This article even includes an explicit reference to men's dances for their fellow miners: "When the miners at Angel Camp in southern California held dances, half of the men danced the part of women, wearing patches over the crotches of their pants to signal their 'feminine' role". And Barry himself has explained that he did research on this topic because he was powerfully attracted by the idea of men occupying "not only public spaces usually occupied by women, but also domestic spaces" ("An Irish Immigrant").

Barry's exploration of homosexual love in the American West may be regarded as a significant example of the potential of the Western to travel beyond time and space, addressing transnational issues and bringing to light questions and realities that go far beyond the traditional limits of American exceptionalism and frontier mythology. Barry has explained that his decision to write a novel focused on two gay men participating in the conquest of the West is connected to both personal reasons and political issues. Thus, the novel is dedicated to his son, Toby. As Barry himself stated in an interview with Stephen Moss in *The Irish Times* in 2017, his son's coming out as gay inspired him to write this book: "His unhappiness fell away, my unhappiness fell away, and from that moment on we entered into this extraordinary period where he was instructing me in the magic of gay life". But the genesis of the novel extends beyond the personal dimension because it is also related to a political and social question that polarized public opinion in Ireland at the beginning of the present century: the issue of same-sex marriage. Ireland, a country where same-sex sexual activity was not decriminalized until 1993, became twenty-two years later the first country to legalize same-sex marriage by popular vote, emerging as one of the most progressive nations in terms of gay rights. In May 2015, over 60 percent of Irish voters approved the addition of the following seventeen words to their constitution: "Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex". Barry had an active role in the campaign for marriage equality. He wrote an open letter to the readers of *The Irish Times* on May 12, 2015, where, firstly, he based his support of marriage equality on personal reasons, defining himself as "the more than proud father of one shining person who happens to be a member of the LGBT community". In this letter, he also rejected the idea of tolerance being the main reason to allow all citizens in Ireland to marry regardless of their gender. Instead, he justified his support for marriage equality as a way to apologize for "all the hatred, violence, suspicion, patronisation, ignorance, murder, maiming, hunting, intimidation, terrorising, shaming, diminishment, discrimination, destruction, and yes, intolerance, visited upon a section of humanity for God knows how many hundreds of years, if not millennia" ("Marriage Referendum"). Certainly, the influence of contemporary issues that trespass regional, national, and mythical boundaries —such as the Irish same-sex marriage question— on the contents of

Barry's novel reveals the capacity of the Western to resonate with writers and readers from around the world. In fact, *Days without End* is a Western that shows the malleability of frontier mythology and the potential of this genre to promote significant examination of transcultural and global experiences. As Luke Gibbons has stated, "it is no longer possible to sequester questions of class, race and gender within conventional national boundaries, Irish, American or otherwise. If the Atlantic is a frontier, it traverses time as well as space, as if oceans have memories of their own" (2004: 47).

4. Beyond Individualism

In Barry's novel, the love relationship between Thomas McNulty and John Cole challenges not only archetypal masculine models in frontier mythology, but also classical mythical views of the West emphasizing individualism as a dominant cultural feature. Since Frederick Jackson Turner emphasized the role of the frontier as "productive of individualism" (1894: 221) in his well-known "frontier thesis", the connection between the westward expansion, American character, and individualism became a 'cliché' in American popular culture. This 'rugged individualism', to use the term coined by President Herbert Hoover, as a quintessential part of the frontier experience and the basis of American society has been put into question by revisionist approaches to the history of the West that have brought attention to the communal attitudes and behavior of the settlers. In fact, as John Mack Faragher has noted, "many nineteenth-century observers of the 'Old West' saw more evidence of community than did Turner" (1986: 130). In *Days without End,* we may observe Barry's departure from the stereotypical rugged individualism of frontier mythology to focus on the main couple's attraction and loyalty to each other. Thomas McNulty and John Cole do not embody the classical figure of the lonely independent cowboy that is so prominent in many Westerns. As Shai Biderman has stated, "this characteristic of loneliness is not a random feature of the western hero; rather, it's the hero's trademark" (2010: 14). However, early in Barry's novel it is stated that "two is better together" (2017: 4), and the two main characters will remain together and treasure their clandestine love even if they have to cope with several traumatic and violent experiences, such as the Indian Wars or the Civil War. Their time in the army symbolizes another powerful example of the important role of community bonds in this novel. Their volunteering for the army seems to challenge the main ideas defended by Turner about the anti-social condition of the frontier, a place that "produces antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control" (1894: 222). Thomas McNulty and John Cole are willing to

accept control and limits to their personal freedom in exchange for a job that basically means for them a way out from famine. The army works as an institution where individual egos are sacrificed in favor of the well-being of the group, in this case, a country immersed in internal violent feuds. Barry's novel does not present the army as a community based on close cooperation and mutual help, but rather as an organization where discipline is the major rule, as illustrated by the court martial of Trooper Pearl, "though the officers presiding had no real notion of what his offence might have been" (2017: 63). In fact, the main protagonists' voluntary enlistment in military service soon becomes a compulsory engagement for a period of duty in which there is no place for dissenters: "we sure getting poorer and uglier in the army but better than be shot" (2017: 63). After the end of their first term of service in the army, community life is still a reference for John Cole and Thomas McNulty because, after their adoption of Winona —"a daughter not a daughter but who I mother best I can" (2017: 236)— they try to live like a family. Turner himself in his "frontier thesis" had claimed that the family was the basic form of organization during the westward expansion: "complex society is precipitated by the wilderness into a kind of primitive organization based on the family" (1894: 221). However, in Barry's novel, the main protagonists' family is far from being the conventional frontier family and some reviewers have even viewed this family as anachronistic and hard to credit (see, for example, Clark 2016). Certainly, the members of this family disrupt traditional gender roles and ethnic and sexual boundaries. Besides, their lives are interconnected to those of other members of the rural community where they temporarily settle, including an Irish friend and freed slaves. As Neil Campbell has suggested, Barry portrays "an alternative community or *muintir* in Gaelic" (2018: 246, emphasis in original), in which there is a sense of cooperation that clashes with the traditional frontier emphasis on individualism. For Campbell, this alternative community would share certain similarities with the Irish agricultural system of rundale, a traditional form of occupation of land that "set the Irish apart from the self-consciously individualistic and independent western American farmer" (Emmons 2010: 110). This alternative community will represent only an interlude in Thomas and John's hazardous lives because, in the second part of the novel, the army recovers its privileged position as their reference community. The military trial of Thomas, first accused of being a deserter and later of killing an officer to save Winona's life, symbolizes the power of a closed institution to undermine the freedom and individuality of those subject to its discipline. In the end, Thomas's survival depends on the will of other members of the military community, as illustrated by Major Neale's final deposition and his intercession for his life. Interdependence, even in such a hierarchical community as the army, becomes once again a key feature for the

fate of the main characters. The end of the novel also hints that McNulty will choose a future life in a community, recovering the alternative family he had managed to build with John Cole and Winona after his first term in the army. In fact, Barry's most recent novel, *A Thousand Moons*, published in March 2020, is a sequel to *Days without End*, but this time the setting is not the Old West, but Tennessee, where the three main characters settle to live like a family, and Thomas McNulty is replaced in the narrator's role by Winona.

5. Conclusion

Days without End provides the reader with an insightful transnational reading of the American West, complicating traditional constructions of a genre usually identified with a series of national myths and tropes. Barry's revision of archetypal frontier mythology allows him to explore neglected western experiences in which 'otherness', transgression, and divergence play a pivotal role. His novel is concerned with international political and cultural questions and realities, and vindicates a shift toward a post-regional and post-national dimension for a proper representation of frontier stories, downplaying the conventional western rhetoric of conquest, masculinity, individualism, and Manifest Destiny. Barry presents us with a narrative that challenges the Anglo-American mainstream idea of progress and success in the West, subverting stereotypes and addressing problematic intercultural and transnational exchanges. His novel enables a revision of the traditional imagery of the Western, emphasizing the extension of cultural transfers and global flows in western narratives. The book contributes to a cross-cultural dialogue about the multiple meanings of the American West, both with its insightful representation of the Irishness trope in the frontier days and with its use of contemporary Irish national and personal issues to conceive a western narrative. Overall, *Days without End* may be regarded as an illuminating approach to a complex, transcultural, and unconventional American West and as a novel that proves the power of the Western to move beyond its mythic, nationalistic, and formulaic frameworks and to travel across global spaces.[1]

Notes

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SAPPHO IN LYRIC IV: MICHAEL FIELD'S SPATIAL POETICS OF DESIRE AND DEFEAT

SAFO EN LA LÍRICA IV: LA POÉTICA ESPACIAL DEL DESEO Y LA DERROTA DE MICHAEL FIELD

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Abstract

In this article, I offer a close reading of Michael Field's *Long Ago* (1889), specifically of lyric IV, with the primary aim of showing how Katharine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper appropriate the archaic figure of Sappho, dramatise her Ovidian romantic tragedy and, in so doing, reconceptualise the notional category of space in two complementary ways: on the one hand, lyric space becomes a tense locus of contention between form-as-hope and content-as-despair and, on the other, the correlation established between space, nature and gender results in a transgressive topography in which, as I conclude, a new Sappho emerges both as a tragic heroine and as an extremely possessive consciousness laden with sheer Hegelian desire.

Keywords: *Long Ago*, space, Kant, Nietzsche, Hegel.

Resumen

En este artículo proponemos una lectura exhaustiva de *Long Ago* (1889) de Michael Field, centrándonos concretamente en el poema IV, con el objetivo primordial de demostrar cómo Katharine Bradley y su sobrina Edith Cooper se apropian de la figura arcaica de Safo, dramatizan su tragedia romántica ovidiana y, al mismo tiempo, reconceptualizan la categoría nocional de espacio de dos formas complementarias:

por un lado, el espacio lírico deviene en todo un topos de tensión entre la forma-como-esperanza y el contenido-como-desesperanza, y por otro, la correlación que se entabla entre espacio, naturaleza y género culmina en una topografía transgresora en la que, según colegimos, surge una nueva Safo en calidad tanto de heroína trágica como de extremada conciencia cargada de puro deseo hegeliano.

Palabras clave: *Long Ago*, espacio, Kant, Nietzsche, Hegel.

1. Introduction

In the spring of 1889, Katharine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper published a large collection of lyrics inspired by Sappho's original fragments under the shared pen name of Michael Field. Titled *Long Ago* and printed in only a hundred copies, the volume did very well among its small yet eminent readership. Distinguished men of letters such as Robert Browning and George Meredith applauded the collection on account of its mastery of "the uses of Greek learning" and its "faultless flow" (Field 1933: 31). However, both the Michael Fields —as Bradley and Cooper were called in their intellectual circle— and their *Long Ago* went completely unnoticed for more than a century.

It was in the nineties that feminist scholars rediscovered the Fields and brought their ingenious works to the foreground of contemporary Victorian studies —among them, Christine White (1990, 1996a, 1996b), Angela Leighton (1992), Virginia Blain (1996, 1999), and Yopie Prins (1999), to name but a few. In this initial phase of rediscovery, *Long Ago* was commonly approached as a significant instance of lesbian writing based on the legitimising authority of Sappho's original texts. Later, for other critics, the volume ceased to be a specifically lesbian literary piece and developed into a more general and subversive discourse capable of breaking away from any clear-cut sexual dichotomy in favour of a more amorphous, versatile, and "category-defying mixture of sexual imagery" (Thain 2007: 50).

What is clearly remarkable in most of the criticism devoted to *Long Ago* is that the primary interest that this volume has elicited lies chiefly —and, in my view, reductively— in its sexual politics. In their more recent studies, Madden (2008), Ehnenn (2008), Primamore (2009), Evangelista (2009), Olverson (2010), Chaozon Bauer (2018) and Thomas (2007, 2019) follow a fairly similar line of interpretation that lays inordinate stress on Michael Field's physical, sensual, Bacchic, and primarily queer Sapphism. Although I fully subscribe to some of their readings (Cantillo 2018a), I would argue for the fruitful possibility of employing other approaches that cut across the long critical narrative of sexuality so commonly applied to *Long Ago*.

Accordingly, I have previously reinterpreted the volume as a paradigm of intertextual theory, as a mythopoetic reflection on death and desire, and as a lyrical inquiry into the paradox of love (Cantillo 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). In order to continue with this cycle of reinterpretations, the present article will focus not on the over-analysed dimension of Sappho's lesbian desire in *Long Ago*, but on her romantic obsession with a handsome fisherman named Phaon. Although commonly overlooked, this particular facet of the Michaelian Sappho is hugely significant and worthy of critical attention. In fact, in one of the earliest readings of the volume, Lillian Faderman goes so far as to claim that it "gives little hint of any consciousness about the possibility of sexual expression between women; the emphasis in these poems, in fact, is on the heterosexual Phaon myth" (1981: 210). I would not say that there is *little* presence of homoeroticism in *Long Ago*, for many of its poems indeed explore Sappho's same-sex desire "as a genuine form of creativity and love" (Cantillo 2018a: 207). However, I do concur with Faderman's contention that *Long Ago* lays special stress on the heteroerotic myth of unrequited love between Sappho and Phaon.

As Page DuBois states in her most recent study on Sappho, the representation of her love tragedy is "the one bequeathed to posterity, for many centuries the definitive, forlorn, love-struck, and suicidal poet who has given up the love of women for an unrequited passion for a young man" (2015: 108). Particularly responsible for the posterity of this portrayal is Ovid's collection *Epistulae Herodium*, in which the Roman poet provides one of the earliest examples of literary transvestism in Western literature by adopting Sappho's miserable voice and by writing as such an elegiac letter to her beloved Phaon to reproach him for his callous demeanour and to share her suicidal feelings. Likewise, in their *Long Ago*, Bradley and Cooper act as literary transvestites "writing as a man writing as Sappho" (Prins 1999: 74). From this ambivalent position, the Fields tackle the Phaon myth in a dramatic revision that places Sappho in the middle of a tragic agon between hope and despair, desire and death, by embodying a multiplicity of voices, male and female, old and new, homosexual and heterosexual, seeking to reproduce the anxieties of late-Victorian poets.

In this article, my aim is to elucidate how such a revision transcends sentimentalism and rethinks the notional category of space from a twofold perspective: the Michaelian reworking of the Phaon myth shows, on the one hand, how poetic space can become an unstable locus of contention between form-as-hope and content-as-despair and, on the other, how space, nature, gender, and desire are all intermeshed and redefined in a lyrical, transgressive topography. What is perhaps most striking, as I seek to prove here, is how such a double articulation of space takes place and shape in a complex lyric identified under the Roman number IV. The poem reads in full as follows:

IV

WHERE with their boats the fishers land
Grew golden pulse along the sand;
It tangled Phaon's feet —away
He spurned the trails, and would not stay;
Its stems and yellow flowers in vain
Withheld him: can my arms detain
The fugitive? If that might be,
If I could win him from the sea,
Then subtly I would draw him down
'Mid the bright vetches; in a crown
My art should teach him to entwine
Their thievish rings, and keep him mine. (ll. 1-12)

2. The Form and Content of Desire

Poem IV unfolds entirely in a single stanza and aligns its twelve lines in a harmonious symphony of six couplets, following an iambic tetrameter rhyme scheme that makes full sense in a poem titled "IV". The effect of formal unity is not just flagrantly transparent and well accomplished, but also highly meaningful in that it enters into stark opposition to the semantic level of the poem, bringing about a tacit debate on what seems to be the hackneyed dichotomy between form and content. The poem itself becomes the locus of convergence —the scenario of a *coincidentia oppositorum*— where such a debate develops in an attempt to find a possible resolution.

The formal junction of poem IV comes as a surprise after a sequence of two poems (II and III) in which Sappho introduces the conventional tragedy of her unrequited love for the inaccessible and disdainful Phaon. This tragic convention condemns and leaves the Lesbian lyrist facing a disjunctive reality where lover and beloved remain at a remove from one another. However, the compact body making up poem IV appears to create an unexpected sense of union that neither the previous co-texts nor its own text —on its semantic level— back up. Autonomous and hence Kantian, the form of poem IV trespasses the old boundaries of lexical or content-determined meaning: it contravenes the strictly factual by suggesting the ideal or even the sublime. The poem can, indeed, be perceived "as a totality consisting of a plurality of parts" (Thorpe 2015: 64), and yet this perception fails to produce an immediate idea of the semantic complexity intrinsic to the whole poem.

The formal ideal of unity operates at first glance as a tenuous variant of the Kantian idealism of form insofar as it asserts some degree of independence from the

Hegelian crudity of historicism or contentualism. Here I adhere to the well-known "controversy between Kant and Hegel" in the field of aesthetic theory (Adorno 1997: 355), siding with the Enlightenment thinker's notion of *freie Schönheit* as posited in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790). Under this radical idea, Kant separates the aesthetic dimension of form from "any content, whether rational or sensible", understanding that "if sensible content were to play any part, then the object would not be beautiful but only agreeable; if a concept were involved, then the beautiful would be too easily convertible with the rational" (Caygill 2000: 92). I would not go so far as to say that poem IV constitutes a paradigmatic illustration of Kant's radical aesthetic formalism, for its form does seem to possess a clear conceptual value of unity. What I would draw attention to instead is the degree, weak though it may be, of semantic independence that the form of the poem claims from its own content which, far from celebrating the ideal of unity, concentrates on the frustration that results from the crude reality of erotic deprivation.

The content of lyric IV corresponds roughly to the unhappy truth of disjunction, disdain, and desolation that the Sapphic lover has to bear in the face of her beloved's physical and emotional distance. This tragic experience does not take the shape of dismembered, fragmented or fractured lines, as one would expect. The form of the poem is radically non-mimetic and hence autonomous: it does not limit itself to mirroring the meanings of Sappho's adverse facticity. The interplay between form and content involves no sense of semantic dependence: each polarity has its own potency of meaning. The form points towards the ideal, the possible, or the oneiric. The content is grounded on the real, the crude, and the elegiac. As a result, what Terry Eagleton terms "the mimetic theory of form, for which the form somehow imitates the content it expresses" (2007: 65), finds no validity in this case: the correlation between form and content is overturned in favour of a formal composition connoting an ideal sense of romantic unity which does not tally in the slightest with the disjunctive despondency of the content.

The polarisation between form and content, tantamount in poem IV to a duality between formal union and contentual disunion, resonates with some aspects of Nietzsche's metaphysical thought, which the Fields themselves read, admired, and defended to the extent that, as Vadillo points out, they were among the earliest generation of British intellectuals who "recognised Nietzsche's importance for modernity" (2015: 204). In connection with poem IV, what is most evocative of the Prussian thinker is his dialectical interplay between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, which seems to operate behind lyric IV by conforming in a relative manner to the semantic values of the form/content binary. The Apollonian

accounts for the order, symmetry, and unity that give the poem its deceitful morphology: it works as the force that Nietzsche calls *der Scheinende*. This ambivalent epithet, associated in German with the words *brilliance* and *appearance*, designates both Apollo's luminosity and his illusive nature. In setting the cosmos alight, the god "wraps man in the veil of Maya and thus protects him from the harsh realities of his altogether frightening and pitiful existence" (Megill 1987: 39). In this light, the form of poem IV is nothing but an Apollonian veil or an illusion: it gives an impression of unity and harmony that the content belies.

Additionally, the form appears to serve a protective or even therapeutic function: it conceals the crude facticity of lovelessness, projects the texture of a promising fullness, and perhaps protects the integrity of the erotic subject against fatal despair, defeatism, and even death. The form opposes and suspends the content, anticipating a happy ending to the Sapphic romance, consummating the ideal of union, and opening up a possible future for desire. Sappho's desire is not oppressed by the strictures of the real content. Although still unfulfilled, her desire remains vitally hopeful in view of the ideal possibility or the transcendence that the form of poem IV enacts. Sappho occupies, as it were, a midway position between form and content or, in other words, between the possibility of conquering her beloved and the raw reality of her dejection. She thus embodies both the Apollonian and the Dionysian —unity and dismemberment.

While the Apollonian corresponds, as explained above, to the structured form of poem IV, it is the Dionysian that seems to undergird the content inasmuch as it is understood as the "realm of formlessness and dissolution" (Paglia 1990: 579). Although Nietzsche links Dionysus mainly with the notion of a primordial oneness or a "unified source of all being" (Diethe 2007: 30), the Greek god also acts as a figure of violent disunion: according to a Cretan myth of his birth, he was torn to pieces by the Titans and then resurrected by his father Zeus. This experience of dismemberment and disjunction is the mythic and metaphoric backdrop against which the Apollonian appearance of plenitude emerges with all its delusive splendour. Beneath the formal surface, Sappho is dismembered, formless, and fragmented: she is but a Dionysian limb. Without her beloved, she has no sense of ontological unity —as if her being were yet to be born, to form itself wholly, and to engender a totality or oneness that can only be simulated as a formal, visual artifice.

However, beyond the difference between form and content, the text of poem IV presents both poles as an *existentially* inseparable structure. I use this adverb in line with Terry Eagleton, who posits the idea of the inseparability between form and content "as far as our actual experience of the poem goes" (2007: 65). In lyric IV, this notion of inseparability takes on a double meaning, since the poem not only

unifies the traditionally contentious binary of form and content, but also the conceptual opposition between the possible and the factual or the ideal and the real, thereby allowing for a systemic unity of opposites —or a double-layered *coincidentia oppositorum*. Otherwise put, the poem functions as a complex semantic unity or, more precisely, as a conceptual space in which meaning is polemical, divisive, and yet inclusive of its own antimonies. The formal semantics of union clashes directly with the content-based semantics of disunion, but both cooperate within a major system of meaning that is paradoxically complete: it merges its unitive formalism and its schismatic historicism into a self-contradictory poem that accommodates the factual, the crude or the dismembered within the Apollonian structure of the ideal. The first two lines of the poem illustrate this paradox: "WHERE with their boats the fishers land/ Grew golden pulse along the sand;/ It tangled Phaon's feet —away/ He spurned the trails, and would not stay". Here words, rhymes and couplets cooperate to create a pure sense of formal cohesion, and yet this cooperation is paradoxically created to express the ominous fact that Phaon spurns Sappho and refuses to stay.

Poem IV forms a totality in itself or, in Nietzsche's terms, a brotherhood of contraries: it asserts union at a formal level only to reject or negate it at the level of its content. A perfect symbiosis arises between the opposition between ideal union and real disunion, both of which are made textually co-present. What stems from this co-presence is a plenitude of meaning, experience, and even truth. Sappho is not merely portrayed as a disdained, mournful, passive, and suicidal lover. She verbally exposes her fragmented and vulnerable self, but simultaneously she manages to overcome this vulnerability by projecting her ideal image of romance as a formal simulation of union. A counter-dualistic dynamic takes place here: "the antithetical inheres within, and is partly produced by, what it opposes" (Dollimore 1991: 33). Here I make use of Jonathan Dollimore's timeless idea of *perverse dynamic*, for it seems to apply neatly to Sappho's dual subjective experience, which integrates a broken self and a fulfilled futural self-alterity as though they were the two sides of the same coin. Sappho's factual brokenness concurs with her ultimate aspiration of romantic fullness. At the same time as pouring out her feelings of alienation, Sappho enacts her ideal of union through the formal space of the poem. The experiences of disunion and union run in parallel, one opposing and complementing the other, and both shaping a complex ontological picture of Sappho as an erotic subject: she is at once factually broken and ideally complete. Her actual brokenness does not exclude the possibility of an amatory plenitude. In fact, both experiences constitute Sappho's liminal reality, which conciliates the real and the possible within the intricate poetic space of a single lyric.

3. The Shore and the Conditional Space of Violent Transcendence

Equally liminal, contentious, and ambivalent is the Sapphic topography delineated in the first two lines of poem IV: "WHERE with their boats the fishers land/ Grew golden pulse along the sand". The space evoked here corresponds to the shore, the littoral, the border, and the point of convergence between land and sea, which proves to be more than a mere locative reference. In an illuminating study of littoral poetry, René Dietrich comes to an important conclusion: the shore "as any other boundary region, [...] is not only a place where land and sea meet, but also centre and margin, inside and outside, self and other, and in which those very concepts shift, switch, dissolve, and clash" (2007: 450). This view applies readily to Sappho's littoral topography, for it is on the shore that her most loving-despairing self encounters her cruel beloved, interrupting their previous separation momentarily, and even clashing frontally in a belligerent competition, as I shall explain later.

The shore is, indeed, the space of mediation where Sappho appears to reach some degree of contact with her beloved Phaon. Personified as Sappho, nature acts in her place as a mediator, trying to ensnare the elusive beloved with the golden pulse which "tangled Phaon's feet —away" (l. 3). The ensnaring affects the poem syntactically: the first two lines quoted above form a mimetic hyperbaton that imitates the effortful attempt to seize hold of Phaon. The whole scene constitutes an effective and dramatic metaphor that pictures Sappho as a serpentine plant, a creeper, or even a snake: she creeps along the sand, reaches down to the shore, and strives to entrap "Phaon's feet" (l. 3). Inevitably, this dramatic trope conjures up the archetypal image of the serpent-woman, reminiscent of Medusa, Lilith, Eve, Pandora, Medea, Salome or Melusina, who are usually portrayed as "agents of fascination, allegories of evil and incarnations of deception, destruction and decay" (Baumbach 2015: 114). These agents have the existential purpose of enticing, ensnaring, enslaving, and emasculating men. In poems II and III, Sappho seems to pursue such a purpose with overt determination: she desires to take and break her beloved's heart, drain him, inhabit him, and even consume him to assuage her greed. Now, in poem IV, the lyric subject re-articulates her fantasy of erotic possession/extermination through the use of specific floral similes that lay bare the trace of the mythic woman-snake, whose sensual sinuosity resembles the movements of a creeping, entwining, and tangling Sappho-as-golden-pulse in her strenuous effort to possess her beloved. In this sense, John Collier's painting *Lilith* (1892) unavoidably comes to mind here, since it serves as an eloquent *fin-de-siècle* illustration of the archetypal correspondence between woman and serpent: the Jewish female demon is represented as an overtly sexual icon, as an incarnate

temptation, amidst the primitive wilderness, fully in the nude, in a plain attitude of pleasure and gratification, with her face immersed in a fulfilled reverie, her reddish hair loosened, and her white body embraced by a dark snake. By analogy, I automatically imagine Sappho exhibiting Lilith's attitude, curving her way along the shore, alluring her beloved, and venturing to enfold him like the serpent that her Jewish ancestor bears.

Nevertheless, the effort to enfold Phaon falls through altogether: he "spurned the trails, and would not stay" (l. 4). His disdain becomes clearly explicit for the first time in *Long Ago*: he rejects Sappho's advances with contempt and contumacy. The use of the habitual past —"would not stay"— indicates that it was perhaps many a time that Sappho attempted to capture Phaon only to receive his disdain. The solidarity of nature, which seems to act under the sway of Sappho's desire by means of a pathetic fallacy, proves completely fruitless: the "stems and yellow flowers in vain/ Withheld him" (l. 5). In this manner, the mediatory function of the pathetic fallacy, which serves to break down the eco-ontological barriers between humanity and non-humanity, loses its sense and purpose: the possibility of interceding between lover and beloved seems to vanish. This failure, however, is geographically determined: the shore, where Sappho and Phaon meet, is no place of permanence, stability, or promise. Dietrich puts it concisely: "the shore is an inherently instable place, never fixed and always in flux, constantly in the process of being made, un-made, and re-made" (2007: 450). Nothing stays on the shore —not even the long-awaited beloved. Its fluidity, fugacity and flux transform it not only into a paradigm of perpetual liminality, but also into a capricious space where mediation, like the tireless waves, is just a transient event, an ephemeral occurrence, or even a delusion.

Such ephemerality manifests itself on a temporal level, causing the past and the present to follow one another at a very short distance and with an unfamiliar sense of extreme proximity. In the initial representation of nature, the principal verbs and their adjuncts are all inflected in the past tense, setting the scene in a vaguely remote space-time. Immediately afterwards, the present tense fast-forwards the action and introduces a lyrical I that identifies at a profound level with the facts and affections of nature. The succession from one field to the other —from the natural to the personal or autobiographical— is instantaneous and explicitly mediated by a colon that appears at the very centre of the poem. This punctuation mark operates exactly as a syntactic device: it arranges —τάξις— and joins the natural and the personal together —σύν— becoming, as it were, the graph of mediation, the visual threshold of two space-times, and the centre of a twofold, specular mode of writing in which different yet complementary spheres of experience are inter-written, inter-related, and thus integrated into a narrow dialogue between one another not

only at a conceptual or semantic level, but also at the level of form itself, of writing itself, of punctuation itself.

In the personal segment of the poem, which opens up in the wake of the central colon, the possibility of romantic union re-emerges with a rhetorical question: "can my arms detain/ The fugitive?" (ll. 6-7). This self-inquiry, whose actual answer matters little, stands in a very strategic position between the negative facticity of the preceding lines and the revitalising transcendence of the subsequent ones. The question brackets off the previous experiences of failure and re-opens the possibility of erotic gratification, thereby liberating the Sapphic subject from her irremediable past and projecting her into the hopeful future. In other words, by means of the rhetorical question, the lyric I manages to arbitrate between the realms of the real and the possible so as to lighten the weight of Sappho's vain efforts and reclaim the space of transcendence where her aspirations remain valid. This transcendental or liberating space is dramatically claimed in poem IV by an image of Sappho stretching her arms. The previous floral imagery —in the natural segment— and Sappho's actual body intermesh now and create a simile that reinforces the motif of solidarity between humanity and nature with her arms replacing the figurative "stems and yellow flowers" (l. 5). It is now her literal arms that seek to "detain" (l. 5) the fugitive beloved, to keep her erotic quest active, and ultimately to give herself a modicum of hope.

The rhetorical question and the progressive gesture of Sappho's arms are followed by a series of conditional clauses that enact a scenario of erotic hope. Here the conditional mood permits the desiring subject to resist the oppression of her factuality and protract her abiding desire by envisioning the ideal circumstances in which her desire touches ground —far from the unsteady shore— in the conquered presence of the erotic object. Functioning perhaps as tentative responses to the central rhetorical question, the conditional sentences disclose the richness and delicate brutality of Sappho's erotic consciousness. The opening protasis —"If that might be" (l. 7)— makes use of a demonstrative pronoun that appears to work ambivalently as an anaphora and cataphora at once: while it clearly refers to the content of the preceding question, it also seems to anticipate the sense of the subsequent protasis, thus accumulating a large density of (other possible) meanings. In a way, and in spite of its inherent semantic occasionality, it becomes an emphatic and condensed expression of the plenitude of Sappho's desire. Indeed, if highlighted and assertively isolated, the demonstrative form acquires a rhetorical and semantic potency that enables it to comprehend or encapsulate the totality and intensity of what Sappho would presumably do were her quest successful in the end. Implicit in her "that" is the virtual certainty that she would detain, entrap, break and possess her loved one with her all too vicious desire.

The second protasis —"If I could win him from the sea" (l. 8)— turns the Sapphic erotic quest into a belligerent competition: Sappho becomes a contestant; the sea, her rival, and Phaon, the final trophy. In this sport-like erotic economy, the lover adopts a certain role of aggressor, a candid attitude of conquest, and hence a virile deportment —if judged from an orthodox gender ideology. In contrast, the beloved loses his subjective transcendence altogether, falls prey to sheer objectification, and enters into the artificial categories conventionally ascribed to femininity. It is true that these gender reversals pervade most of *Long Ago*, but what does make a significant difference in poem IV is the representation of a transgressive topography of desire in which such reversals come into play. Three conceptual spaces arise. The terra firma, on the one hand, presents itself as the territory where Sappho holds sway and wishes to detain her beloved: it is thus a space of control and detention. On the other hand, the sea seems to represent Phaon's domain, where errancy and freedom keep him away from the mainland —and, by extension, from Sappho. The third space, the shore, unites and separates the previous two: as I have explained above, it serves as an intermediary between land and sea, yet the mediation it makes possible comes down to nothing but a momentary occasion. It is, however, in the brief course of this occasion that Sappho initiates her competition, establishes her own battlefield, mounts her serpentine attacks, stretches out her arms in the form of "stems and yellow flowers" (l. 5), and does her uttermost to "win [her beloved] from the sea" (l. 8). In this fashion, the littoral changes not into a site of peaceful confluence, but into an erotic space of competition and belligerence where the Fieldean lover seeks the ultimate conquest.

In the event of the final conquest, the first apodosis avows: "Then subtly I would draw him down/ 'Mid the bright vetches" (ll. 9-10). The motif of ensnarement repeats itself once again with the recurrent floral imagery. This time Sappho renders more explicit her eagerness to wrap herself around Phaon and enfold him wholly underneath her "bright vetches" (l. 10), which amount to her arms, her sinuous torso, or her entire body. It seems quite clear that the body/nature correlation, formerly evocative of the serpent-woman figure, endows Sappho's carnality and eroticism with some subtle sense of wildness or natural violence that accounts for her competitive disposition and her desire to subdue her beloved —to "draw him down" (l. 9).

Nonetheless, such violence clashes with the adverb "subtly" (l. 9) that qualifies the coveted action of subjection. Some paradoxical complexity affects this discordance. Sappho's erotic desire is at least two-sided: on the surface, it appears subtle, tepid, flowery, aesthetic, driven by despair, and vehement at the most, but just a few insights into it reveal its deep undercurrents of greed, detention,

and subjugation. It is this tacit violence that becomes all the more apparent in the second apodosis, wherein Sappho claims: "in a crown/ My art should teach him to entwine/ Their thievish rings, and keep him mine" (ll. 10-12). In the final verb phrase of these lines, no subtlety is intended. Sappho's desire aspires to the absolute possession of her beloved and the total union with him —with no half measures.

The symbol she employs for such a union is the crown, which also figures in the first poem of *Long Ago* in the form of garlands plaited and shared between maidens. On this occasion, the crown seems to typify the radical entwinement that Sappho pursues as a "thievish" lover (l. 12). The ideal of entwinement or erotic fusion that Sappho covets recalls the Ovidian myth of Hermaphroditus: in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, "the youth Hermaphroditus bathed in a fountain at Salmacis. A nymph fell in love with him, but he rejected her. The nymph (sometimes called Salmacis) wrapped herself around him like a serpent, praying that she might never be parted from him. Her prayers were answered as their two bodies became one" (Roman and Roman 2010: 220). The analogy with Sappho is self-evident: both Salmacis and Sappho profess an all-consuming love, both manifest serpentine proclivities towards their beloveds, and both pray for an erotic union that entraps, devours, and appropriates the loved other into their very physical selves. From this perspective of desire as extreme fusion and appropriation, the kind of erotic "art" (l. 11) that Sappho wishes to teach Phaon consists in robbing him of his autonomy, dominating him altogether, and plaiting him into her "crown" (l. 10). If such is her idea of art, then hers is an aesthetics of erotic violence, assault, and even annihilation. In Sappho's approach to love, no room is left either for a subtle romantic epistemology —for the possibility of discovering and knowing the loved other— or for a kind, sweet form of intersubjectivity. The only ideology at work is, *au fond*, a radical *ars amatoria* of appropriation.

Undoubtedly, Hegel can be invoked here. The Fields "absorbed a great deal, from the 1890s onwards, from the German philosophers" (Thain 2007: 36). As discussed above, not only did Bradley and Cooper read and adopt Nietzschean ideas: they were also ardent Hegelians, so much so that, in a revealing letter to American art critic Bernard Berenson, Edith Cooper declares: "Hegel's Aesthetic belongs to me, though Michael [Katharine] rightfully claimed it, as all mine is his" (in Thain and Vadillo 2009: 323). This possessive subscription to Hegelianism becomes fairly patent in how the Fields portray and dramatise Sappho's desire in lyric IV. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the German philosopher understands desire —*die Begierde*— as "our active will to compel objects to conform to our conceptions or wishes" or, in its crudest manifestation, as an egoistic drive "to annul the other and absolutize itself" (Magee 2010: 69). As shown above, in poem IV Sappho

manifests such an active will by displaying a powerful, possessive and even emasculating psychology of desire. If successful, Sappho's desire would result in a destructive paradox. In loving and possessing Phaon, she would annul him altogether.

However, Sappho's Hegelian desire is articulated in the conditional mood. While this mood enables her to maintain her erotic aspirations and persevere in her romantic quest, the reality she faces is rather sterile and tragic. Phaon spurns her and remains a fugitive from her conditional scenarios. His presence on the shore is but an ephemeral occasion. As a result, Sappho inhabits an existential tension, a dramatic agon or a complex liminal space between her barren reality and her possessive consciousness —between a fragile hope for extreme romantic fulfilment and a crude feeling of hopelessness.

4. Conclusion

In the light of Michael Field's *Long Ago*, space becomes resignified in figurative and in more literal ways. Methodologically, I have opened a critical space in which the Fields are no longer seen simply as queer voices, but as genuine intellectuals whose poems can enter into fruitful dialogues with the philosophers they admired and defended. Further, within the critical space I have created, the Fields can be imagined emulating Ovid's practice of literary transvestism, rewriting the elegiac missive that Sappho addresses to her beloved boatman, and articulating a highly ambiguous discourse of heteroeroticism in which the Sapphic lover suffers and dreams passionately at once.

Such a suggestive sense of ambiguity is structural and central to the dynamics of lyric IV. In it the Fields open an experimental poetic space of multiple dualisms. Form and content are at odds. Kant and Hegel are brought to account for different experiences of formal fantasy and content-based reality. The Apollonian imposes a fictional or illusive order, symmetry, and unity upon the formless, dismembered, and Dionysian facts that Sappho confronts. Her tragic agon is poised between a conditional dream of radical erotic possession and an all too actual state of despair. However, lyric IV compresses all these dualities into a single, synthetic, and densely meaningful poetic space where Sappho's existential tragedy is genuinely displayed with all its inherent contradictions.

In like manner, lyric IV can be viewed as a topographical poem in which each spatial element plays a significant tropological part: each space is a suggestive and dramatic trope. Nature becomes personified as Sappho's pathetic ally in her attempt to seize hold of Phaon. The shore is represented initially as a tense space

of momentary mediation and limited hope, and then as a battleground of voracious yet impossible desire. The sea turns into Sappho's nemesis and Phaon's dominion of freedom, errancy, and safety. The mainland, in contrast, can be pictured as Sappho's tragic stage of lovelessness.

In limning such a dynamic topography, the Fields depict both nature and their Greek heroine not in keeping with orthodox gender codes, but in a radical and transgressive way that renders the old feminine/masculine binary utterly invalid. While the new Phaon is now tacitly described as an objectified, elusive, and coy pseudo-subject, the new Sappho becomes a sublime, dominant, and relatively violent consciousness laden with sheer Hegelian desire. As I aim to show in my upcoming research projects, this composite treatment of gender, nature, space, and desire is not merely an original aspect of *Long Ago*, but a pervasive leitmotif in the vast Michaelian corpus of poetry and drama.

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REWRITING THE NIGERIAN NATION AND REIMAGINING THE LESBIAN NIGERIAN WOMAN IN CHINELO OKPARANTA'S *UNDER THE UDALA TREES* (2015)

REESCRIBIENDO LA NACIÓN NIGERIANA Y REIMAGINANDO LA MUJER NIGERIANA LESBIANA EN LA OBRA DE CHINELO OKPARANTA *UNDER THE UDALA TREES* (2015)

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Abstract

This paper presents a revised paradigm of the postcolonial Nigerian nation through the exploration of the figure of the black lesbian in Nigeria. I argue that the reconceptualisation of Nigerian nationhood is enabled through the revision by Chinelo Okparanta in her debut novel *Under the Udala Trees* (2015) of subaltern and abject Nigerian womanhood carried out from a homoerotic or Afroqueer standpoint. The exploration of lesbian Nigerian woman(hood) from a literary stance clearly represents a valuable and subversive way of re-writing, re-constructing and re-conceptualising the postcolonial Nigerian nation so that othered subjectivities can also become part of the nation-building project. Okparanta, considered an Afrosporic and transcultural writer, interpellates the Nigerian nation in order to present us with post-abyssal configurations that transcend reductive and monolithic discourses. Drawing on the work of a wide array of scholars belonging to Postcolonial, Gender and Queer Studies —such as Neville Hoad, Ifi Amadiume, Lindsey Green-Simms, and Lee Edelman— I demonstrate how Okparanta's novel can work as an example of resistance against hegemonic, heteronormative and Eurocentric representations of Africa.

Keywords: Lesbian Nigerian woman(hood), Chinelo Okparanta, same-sex desire, postcolonial nation, Afroqueerness.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como propósito presentar un nuevo paradigma de la nación postcolonial nigeriana a través de la exploración de la figura de la mujer negra y lesbiana en Nigeria. Discutiré cómo la reconceptualización de la condición de nación de Nigeria se hace posible a través de la revisión que la autora Chinelo Okparanta hace de la feminidad nigeriana (subalterna y abyecta en este caso) desde una perspectiva homoerótica o afroqueer en su novela *Under the Udala Trees* (2015). La exploración de la mujer nigeriana y lesbiana desde una perspectiva literaria claramente propone una forma valiosa y subversiva de reescribir, reconstruir y reconceptualizar la nación nigeriana (postcolonial), con el propósito de que otras subjetividades instaladas en la otredad puedan formar parte del proyecto de construcción de la nación. Okparanta, considerada escritora afrodiaspórica y transcultural, interpela a la nación nigeriana para así mostrar configuraciones post-abismales de la misma que trascienden discursos reduccionistas y monolíticos. Haciendo uso de los planteamientos propuestos por intelectuales pertenecientes al campo de los Estudios Postcoloniales, de Género o Estudios Queer como Neville Hoad, Ifi Amadiume, Lindsey Green-Simms o Lee Edelman, pretendo demostrar que la novela de Okparanta puede funcionar como práctica de resistencia contra representaciones hegemónicas, heteronormativas y eurocéntricas del continente africano.

Palabras clave: Mujer lesbiana nigeriana, Chinelo Okparanta, deseo homosexual, nación postcolonial, identidad afroqueer.

1. Introduction

The African-American artist Roy DeCarava (1919-2009), well-known for his black-and-white photographic portraits of black America in post-war Harlem, helped to explore and construct a very particular African-American identity through his works depicting Harlem inner city. "Sun and Shade" (1952), one of his most iconic pictures, exhibits two black kids playing in a common space separated by dark and light, each of them inhabiting different halves. The symbolism of DeCarava's photograph is reflected in what this article tries to address, namely the coming together of somehow opposing realities in the same physical locus, inhabited by black subjectivities that remain in common yet well-differentiated areas. In this article, I address same-sex attraction in post-war Nigeria as experienced by a number of homosexual female fictional characters who remain part of a society which still does not acknowledge or accept queerness as an undeniable dimension of the Nigerian nation. The exploration of lesbian Nigerian woman(hood) from a literary stance offers a valuable and subversive way of re-

writing, re-constructing and re-conceptualising the Nigerian post-nation so that othered subjectivities can also be recognised as part of the nation-building project. Though framed within a matrix of hatred, intolerance and persecution, lesbianism can be regarded as a form of resistance against colonial and heteropatriarchal structures that still permeate the modern African nation, as illustrated in the debut novel *Under the Udala Trees* (2015), written by the US-based Nigerian author Chinelo Okparanta.

Nowadays, homosexuality is criminalised in 29 out of the 54 countries in Africa. For instance, Botswana is the most recent country to repeal (in 2019) laws that had legally legitimised criminalisation and violence against same-sex relations, according to Amnesty International.[1] Kenyan researcher Lyn Ossome aptly underlines that the change towards the democratisation of African states "creat[ed] visibility around queer activism and class" (2013: 32). However, this was also a contradictory period since there were, at the same time, several "wave[s] of competing fundamentalist and moralistic claims" (2013: 32). These democratising processes along with the current surfacing of gay and lesbian human rights have exposed the difficulties in theorising about these identities as they are often regarded as "a relic of the colonial past that must be transcended" or even as "a sign of the transnational future that must be feared" (Hoad in Ossome 2013: 33). Ossome also states that current debates about the de-criminalisation of same-sex and consensual relations are easily manipulated by "those hegemonic groups in society that have real access to resources and power", which is why in a myriad of present-day African countries "sexual identity is sacrificed at the altar of conservative religious or ethnic identities that are being positively manipulated for political and economic mileage" (2013: 44). Furthermore, Western religious and colonial beliefs support a very specific political and sexual agenda in which criminalising laws are passed as a result of the mythic conception that homosexuality and transsexuality are both un-African and un-Biblical imported realities from colonial times. In this novel, Okparanta delves into lesbianism as expressed during and after the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (1967-1970) in an effort to debunk these mythic conceptions. Before analysing the novel, I examine the notions of gender and sex in pre-colonial Nigeria to explore the impact (post-)colonialism has had in the (re-)conceptualisation of these two categories.

2. Same-Sex Practices in Pre-Colonial Africa

Gender in pre-colonial Africa was a flexible, dynamic system, never exclusively conditioned by biological sex, as Nigerian scholar Ifi Amadiume demonstrated in her path-breaking volume *Male Daughters and Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987). In this ethnographic study of the Igbo women

belonging to the town of Nnobi, Amadiume examined the presence of what we have come to know as "male daughters", or women who had "the status of a son and [were] able to inherit [their] father's property" due to the absence of closer male members of the lineage (2015: 32). This flexible gender system "affected women's access to economic resources and positions of authority and power through the institutions of 'male daughters' and 'female husbands'" resulting in role and status ambiguity (2015: 51). Indeed, women-to-women marriage (or "female husbandry") was a fairly common practice carried out as a means or strategy for women to free themselves from "domestic service" and thus achieve power and success (2015: 70).[2] The post-1900 period saw the invasion of the Igbo hinterlands by the British, which was followed by the violent suppression of indigenous institutions, the imposition of Christianity and Western education, and the introduction of a new economy and local government administration through the warrant chief system. Western worldviews and belief systems entailed strong sex and class differentiation supported by rigid gender constructions; a woman was always female regardless of her social achievements or status (2015: 119).

As a result, a male-dominated and theocratic system was imposed on the colonies under British control. Moreover, Victorian notions of womanhood "idealized the virtuous and frail-minded female incapable of mastering 'masculine' subjects like science, politics and business" (Amadiume 2015: 136). This made feasible the total exclusion of women from the political and administrative spheres, forcing them into the role of "second fiddle". Eurocentric binary thinking was enforced as a form of domination that privileged Western conceptions —which included a heteropatriarchal and binary understanding of sexual desire and gender— and rejected African experience, characterised by flexibility in the understanding of gender and sexual orientation.

In explaining the way homosexuality was signified and experienced in pre-colonial Africa, researcher Chantal Zabus states that there already existed specific expressions to designate homosexuality in this continent before the colonial period, but that these practices "d[id] not always designate homosexuality as it is understood and experienced in the Western world" (2013: 16). Zabus provides an example of same-sex relationships between men in many Melanesian ethnic groups as a rite of passage and not as a form of homosexual desire as theorised by the West.

> An older man inseminating a young man or smearing the latter's body with ejaculate is an age-structured, intergenerational, possibly 'homosocial', form of sexuality, which allows a young man to access the world of adult —heterosexual— masculinity. If, in Western societies, homosexuality is divorced from reproduction, this is not the case by far in pre-colonial or post-colonial African societies. In pre-colonial Africa, young boys who had relationships with older men almost always married a woman later in life and had children. (2013: 26)

Zabus also mentions the "male-male non-penetrative" practice of "boy-wifery" and "mine marriages" in regions in South Africa (2013: 37-39). This is not to say that homosexuality, conceived as a sexual and/or romantic relationship between two same-sex partners, did not occur in pre-colonial Africa. Authors like Ifi Amadiume (2015), Chantal Zabus (2013), Kenneth Chukwuemeka Nwoko (2012), or Charles Ngwena (2018), among others, demonstrate how pre-colonial discursive theorisations of man, woman, husband, wife, heterosexual and homosexual in Africa deviated from the European ontological resignifications of these entities.

3. Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Nigerian Fiction

I will centre my analysis on the ways queerness is expressed in twenty-first century Nigerian fiction and how queer Nigerians thrive in a hostile environment still reluctant to accept alternative gender and sexual manifestations. Indeed, Nigerians who dare to come out inevitably experience prejudice, criminalisation, (self-) censorship, physical and mental abuse, exile or even murder. Non-conforming gender and sexual identities are punished in most African countries by imprisonment (up to fourteen years), corrective (gang) rape, lynching, flagellation, ostracism, murder or even the death penalty (in the northern provinces of Nigeria, which are under Islamic Shari'a law). According to Edward Ou Jin Lee, "[c]olonial laws that criminalized sexual and gender transgressions (i.e. sodomy, 'eunuchs', vagrancy, etc.) operated as a key tool of white/Western empire building to contain and control the colonized" (2018: 65). He further argues that "[t]he policing, surveillance, and erasure of Indigenous sexualities and genders, as interpreted by colonial powers, served as key mechanisms through which many Indigenous societies were reorganised", concluding that "[t]he boundaries of heterocisnormative intimacies demarcated which sexualized and gendered behaviours and colonized bodies would be consigned to life and death [which] consolidated the colonial relation of the civilized (heterosexual/cissexual) white/ Western subject versus the uncivilized perverse Other" (2018: 65). Such a dual notion of civilised as implying heterocisnormativity and savage as identified with Other in any of its understandings was central to the nation-building project that Western metropolises imposed on the different countries in the Global South (see Hoad 2006).

In Nigeria, the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) —commonly called the "jail the gays" Bill— was passed and enforced in 2014 by the then-president Goodluck Jonathan. This bill was created to resist moral corruption by prohibiting "deviant unions" —typified as sodomy, abomination or perversion— and arresting, imprisoning or even executing people who dare to come out and express their

homo-/transsexuality. Authors such as Adriaan Van Klinken and Ezra Chitando have acknowledged the fact that this legislation was "largely driven by religious agendas" (2016: 1), more specifically, fundamentalist agendas that welcome certain forms of Pentecostal Christianity. This interpenetration between religion (namely the Islamic Shari'a law and Pentecostalism) and politics is very evident in the Nigerian context where religious orthodoxy "has played an important role as a governance structure and mechanism" (Ukah 2016: 22), which deliberately contributes to the criminalisation of dissident sexualities.

In this bleak scenario, several artists and activists belonging to different generations and from different fields such as literature, cinema, sculpture, photography or journalism have represented and discussed these alternative subjectivities to proactively encourage a move towards a more accepting and modern vision of the Other in terms of desire and gender. There is a considerable repertoire of literary works whose main characters are fundamentally Afroqueer,[3] for instance: Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), Mariama Bâ's *Scarlet Song* (1981), Yulisa Pat Amadu Maddy's *No Past, No Present, No Future* (1997), Unoma N. Azuah's *Sky-High Flames* (2005), Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* (2006), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story collection *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009), Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004), Chike Frankie Edozien's *Lives of Great Men: Living and Loving as an African Gay Man* (2017), Azeenarh Mohammed, Chitra Nagarajan and Rafeeat Aliyu's collection of memoirs *She Called Me Woman: Nigeria's Queer Women Speak* (2018), and the novel discussed in this section: Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* (2015).

Twenty-first century Nigerian writers[4] have introduced more diverse, anti-hegemonic discourses in order to explore the multiple manifestations of homoerotic desire from a positive, non-monolithic and anti-essentialist perspective. When it comes to the specific featuring of lesbian characters in present-day (sub-Saharan) literary narratives, we should not forget that this is still an emergent literary trend (Azuah 2005). Lindsey Green-Simms contends that all the current literary responses condemning homophobia and other forms of hatred against the LGBTQI+ community point to "an overall trend in much of anglophone [sic] sub-Saharan Africa where anti-gay legislation and rhetoric is on the rise" (2016: 141). For this reason, the term 'emergent' is fundamentally used in this literary context to "resist the dominant in ways not previously done before and to tell diverse stories about same-sex desire that are neither monothematic nor moralistic" (2016: 142).

In this vein, Chinelo Okparanta subscribes to this emergent literary trend with her two published works: her short story collection *Happiness, Like Water* (2013) and her aforementioned debut novel. In fact, most symbolic explorations of women's

same-sex desire have traditionally taken place within the form of the short story (Adetunji Osinubi 2018: 673). However, Okparanta is one of the pioneers (along with others such as Unoma N. Azuah or Lola Shoneyin) to use the novel as a genre not only devoted to the exploration of male same-sex desire but rather as a means to explore lesbian subjectivity in a nuanced, sympathetic manner (Munro 2017). Okparanta's queering of the African novel is also exemplified in her attempt to normalise and humanise these subjectivities, while positively re-inscribing them into the Nigerian nation-building project. As this author explains in the "Author's Note" placed at the end of the text under scrutiny, "[t]his novel attempts to give Nigeria's marginalized LGBTQ citizens a more powerful voice, and a place in our nation's history" (2015: 325).

When delineating the differences in the ways lesbianism and womanhood have been portrayed by African writers belonging to different generations, Dobrota Pucherova asserts that "[third-generation] African lesbian fiction brings an entirely new perspective on African womanhood that has been essentialized by first-generation African academic feminists" (2019: 107). In relation to the inclusion of non-conforming sexualities in the African imaginary along with the revision of essentialised notions of wo/manhood, ma-/paternity and femininity/masculinity, Pucherova further argues that third-generation female authors

> reject not only the notion that lesbianism is foreign to Africa, but also the definition of African femininity as centered around motherhood, wifehood, and self-sacrifice that has been affirmed even by theorists who have not explicitly rejected lesbianism. (2019: 110)

Thematically, this re-signification of Nigerian femininity in twenty-first century queer Nigerian fiction is not complete without re-defining the traditional, nuclear African family and heterocisnormative African society (Pucherova 2019: 109). Lesbian women are no longer reductively depicted as "intimate friends" having a Platonic relationship, or as having a mother-like, childish relationship (2019: 109). On the contrary, lesbian desires and needs are fully recognised and explored in contemporary African fictional works, and lesbian characters may as well oppose the idea of aligning their personal desires and aspirations with the making of a conventional family. As the same scholar puts it, referring to the protagonists in African lesbian fictional works,

> by orienting their desire toward other women, the heroines of this fiction reject the traditional family that has been at the center of African nationalist imagination and express a desire for a new model of the nation that is nonviolent, protective of human freedom and of nature, and moved forward by respect for others rather than identity politics, the imperative of procreation, or the capitalist idea of progress. (Pucherova 2019: 111)

These manifestations are nothing less than artistic *activism* aiming to shift the status quo of the homosexual citizen, to avoid the removal of non-normative subjectivities and to bring in a renegotiated paradigm of the twenty-first century (queer) African.

4. Lesbian Intimacies, Nationhood and Nigerianness as Explored by Chinelo Okparanta

Third-generation Nigerian author Chinelo Okparanta (1981-) was born in Port Harcourt and raised in Pennsylvania. She is currently an Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing at Bucknell University, where she is also a Faculty Research Fellow. She has been nominated, shortlisted and awarded with several distinctions such as the 2014 and 2016 Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian General Fiction for her debut short story collection *Happiness, Like Water* (2013) and her novel *Under the Udala Trees*, the 2014 New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award, and the 2017 International DUBLIN Literary award. *Under the Udala Trees* (2015) is her first Anglo-Igbo novel.[5] This coming-of-age novel or bildungsroman (see Courtois 2018) explores a number of dichotomies such as past vs. present, mother (heterosexual) vs. daughter (homosexual), tradition vs. modernity, or African vs. Western worldviews. The dichotomous nature of the novel is very much connected with Okparanta's personal circumstances, particularly when labelled as an Afrosporic author. As she explains in an interview,

> I'm working within an African literary tradition in the sense that the culture is very strong in my writing. My novel is completely set in Nigeria. [...] I wanted we as Nigerians to have this conversation on our own, because there is sometimes too much Western influence or Western pressure trying to tell Africans "what to do" and "how to be" and how to run our countries. [...] What's happening in Nigeria, for instance, is there's a crisis between honoring our traditional belief systems and wanting strongly to feel like we are part of the West, that we can do the West better than the West can do itself. (In Lombardi 2018: 19-20)

Okparanta, considered as a mediator between different cultures, is able to confront both perspectives in the same fictional space to critically engage in the exploration of colonialism and its impact on a number of socio-cultural and political structures and conceptions in Nigeria, in this case, mainly related to gender and sexual preference. In her analysis of the novel, Okparanta negotiates the main character's subaltern position in postcolonial, post-bellum Nigeria together with the author's own status as a peripheral, Afrosporic Nigerian.

Under the Udala Trees, articulated around six main sections and an epilogue, is, at its core, a rethinking of the relationship between the Nigerian woman and nation

beyond Western notions of gender and sexual normativity. Indeed, what we see here is a masterful use of the inward gaze which provides a detailed analysis of the protagonist's inner world and emotional landscape while showing "levels of detail and intimacy previously unseen" in the coming-out African novel (Green-Simms 2016: 144). This bildungsroman deals with the figure of the lesbian in modern Nigeria as described by a first-person female narrator from an un-stigmatising narrative position. Such retrospective meditation on the protagonist's lesbian awakening is interesting as it allows her to come to terms with her own queerness without explicitly outing herself. The protagonist's homosexual orientation is not overtly revealed, but her queerness is subtly voiced through her actions and inner thoughts in the novel. In this sense, Ijeoma remains a "closeted lesbian" despite the fact that the novel implicitly "outs" her. This formal aspect, I argue, reflects the tensions and contradictions in contemporary coming-out narratives that arise from "those modes of privacy and publicness that are more complex than 'out' or 'closeted'", as Lindsey Green-Simms and Brenna Munro assert (2018).

The story begins with Ijeoma, the protagonist, living with her parents in Ojoto (Southeast Nigeria) during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (1967-1970).[6] In fact, the author based the fictive construction of the novel's setting on her mother's testimonies from the war and on real material such as old newspapers and photographs, old radio announcements, BBC documentaries and a number of interviews (Carter Wood 2016: 30). Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi posits that the choice of this war setting for Anglo-Igbo authors works as a metafictional space employed "to examine [and work through] all manners of marginalization and disaffections created by political authority and their dissemination into private lives" (2018: 678). Symbolically, this conjuring up of spectral and traumatic national episodes enables, on the one hand, the creation of a fictional queer archive when inscribing the queer dimension into a rather turbulent period in recent Nigerian history; and, on the other, the interrogation of "the coherence of projected [post-]nations", solidly tying "Nigeria's violent and disordered pluralisms to the suppression of lesbian emergence in the public domain and in the home space" (2018: 677).

Drawing attention to the notion of "intersecting struggles" put forth by Lindsey Green-Simms in an African context (2016: 139), we can easily notice the interconnectedness of national and personal trauma, as in this prophetic passage at the beginning of the novel:

> By this time [1968], talk of all the festivities that would take place when Biafra defeated Nigeria had already begun to dwindle, supplanted, rather, by a collective fretting over what would become of us when Nigeria prevailed: Would we be stripped of our homes, and of our lands? Would we be forced into menial servitude? Would we be reduced to living on rationed food? How long into the future would we have to bear the burden of our loss? Would we recover? (Okparanta 2015: 4)

This sort of meditation on the future of the country, particularly from the retrospective position of a lesbian Igbo woman, is embedded in the current conception of queer individuals in present-day Nigeria. In this vein, a parallel between the persecution and discrimination of Igbos during the war and the persecution and criminalisation of LGBTQI+ subjects in this country can be easily traced. Okparanta successfully examines the intersecting space between the protagonist's ethnicity and her queerness. In fact, this attests to the tensions between the ethnic-national, the familial and the personal, but also the temporal tensions between past and present.

In this narrative, a discursive revision of the post-nation during and after conflict is clearly staged. Nigerian individuals were forced to physically and symbolically reconstruct the postcolonial Nigerian nation and to negotiate the presence of subjectivities and sexualities that were considered a direct consequence of the British invasion.[7] One of the aims of Anglo-Igbo Afrosporic writers is thus to allow a trans-generational and transnational dialogue in order to reformulate the postcolonial nation, which is exactly what Okparanta does: she includes the trope of the lesbian woman in a realistic post-war Nigeria that is regenerating itself; a country actively trying to detach itself from imperialist control. When connecting the Nigeria-Biafra civil war and the persecution of Nigerian queer subjects, *Under the Udala Trees* de-centralises hegemonic, colonial and heteropatriarchal conceptions of Nigeria by "'contaminating' national narratives with sexual transgressions" (Hayes 2000: 16). In this restorative project, the text provides readers with diversified forms of national belonging by rejecting the post-nation's homogenising endeavour.

Okparanta's novel challenges, by means of counter-hegemonic discourses, the articulations, systems and worldviews imposed by the Global North which especially affected the ontological re-signification of the African woman, doubly subalternised in a "process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination" (Oyewumi 1997: 124). As Cheryl Clarke lucidly asserts in her article "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance", "[t]he lesbian has decolonized her body. She has rejected a life of servitude implicit in Western, heterosexual relationships and has accepted the potential of mutuality in a lesbian relationship —*roles* notwithstanding" (1981: 128, emphasis in original). In this vein, lesbianism can be seen in this novel as a subversive practice of contestation and resistance against heteronormativity, gender subjugation and colonial oppression. Notwithstanding, Ijeoma experiences and reproduces a different form of resistance against heteronormative and phallocratic Nigerian society. She *passes* first as a heterosexual woman to later exit, while defying, the so-called "heterosexual matrix" (see Wittig 1992, 1993). She cannot afford the privilege to out herself publicly, even

when she leaves her abusive husband, Chibundu, since she could easily be murdered, which is why she decides to maintain a covert romantic relationship with a woman, Ndidi, while raising her daughter to accept other forms of bonding and desire.

In this coming-of-age novel, the defeat of Biafra leads the protagonist's father, Uzo, to commit suicide and Ijeoma and her mother to relocate to another Nigerian town (Aba). When Ijeoma reaches adolescence, she is sent away to live with the grammar school teacher and his wife so that she can receive a formal Christian education while working as their house girl. In her stay with that family, Ijeoma (of the Christian Igbo ethnic group) meets Amina (of the Muslim Hausa ethnic group) and they become involved.[8] During those two years of companionship under the grammar school teacher's roof, they have their first sexual encounters where they discover and explore their (homo)sexuality. Eventually, they get caught and both are forced to continue their education in a Catholic boarding school. There, Amina starts meeting boys and ends up marrying a Hausa man. Ijeoma, for her part, finishes her education and moves back in with her mother to help her with her small business. Ijeoma will then meet Chibundu, her future husband, and Ndidi —the "woman apart" as she is described in the story (Okparanta 2015: 221)— who will eventually become her lifelong lover.

Once Ijeoma reaches adulthood, she is forced to marry Chibundu. In so doing, she decides to stop seeing Ndidi (though they keep in touch by correspondence) and moves in with her husband with whom she has a daughter, Chidinma. The novel ends with the collapse of the marriage and Ijeoma and Chidinma moving back with Ijeoma's mother while renewing contact with her ex-lover Ndidi. This failure and critique of the normative family could allegorically stand for a projected image of contemporary Nigeria to "uncover the fiction of the nation" as conceived in an African post-colonial context (Adetunji Osinubi 2018: 677; see also Boehmer 2005).

Through the fictional character of Ijeoma, Okparanta advocates a Nigeria where men and, most especially, women can have a say in their own lives and whose desires are not constrained by external actors. Indeed, I would claim that the aim of this novel (and of this *peripheral* author) is to de-centre normative sexualities from marginal spaces in Nigeria (and in the world). This argument has been further developed by Chantal Zabus in her volume *Out in Africa: Same-Sex Desire in Sub-Saharan Literatures and Cultures* (2013), where she postulates:

> The queer subject by definition speaks from the margins in that by virtue of his, her or his position as excluded, that subject's desire interrogates what the mainstream discourse of heteronormativity tries to conceal. In so doing, it produces —unwittingly or consciously— sites of resistance from which alternative models of subjectivity can be generated. (2013: 12)

These "sites of resistance" can be seen as anti-colonial and post-abyssal routes against imperialist power structures in Africa and anti-patriarchal opposition to male-dominated societies worldwide.

We can find a number of examples of well-differentiated gender roles for men and women in Nigeria, which clearly expose the straitjacketed sexual division of labour where women are commonly conceived as procreative vessels. As Currier and Migraine-George state, "[l]esbians therefore become equated not only with an anti-nationalist agenda but also with the prospect of national corruption and collapse, underscored by the misconception that same-sex sexualities will lead to ethnic extinction" (2017: 143). This is an argument previously outlined by the intellectual Lee Edelman in his volume *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) in which he introduces the notion of "reproductive futurism", defined as that which "impose[s] an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable […] the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relationships" (2004: 2). As this scholar suggests, homosexual subjects challenge the heteronormative investment in this "reproductive futurism", "accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social [and thus to futurity of human race]" (2004: 3). In other words, a seemingly disassociated and queer temporality that would prevent homosexual subjectivities from taking part in any viable nation-building project. Edward Ou Jin Lee asserts in this regard that "[c]entral to the post-independence nation-building projects was the maintenance of a heterosexual, cissexual, and patriarchal social order, through discourses of 'family values', the promotion of heterosexual monogamous marriage, and continued criminalization of sexual and gender transgressions" (2018: 66). In line with these arguments, Okparanta, we could argue, clearly proposes a queer understanding of national futurity that does not go against the social, communal or ethnic viability of the Nigerian nation. In this light, Okparanta's novel does challenge African traditionalism and its cordoned-off, predestined conception of the queer self (especially the lesbian woman). Nonetheless, traditional and pre-colonial sexual practices to some degree inform Okparanta's narrative without her intentionally trying to restore or recuperate them in a non-fictional context. If anything, Afrosporic Okparanta, with her Anglo-Igbo novel, acknowledges the hybridity of a current national/social scenario where African roots are intertwined with Western influences.

In the novel, Ijeoma's mother reveals her own conception of the Nigerian woman and the gender roles she must play in this society. She declares repeatedly: "Marriage is for everyone! Remember, a *woman without a man is hardly a woman at all*. Besides, good men are rare these days. Now that you've found

one, you must *do what you can to keep him*" (Okparanta 2015: 223, emphasis added). And then, she further develops this maxim: "Because sooner or later we would each become somebody's wife, and as wives, it would be *our obligation to be fertile*, *to bear children for our husbands*, sons especially, to carry on the family name" (Okparanta 2015: 310, emphasis added). These instances reveal the indoctrinating notions mostly passed from mothers to daughters to discipline the female body and the female mind and, more dangerously, the effect these teachings have on their daughters' overall development. Indeed, it is through these restrictive and infantilising patterns of interaction and socialisation that women acquire very specific formulations of womanhood that imply submissiveness, interdependence and lack of (homosexual) desire or pleasure. Even though there is collusion between Ijeoma's sense of womanhood and her mother's in the novel, Okparanta re-examines these dynamics and ventures to renegotiate and resist domestic notions of womanhood and female desire. Ijeoma un-does and re-does gender in Nigeria while re-staging nationhood in this postcolonial setting. Additionally, Ijeoma's daughter Chidinma enacts a more accepting attitude towards queer subjects, which underlines a change in the way current generations regard queerness and the many ways motherhood is performed in this novel.

Moreover, Ijeoma's mother constantly stresses that female subjectivity is understood not individually but *relationally* (i.e. in relation to her husband, offspring and community so that women can be easily assigned to a certain female category with well-delimited gender roles). In the following example, Ijeoma's mother advises her daughter to find a husband that can provide for her and "make her complete", as Amina has done recently: "'Marriage has a shape. Its shape is that of a bicycle. […] All that matters is that the bicycle is complete, that the bicycle has two wheels'", to which she adds: "'The man is one wheel' […] 'the woman the other. […] What is certain, though, is that neither wheel is able to function fully without the other. And what use is it to exist in the world as a partially functioning human being?'" (Okparanta 2015: 182). It is very interesting to observe how Ijeoma becomes a fully-functioning and empowered human being "through a lesbian sexuality" (Courtois 2018: 127).

In patriarchal and heterosexist societies, affective gender roles are automatically assigned to women and instrumental roles to men (see Hernando Gonzalo 2000). According to Asante L. Mtenje, "disciplining female bodies and positively channelling their sexual energies towards home and family and away from desire and bodily pleasure sets the foundations for the (re)productive project of building the nation" (2016: 192). In such societies, women are thus conceptualised as (affectionate and exploitable) "means" in themselves while men are treated like

"ends", which is exactly what Ijeoma's mother is demanding from her daughter: finding a man, serving him, bearing him sons, and caring for the family just for the sake of perpetuating "tradition" and reinforcing that restricted sense of nationhood and Nigerianness.[9] By questioning traditional, prescriptive gender norms, the protagonist actively demands to enact her agency so as to seek a life of her own choice. She deconstructs and reconstructs herself in an attempt to naturalise and legitimise alternative manifestations of womanhood, where agency and ownership are not taken away from women.

In fact, I would postulate that Ijeoma and her Mama can be held as opposing forms of understanding the Nigerian post-nation. Whereas Ijeoma's Mama is presented as a woman who epitomises the traditionalism, heterosexism, chauvinism and parochialism deeply ingrained in this society, Ijeoma is held as a symbolic representation, one of many, of the modern Nigerian nation that is more progressive and, certainly, more welcoming of other identitary and sexual expressions. Additionally, it cannot be overlooked how Okparanta's Afrosporic status challenges and unsettles the very foundations of Nigerianness and the Nigerian post-nation as discussed from a queer and transcultural standpoint.

5. Conclusion

In this article I have examined the lesbian paradigm in postcolonial Nigeria as a plausible form of re-wiring and re-writing the postcolonial African nation beyond abyssal and exclusive structures. Third-generation authors are creating multi-dimensional characters through which they can re-conceptualise personal, cultural, sexual and gender identity in Africa only to create more textured African subjectivities. The novel under scrutiny, among many others written by third-generation African authors that explore similar thematic lines, tries to subvert traditional and conforming gender roles, heterocisnormative sexualities, and essentialised notions of womanhood and femininity while including alternative systems of representation which, I argue, pro-actively work towards an emancipatory re-negotiation of the African post-nation and, fundamentally, the re-imagination of the African (lesbian) woman.[10]

Notes

1. For further information related to the mapping of anti-LGBT laws in Africa, see https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/botswana-decriminalisation-of-consensual-same-sex-relations-should-inspire-other-african-countries/ and <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/lgbti-lgbt-gay-human-rights-law-africa-uganda-kenya-nigeria-cameroon.

2. As researcher Kenneth Chukwuemeka Nwoko reminds us, "the practice [of female husbandry] did not involve sexual relationship between the couple as opposed to lesbianism" (2012: 74). This claim has also been supported by authors such as Chantal Zabus (2013), Joseph M. Carrier and Stephen O. Murray (1998).

3. Most authors gathered in this list are Nigerian. However, I have included three African writers who are considered seminal figures due to the original way they have explored Afroqueerness and homoerotic desire in this continent. These authors are: Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo, Senegalese Mariama Bâ and Sierra Leonean Yulisa Pat Amadu Maddy.

4. As clarification, previous generations of sub-Saharan writers have addressed homosexuality and queerness in different ways. Lindsey Green-Simms mentions in this respect that homosexual characters who appeared in works written by first and second-generation Nigerian authors were "characterized above all by silence and opacity" (2016: 140), while the characters' agency was openly denied. Homosexuality was still considered taboo and homoerotic desires were viewed through a homophobic lens. Authors born after independence in Africa, or the so-called third-generation writers, have started to represent homosexuality in Nigeria from a more positive stance.

5. A number of discussions have traditionally been conducted by several African authors to accurately define African literature and why it is mostly written in a colonial or European language (for more information, see Achebe 1997, and Bandia 2012). Following Elena Rodríguez Murphy's postulates (2015, 2017) on the particular use of the English language in contemporary Nigerian literary texts, this novel can be defined as using a Nigerian English or, more specifically, as using a completely new variety of English in which authors add terms and expressions from their own African languages. In *Under the Udala Trees*, Okparanta introduces Igbo expressions throughout the text, an example of the literary and personal hybridity, interstitiality and transculturation of many third-generation African authors nowadays.

6. This conflict was one of the most traumatic events for Nigeria and its effects are still prevalent nowadays. In 1960, after Nigeria gained independence from the British Empire, an ethnic group from the Northern part of the country, the Muslim Hausas, massacred the Christian Igbos in their area. The Igbos relocated to the Eastern part of Nigeria where this ethnic group was a majority. As the Nigerian government was ruled by the Hausa ethnic group, the Igbos decided to secede and establish the Republic of Biafra in 1967. After this event, civil war broke out concluding with the surrender of the Biafran government in 1970 due to the military superiority of the Nigerian state (see "Civil War Breaks out in Nigeria" 2009).

7. It is necessary to clarify the conception of the post-nation. Some contemporary authors have openly questioned and even given up on the idea of the postcolonial African nation, revealing its arbitrariness and fictionality. For instance, US-based Nigerian author Chigozie Obioma critically stated: "Today most of the nations in Africa should not even be called African nations, but western African nations. The language, political ideology, socio-economic structures, education, and everything that makes up a nation, even down to popular culture, do not originate from within these countries. African nations have a total dependency on

foreign political philosophies and ideas, and their shifts and movements" (2017). In this line, Okparanta's novel could be held as a re-interrogation of the post-nation from a queer perspective as a thematic strategy to denounce the pervasiveness of neo-colonial realities and their effects on national and personal spheres.

8. As mentioned above, during the civil war, the Igbo and the Hausa ethnic groups confronted each other and fought for control of the country. Ethnic and religious origin, along with gender, is another constitutive factor against this type of union in the novel.

9. As Remi Akujobi argued in relation to those patriarchal and prescriptive notions of womanhood and motherhood, "motherhood is the only thing in which a woman's worth is measured. A woman without a child is viewed as a waste to herself, to her husband and to her society" (2011: 5). He, thus, highlights the conception of women as nation-builders and, therefore, their "duty" to bear children in order to perpetuate society, community and nation.

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AUTHENTICITY AND THE FOREST IN *CAPTAIN FANTASTIC* (2016) AND *LEAVE NO TRACE* (2018)

LA AUTENTICIDAD Y EL BOSQUE EN *CAPTAIN FANTASTIC* (2016) Y *LEAVE NO TRACE* (2018)

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Abstract

A number of recent productions would appear to suggest that American cinema in the 21st century has abandoned the traditional, culturally defined tropes of the American wilderness in favor of its portrayal as an alternative environment for the contemporary American man. This study focuses on the role of the forest as a specific form of the wilderness in two contemporary American films, *Captain Fantastic* (2016) and *Leave No Trace* (2018), analyzing how this background motivates and shapes the authentic representation of the main male protagonist. This form of authenticity, as the study suggests, reflects a more extensive cultural call for the authenticity of American masculinity in American cinema in the 21st century. The crucial aspect in relation to the contemporary representation of the American man in these two films is the father/child relationship that emphasizes the role of the setting in the process of regenerating man's position in society, thereby reflecting the postfeminist characterization of the American man.

Keywords: *Captain Fantastic*, *Leave No Trace*, forest, fatherhood, masculinity.

Resumen

El cine americano del siglo XXI parece haber abandonado el espíritu tradicional del paisaje salvaje estadounidense a fin de crear el escenario alternativo para el hombre estadounidense contemporáneo. Este estudio se centra en el papel desempeñado por el bosque como una forma específica del paisaje silvestre en dos películas estadounidenses contemporáneas: *Captain Fantastic* (2016) y *Leave No Trace* (2018). El estudio analiza como este paisaje transforma y moldea la representación auténtica del protagonista masculino principal y como esta autenticidad refleja la necesidad cultural más amplia de la autenticidad del hombre estadounidense en el cine americano del siglo XXI. El punto clave que se destaca en el contexto de la representación contemporánea del hombre estadounidense en ambas películas es la relación padre-hijo que enfatiza la importancia del entorno en el proceso de la formación del papel del hombre en la sociedad y que refleja la caracterización postfeminista del hombre estadounidense.

Palabras clave: *Captain Fantastic*, *Leave No Trace*, bosque, paternidad, masculinidad.

1. Introduction

[An] authentic account is one that speaks the truth of the author's situation, about the truth of the (absent) others' situation.

Allan Moore, "Authenticity as Authentication".

The pursuit of authenticity[1] in cinema is the pursuit of a chimera. The concept itself might seem, in relation to cinema and representation, almost contradictory, and yet for more than a century filmmakers have shown an unflagging and relentless desire to portray authenticity on screen. This holds true for most American cinema productions, Hollywood as well as independent cinema, but while Hollywood is more preoccupied with the authenticity of reproduction and performance to claim legitimacy and originality of its production, independent cinema focuses instinctively on the authentic image/experience/form itself, often all within a single frame. Postmillennial American cinema has specifically demonstrated its interest in authenticity by presenting a variety of types: authentic characters with authentic flaws as in *Steve Jobs* (2015), *Manchester by the Sea* (2016) or *Leave No Trace* (2018); authentic performances through the casting of non-actors in *Mid90s* (2018) or *Boyhood* (2018); or, as this study proposes, by using environments that encourage an authentic living experience in films such as *Captain Fantastic* (2016) and *Leave No Trace* (2018).

Authenticity and the ability to live authentically have also been the concern of social theories that examine the impact of information technology upon contemporary

Western men. Considerable research has been devoted to the processes by which the potential of western men to benefit from a connection with nature has been replaced with the demand for computerized reality, especially in the digital age. The divorce from nature engendered by modernity has encouraged the investigation of individuals' capability to maintain their access to nature, but the impact of late 20th-century information technology that has significantly accelerated the divorce itself has also disrupted our understanding of the human connection to the natural environment. Social theory has primarily explored the ability of individuals to access their true selves[2] in the age of data and information or within the "ingenuity of space", a term used by Zygmunt Bauman to refer to a world overwhelmed by the urgency of data processing and the global economy (2007: 83). This ingenuity defines locations in which individuals suffer from alienation produced by the segregation or the entire replacement of social spaces by digital spaces. The progress-driven nature of Western society and the never-ending flow of information and socializing practices that take place via social media rather than in the real world have been the focus of significant study over the past two decades, with a particular emphasis being placed on the effect of contemporary society on individuals (Bauman 2007; Kirby 2015; Lipovetsky 2015; Samuels 2015). Considerable research suggests that the impact is triggered by a growing sense of detachment from the authenticity of life which leads to an inability to access one's true self, a phenomenon which is often demonstrated as a form of social anxiety from which many individuals suffer (Schlegel et al. 2009; Kass 2016).

Any attempt to study authenticity in cinema is fraught with difficulty, precisely due to the concept's contradictory relationship to representation. However, the concept can be examined as a social construct through specific cinematic devices that, in relation to the representation of authentic experience, shape the assumed characterization of the main character. *Captain Fantastic* and *Leave No Trace* are examples of a type of film which embraces authenticity and exploits its potential as a device to depict the particular experience of contemporary Western men, more specifically fathers, in a setting that is typically associated with the authenticity of life —the wilderness. The focus in these films is thus on the representation of the wilderness as a form of environment that motivates and shapes the representation of the postmillennial father. The wilderness and the father in the two films are studied as two actants (Greimas 1983); the characterization of the former motivates and shapes the characterization of the latter.

The wilderness was one of the most crucial points of confrontation in the process of the formation of the American character. The pioneer experience served as a vehicle that formed the representation of early visions of America, promoting the idea of opportunity and of a new beginning for civilization. In the American

narrative, Edenic nature has symbolized the "primitive world which lies beyond the margins of cities" (Fiedler 1966: 366) and as such it has been a space for moral, spiritual, and aesthetic regeneration (Peprník 2005: 21-25), far from urban areas in which corruption prospers. Literary depictions of the wilderness typically oscillated between sublime and civilized landscapes, images that are visually best represented by the Hudson River school of artists whose primary focus was the contrast between the untamed American wilderness and cultivated land. In cinema, it was the genre of the Western that celebrated the American landscape to such an extent that it elevated the setting to the position of an actant capable of shaping the way in which the main protagonist is represented (Carmichael 2006; Den Uyl 2010; Kitses 2018). In many ways, the Western constitutes a literal celebration of the American landscape, usually through a focus on pioneers and the progress they wrought on the land, a process in which male protagonists were largely prevalent.

The wilderness as a space fomenting self-identification continues to shape American mythology. A leading representative of this mythology is the American Adam, who has been traditionally associated with virtues such as innocence, purity, and independence (Lewis 1959)[3] and who continues to serve as an archetype representing the ideal of the American man in contemporary narratives. 21st-century cinema reflects the yearning for Adam's innocence in films like *Into the Wild* (2007), inspired by the real-life story of Christopher McCandless who, like many typical male protagonists of American fiction, turns his back upon civilization in order to escape the consumerist, profit-driven, and manipulative society and searches for genuine life experiences in the primitive but liberating wilderness (Fiedler 1966: 26). Similarly, *The Revenant* (2015) portrays an early-nineteenth century frontiersman/explorer (Leonardo DiCaprio) as embodying the relentless American desire for progress and achievement, but then shows how an encounter with the primitive grants him a somewhat transcendental vision of life. In both cases, the wilderness represents an effective and rewarding refuge from civilization when society proves to be too corrupt and damaging. The tendency to demonstrate the healing effect of the wilderness (albeit somewhat limited) on the main protagonists can also be observed in *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Wild* (2014), while in the post-apocalyptic *The Road* (2009), it serves as a redemption for —and restoration of— society and civilization.

As in the examples above, the wilderness in *Captain Fantastic* and *Leave No Trace* acts as a refuge from society, a natural habitat in which the protagonists and the children whom they have decided to withdraw from society can live freely. This study examines the universality that the wilderness offers as a crucial attribute of this setting, and one that provides an alternative for American men who feel jeopardized by what Zygmunt Bauman has termed 'liquid modernity' (2007) —a highly

developed global society in which the demand for mobility and constant flow of information result in a sense of the impotence of human interaction. It thus serves as an alternative milieu in which the American father in 21st-century American cinema can acquire authentic experiences free from norm-related behavior.

The crisis facing Western masculinity has been the subject of wide-ranging discussion for more than three decades now (Faludi 1991, 1999; Connell 2005; Kimmel 2010 among many others), and the focus on the issue of fatherhood has also grown significantly, especially in millennial film production.[4] Some authors have argued that the emphasis on fatherhood in postmillennial cinema is suggestive of the need for reconciliation with father figures of the past, who have been for many decades largely absent in American cinema —if not physically, then very often at the emotional level.[5] In his study of millennial fatherhood, Mike Chopra-Gant points out that the father figure in the 1950s and 1960s "became a dominating figure, not by his presence, but by his absence" (2013: 88). As he explains, while the absence of the father can be physical, the sense of absence is also experienced on a secondary level when the father is "hopelessly deficient in [his] provision of the guidance and direction needed by [his] sons" (2013: 89). The effect of such absence on subsequent generations has been explored in films such as *Fight Club* (1999), *American Beauty* (1999) or *Forrest Gump* (1994), all of which were produced in the 1990s. Timothy Shary also acknowledges the emphasis on the father figure in postmillennial American cinema in his study of millennial masculinity, arguing that due to the "ongoing evolution of male roles (domestic, professional, performative)" and concerns with the effects of such influences on the patriarchal norm, the advent of the 21st century offers a logical opportunity to reexamine the representation of the father on-screen (2013: 4). The father-child relationship is a significant aspect in any analysis of contemporary representations of the American man in cinema. This study will also address the role of the setting in the regeneration of the protagonist's position in society in terms of postfeminist characterizations that play a considerable role in determining the depiction of men in paternal relationships.

2. *Captain Fantastic*

What we have created here may be unique [...]. We created paradise.
Matt Ross, *Captain Fantastic*.

Captain Fantastic stars Viggo Mortensen as Ben Cash, a non-conformist father of six all living together in an unspecified area somewhere in the Washington forest. Promotional materials for the film include a poster with an image of the family in

an almost defensive pose surrounded by tree branches, which suggests the protective role which the forest plays in a somewhat idyllic context, but it does not reveal the extent to which the family makes use of the wilderness, both physically and psychologically. The opening of the film introduces viewers to pastoral notions of the setting, emphasizing the vastness of the forest in which humans —other than the family— are only occasional visitors. Scenes of peace and tranquility show how the family thrives in this harmonious, almost transcendental, setting. But soon after this introduction the viewer is made aware of the real function of the forest in the film and also of Ben's intention to use the environment to develop and cultivate qualities in his children which are no longer valued in a contemporary urban setting; qualities such as persistence, endurance, and self-sufficiency. The audience frequently observes all six children, regardless of their age, repeatedly shown engaged in dangerous activities —climbing steep rock faces in severe weather conditions or hunting wild animals armed only with a knife. Injuries, ranging from the minor to the more serious, appear to be a fairly common occurrence. The forest in *Captain Fantastic* is soon transformed from an Arcadia into an arena where survival skills are practiced and tested, and Ben's uncompromising insistence on self-sufficiency makes him the ultimate authority figure. At the same time, the forest is an asylum for the father whose decision to abandon civilization was a deliberate choice after he and his wife had decided to escape from the seductive influences of American capitalism.

Ben, *the* Captain Fantastic, is the kind of visitor who approaches the wilderness with the intention and ability to process natural materials, thus benefiting from resources the environment provides (Turner 2002: 466-467). He lives with the kids in a camp with no infrastructure, consisting only of a few wooden huts and teepees which they have built by themselves. They hunt animals and grow plants for food, make their own appliances and produce everything that they can by themselves in order to live as self-sufficiently as possible. Ben's conscious approach to the wilderness resembles that of exercising dominion over the natural world (Turner 2002: 474), and this requires not only wood crafting skills but also physical strength and mental toughness to endure the discomforts that such a life entails. For most of the opening section of the film Ben is seen carrying out physical tasks, activities associated with masculine energy; in other words, performing his masculinity.[6] According to Judith Butler's influential work, gender is always performative (1990, 2004) and the performative aspect of masculinity has since been interpreted as an exhibition of manly authority (or its lack thereof). In relation to cinematic representations of the Western man, this theory has been covered by many influential authors. However, the performative aspect of masculinity in connection to fatherhood has been largely overlooked in academic research.

In addition to being an instructor of practical skills and a mentor of essential survivalist knowledge, Ben also tutors his children, giving them a proper education that is more rewarding in social environments other than the forest. In order to foster his strong political views among his children, Ben insists that his family study social and political theories critical of capitalism, insisting that the children reach their own interpretation of these texts. His choice of authors such as Noam Chomsky (and the fact that Ben coins "Chomsky Day" to celebrate the theorist) demonstrates Ben's preoccupation with works that encourage critical thinking. The father's attention to survivalist skills and critical thinking reflects his need to leave behind the conventional capital-driven environment where these skills are no longer esteemed, especially in the urban areas where Ben comes from. Ben has abandoned the urban environment and returned to the wilderness like the classic former city-dweller who has returned to the mythical frontier (Turner 2002: 466) in order to develop and preserve capabilities that can only be acquired through the intensity of life experience. At the same time, however, he also takes pains to ensure that his children will be prepared for life back in civilized society. In a flashback into Ben's past, the audience learns that his intention to isolate the family from the negative impact of consumerism was part of a larger plan that he and his late wife Leslie (Trin Miller) had agreed on. The couple had purchased the land in the wilderness before they isolated themselves and their children there; their situation is therefore both an experiment in alternative living and also a legally sound and thoroughly prepared project.

This plan, and the film's overall transcendentalist embrace of the wilderness, is strongly reminiscent of Henry David Thoreau's attempt to discover whether people could live an authentic life in the wilderness. Thoreau sought transcendental inspiration from the wilderness and, transformed by this experience, aimed to return to civilization in order to challenge its norms. Thoreau thus submitted himself to life in the forest and nourished his inner wilderness (Peprník 2005: 225), subsequently returning to society to talk about the authenticity of nature and his experiences of living within it. Ben, however, takes this experiment even further and uses the forest as a means of teaching his children about the economy of a sustainable and authentic life; once they have received this knowledge and experience, they can return to society and challenge it from within. In this process, the father takes on the role of an intermediary, ensuring that skills and experience can be successfully transferred to the next generation, to prepare them to cope with their responsibilities in the most effective manner. In one early scene in the film in which Ben's eldest son, Bodevan (George MacKay), successfully hunts a deer, we can see how Ben is able to exploit the potential of the forest. In this scene, the audience not only observes the killing of an animal but themselves become part of a ritual ceremony of initiation. As Bodevan acknowledges the

deer's sacrifice by accepting a bloody morsel of its flesh, a ritual which is conducted in complete silence and in an almost atavistic manner, the boy, naked and camouflaged, also acknowledges and accepts his responsibility, whether familial, social or political. In order to emphasize the sanctity of the moment, the father proclaims: "Today, the boy is dead. And in his place... is a man" (Ross 2016: mins. 4.30-4.45). In mythology, the forest acts as a place in which initiation processes take place because it is the only setting that allows for the growth of skills and abilities that can be acquired through feats of daring that grant physical and mental strength (or strengthening) and which eventually lead to the transformation from boy to man (Peprník 2005: 22-24).[7] It is a place of trials that brings about the hero's encounter with his inner strength, but it is also a place of solitude which enables contemplation that encourages assertiveness and determination, a process that ultimately contributes to another important aspect of initiation —self-identification (2005: 25). The involvement of a father figure is a classical feature of the transformation process which initiation rituals represent. The father-son relationship thus creates an analogy to the cycle of nature —death and rebirth— in which the rebirth is manifested by the son who completes the cycle (2005: 26).

Culturally, as Peprník suggests, the essence of such a transformation in the narrative is the principle of death and rebirth into the new social role that the hero adopts upon his return to civilization (2005: 27). The hero is transformed in the forest and returns to society ready to challenge it. Once Ben and his children leave the forest to attend the funeral of the now deceased Leslie, the process of their confrontation with society starts to unfold. Simultaneously, the implications of one of the most potent narrative devices —the absence of the mother— gain importance in the narrative.[8] The confrontation with normative behavior is a challenge to the father, who is repeatedly forced to defend his decision to alienate his children from society. This is particularly evident in the scene where he visits his sister in law Harper (Kathryn Hahn) and her family —her husband Dave (Steve Zahn) and her two sons, Jackson, 13, and Justin, 15. After being accused of neglecting his children's education and neglecting the structure that Harper sees as essential for a proper upbringing, Ben confronts Harper's two teenagers over their knowledge of the Bill of Rights. After the boys answer —"ah … something about costs, I guess?" and "It's … ah … government thing, I think" (Ross 2016: mins. 56.25-56.50)— he prompts his own eight-year-old daughter Zaja to answer. Not only does she cite the full definition of the document word-for-word but she also provides her own interpretation of its social and political implications on the lives of individuals. More resonant in this context, however, are Harper's concerns with Ben's parenting abilities:

> Harper: Sorry, but your kids, they are without their mother now, I don't think you have any idea what you're doing to them!
> Ben: I'm saving their lives, that's what I'm doing…
> Harper: Ben, you sound so ridiculous…
> Ben: Is knowing how to set a broken bone, or how to treat severe burn ridiculous? Knowing how to navigate by the stars in total darkness, that's ridiculous? How to identify edible plants, how to make clothes from animal skins, how to survive in the forest with nothing but a knife, that's ridiculous to you? (Ross 2016: mins. 55.20-55.45)

As the journey continues, Ben's unconventional parenting methods continue to come into conflict with more traditional approaches, whether when shopping in stores or in their eventual arrival at the home of the children's grandparents where the funeral is scheduled to take place. With Ben's discomfort growing after each confrontation over "his way of doing things", it becomes clear that the journey has transformed into Ben's defense of his paternal authority, a force which seems to have become weakened upon leaving the forest. The forest fosters this authority because it is far from the irritations and restrictions of the home (Fiedler 1966: 26) where the father is subjected to scrutiny both from society and the mother-wife figure and its standardized parenting methods. Ben's authority in the forest is derived from his ability to confront physical challenges, but the challenges which he faces in civilization are psychological in nature and are thus beyond his control. On the other hand, this confrontation also provides Ben with a platform from which he can justify his parenting methods and defend his decision to allow his children to live as individuals. He wishes to protect them from the impact of consumerism, technology-oriented education and entertainment, aspects of the civilized world which cause individuals to lose their agency in favor of prosthetic gadgets and devices which can both extend human experience but also numb essential capabilities and intellectual abilities. As the film's director Matt Ross has said, Ben denies his children the opportunity to form social bonds in order to develop their child-like awareness of the real world (West et al. 2016: 39).

The eventual restoration of the narrative status quo comes with Ben's assertion of his moral authority after he responds to the needs of his children and places them ahead of his own. The revelation of Ben's humility comes with his acceptance of his children's desire to stay and live with their grandparents in civilization. This decision, however, comes only after the world of civilized society has witnessed a mistake on Ben's part that results in Vespyr (one of Ben's older daughters) incurring a serious injury. Ben sends Vespyr to spy on her brother Rellian from the roof of her grandparents' house but she falls and is taken to hospital, where Ben is finally confronted with socially constructed responsibilities that ultimately force him to come to terms with his guilt. In a similar accident involving Rellian which

occurred while the family were still living in the forest, unseen by civilization, Ben's confidence did not seem to have been affected so deeply. Rell injures his hand while climbing a cliff, but this incident does not prompt Ben to consider the appropriateness of the conditions which he has created for the family, nor does it prompt any sense of guilt on his part. Ben's confidence and authority are severely diminished when surrounded by civilized society, where his ability to be his true self seems to weaken through endless confrontations with normative behavior. In a psychological study, Schlegel et al. suggest that an individual's true self and their ability to access it "is an important contributor to well-being" (2009: 473). One of the implications of this study is that the (in)ability to cognitively access one's true self affects the experience of the meaning of life (2009: 473). That is, if Ben's access to his true self was diminished upon leaving the forest, an environment in which he is the sole source of unquestioned authority, his understanding of who he is and where he belongs would, according to Schlegel et al.'s argument, also become diminished. The forest, as a physical space that provides ideal conditions for Ben, serving as a means of escape which is more social than physical, thus also represents a space in which his abilities and competencies remain unquestioned by other authority figures. The forest serves as an isolated and sparsely populated environment that remains unaffected by the social norms and norm-relevant behavior that do so much to suppress critical thinking in more civilized and cultivated environments. However, if Ben is to fulfill his role and maintain the post-feminist characterization indicating a new social position for the American man, his response to the necessity to leave this asylum has to be conditioned by the ability to provide his children with proper guidance and direction so that they can continue to challenge society. And thus when he is faced with his children's strong desire to attend their mother's funeral despite their grandparents' disapproval, Ben yields to them, even though this means leaving his safe haven and exposing the results of his unorthodox parenting methods to public scrutiny. He declares, "We can't go to mommy's funeral. We have to do what we are told [...]. We have to shut up and accept it... Well, fuck that!" (Ross 2016: mins. 29.15-29.50), at which point they all resolve to go, and singing *Scotland the Brave* set out on the journey to bid the mother farewell.

The most critical moment of the film, and one that confirms the effect and the legacy of the wilderness experience, comes in the final scene with Bodevan's recognition of his true self, or rather what appears to be his true self. Although the family eventually returns to civilization in acknowledgement of their social nature, their experience of life in the wilderness has encouraged their confidence and made them more resistant to social obligations, restraints and expectations. Bodevan chooses to pursue his own desires and makes a decision that does not conform to the general expectations of his extended family, but one that reflects his father's

teachings. With the children's sense of confidence that comes as the ultimate reassertion of their father's paternal authority, the film essentially celebrates the father and his remarkable abilities. He is a father figure who, unconcerned by social conformity, insists on maintaining his way of doing things in the forest and thus manages to project his influence onto his children.

3. *Leave No Trace*

'What if the kids at school think I'm strange 'cause of the way we were living?'
'How important are their judgments?'
Debra Granik, *Leave No Trace.*

While *Captain Fantastic* depicts a father figure who eventually abandons the environment that signifies the authenticity of living and returns to civilization, *Leave No Trace* presents a very different approach. The film is an adaptation of the 2009 novel *My Abandonment* by Peter Rock which was based on actual events. The plot of the film follows the story of a father, Will (Ben Foster), and his daughter Thomasin or Tom (Thomasin McKenzie) who have abandoned civilization and live deep in the Oregon forest. The pair were discovered by the police and social services in 2004 after tourists to the area had reported seeing a child in the forest. As with *Captain Fantastic*, which was partially inspired by the director's real-life experiences of growing up in a remote commune (West et al. 2016: 34), the primary focus of the film falls on the real-life experiences of the father. The film explores a variety of social issues through the character of Will, a traumatized veteran of the Iraq War who is unable to readapt to life in civilization after returning from a particularly traumatic mission, but it is also a story that draws parallels between the impact of war-inflicted traumas and that of the relentless pursuit of the American Dream in modern-day USA. The effect of these traumas is projected in the film as a form of social anxiety and inability to cope with everyday obligations or commitments.

The 2018 film shares its title with the federally funded program 'Leave No Trace' that encourages campers and backpackers to adopt a more ecologically-minded ethic when staying in the wilderness.[9] This program is one result of a broader environmental movement that called for greater protection of the American wilderness, and the goal of the program was to guide and educate tourists about ways in which they could minimize their impact on nature. The basic principle that guidebooks and guidelines proposed to promote the minimal impact ethic was for visitors to bring all of the equipment which might be needed to survive, but crucially also to take it away with them when they leave, thereby avoiding the need

to build cabins, make fireplaces, or kill animals during the time spent in the forest (Turner 2002: 473-474). The principle of the Leave No Trace ethic is a rejection of humankind's dominion over nature, and the guidelines also emphatically abandon the masculine rhetoric that was previously used to refer to the "woodcrafter" or camper whose experience is closely tied with control (Turner 2002: 474); all of these ideas were, of course, embraced by Ben in *Captain Fantastic*.

In *Leave No Trace*, Will and his daughter live in the forest much like soldiers on the front line. They move to a different location every two weeks in order to avoid being accidentally spotted by hikers or visitors to the park. They have reduced their belongings to the absolute minimum so, in the event of an emergency, they can pack within seconds and leave undetected, thus also minimizing any traces of their presence. Instead of a hut they use a canvas tent as a shelter; when they run out of water, they use rainwater. Will, like Ben, trains and teaches Tom techniques of survival but also those of escape and ambush so that she will be able to vanish into the forest if necessary. Will also insists on giving Thomasin a proper education; in fact, when the father and daughter are finally discovered by the police and checked by social services, Tom performs exceptionally well and demonstrates a level of knowledge far in advance of her peers. But Tom also appears to be more competent generally than her father. When she accompanies him to the city to obtain supplies and medication, it is Tom who does the talking, whether in the hospital or at a grocery store. Thus when the father proves incapable of coping with civilization, it is left to Tom to take over responsibility and she also looks after him when his anxieties overwhelm him. Thomasin becomes a kind of extension of her father's existence that is limited by the inability to deal with social commitments; the maturity she displays in her interactions with civilized society only reiterates the inability of her father.

As a former soldier, Will suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which, in his case, is expressed in the form of anxiety, insomnia or frequent panic attacks induced by the sound of helicopters, either real or imagined. PTSD can also cause angry outbursts, memory loss or mutism, a disorder where individuals remain silent which is typically accompanied by social anxiety (Hekman in Moss and Prince 2014: 116). Will is withdrawn; he rarely speaks in public, only when necessary, and most of the talking is done by Tom who, unlike her father, enjoys the company of her peers. Will, in contrast to Ben, the Captain Fantastic, is not so fixed in his ways as to deny his daughter simple pleasures in life, as we see in the scene in a shop when, holding a candy bar, Tom asks: "Want, or need?", to which Will replies: "Both" (Granik 2018: min. 16.25). However, when Tom finds a necklace on one of the trails in the forest, he does not allow her to keep it. The

stark contrast between the comfort Tom derives from simple pleasures and Will's aversion to the possession of material things due to his war-inflicted traumas is made evident. Will's abandonment of materialism is a direct reference to the distrust of technology and technological products and the potentially devastating effect which they can have on humanity. As with the Captain Fantastic, Will's anxieties indicate that these material objects have a more damaging impact on an individual's mental state than on one's physical condition.

In her study of PTSD, Susan Hekman suggests that traumatized soldiers often struggle due to the loss of their identity. As she explains, "without a distinctive identity that one can slip into, one's ontological status is erased: one ceases to be" (in Moss and Prince 2014: 119). Will struggles to exist beyond the range of accepted identities; moreover, he is aware that he can no longer cope with or fit into any preexisting identities. His escape from a norm-focused environment into one in which he is isolated from normative behavior seems driven by an urgency and necessity which is best demonstrated by his inability to reconnect with civilization. However, in order to keep custody of Tom after their discovery in the forest, Will agrees to participate in a rehabilitation program that commits him to a regular residence and social responsibilities, but his disdain for social commitments soon becomes apparent to the audience. When Tom comments on their different circumstances by saying that "Everything's different now", Will replies that "We can still think our thoughts" (Granik 2018: mins. 34.50-34.60). With his strong disregard for social authorities, Will urges Tom to remain authentic and true to herself regardless of their social or geographical location. Nevertheless, Tom enjoys this period of their life: she attends school and engages with her peers, but Will continues to struggle to adapt. He seems unwilling or unable to settle; he ignores important paperwork, and seems disengaged at social gatherings and at the Sunday masses that he has committed himself to through the rehabilitation program. In order to understand their new responsibilities, Tom reacts to their church attendance by reading aloud a pamphlet and, while listing possible ways individuals can participate, she asks Will: "Is that why we went?", and Will replies: "We went because Walter[10] asked us to. You dress up and show up on Sunday, and people will believe certain things about you" (Granik 2018: mins. 42.30-42.45). The very next scene shows how helicopters flying overhead intensify Will's anxiety, an allegory of the social commitments which he can barely keep to, let alone appreciate.

The more Will's inability to cope with society becomes apparent in his growing anxiety, the more Tom's sense of belonging develops, nurtured by her life in the community, her friends and the attractions of socialization, all of which leads to a clash between the desires of the two characters. As John Beifuss aptly pointed out

in his review of the film, the plot seems to be built around the central conflict that is "resolved into two competing impulses: the desire to be noticed [represented by the 13-year-old daughter] and the desire to disappear" (2018), represented by the traumatized father. It is through this conflict that the father's nature is more clearly revealed; juxtaposed with his daughter's need for society, his withdrawal from civilization into the surrounding wilderness seems more than ever an act of urgency and the result of his own desperation.

But the wilderness in this film is not only a dividing aspect in their relationship, both metaphorically and narratively; it is also a place of reconciliation and, in many respects, of unity. Will is fully aware of his parental commitments and responsibilities towards Tom and struggles and fights to take care of her. But with each of his failures that she witnesses, Tom comes to understand that their escape from society was not an ideological one but one borne of necessity —if Will is to continue to take care of her, he has to find an environment that will allow him to do so. She openly acknowledges her awareness of her father's problem as she reads a PTSD pamphlet —"Do you have difficulty enjoying things? Have you felt distant or cut off from people? Are you unable to have sad or loving feelings?"— understanding that her father's answers to all these questions would be positive. Nevertheless, her perception of Will's need to disappear is often in conflict with her own desires, as in the conversation where she states that "the same thing that's wrong with you isn't wrong with me" (Granik 2018: min. 1.35.40).

The final and effective resolution to the conflict within this father-child relationship proves to be a commune in the woods, a compromise in which Tom can find a satisfying socializing environment and Will respite from civilization. The real-life commune and its non-actor residents is located in Squaw Mountain Ranch, a nudist resort outside Estacada, Oregon, and was established in 1933. The couple eventually reach the commune after one last attempt to find their peace in the deep forest, in a remote cabin close to which Will gets dangerously injured and from which Tom is forced to seek help from strangers in order to rescue him. This incident resembles the mythical process of initiation, after which Tom acquires the ability to make her own decisions and can finally separate herself psychologically from her father. Soon after the incident Will disappears into the nearby forest, content in the knowledge that his daughter is fully prepared to take care of herself. Tom thus remains part of the community, while Will continues to hold a symbolic connection with her. He becomes an invisible, physically absent father, yet his presence is never in doubt; and ultimately he is a father who has managed to provide his daughter with the guidance and direction needed for her to mature. Tom herself has become a bearer of authentic life experiences who can harness her past in order to challenge society when Will is no longer able to do so.

The last scene of the film suggests that Will's experience is not unique and that there may be more men living in the woods —estranged men who are incapable of coping with society. It hints at the possibility of an entire generation of men suffering from social anxieties, who flee to the forest to escape from the disturbing realities of contemporary Western society in which only appropriate norm-relevant behavior is accepted. The wilderness is the least populated area and one that is unlikely to evoke specific associations with people, and this seems to be the crucial determinant in Will's preference for the forest. In a study of the psychological impact of different environments on human well-being conducted by Stapel et al., the authors suggest that to a large extent an individual's surroundings can "influence people's thoughts, feelings, and actions" (2010: 176), so much so that an environment can determine the relevance of social norms that apply to that environment and shape concerns for normative thinking itself, that is, it can even play a role in encouraging or suppressing norm-related behavior. The study provides evidence that environment can be perceived in a "norm relevant manner" when making associations with such places that include people, thereby transforming the understanding of this environment to a social one (Stapel et al. 2010: 176). In contrast, when we consider environments which lack specific connotations related to people or human activities, such as trees, the authors suggest that relevant norms become less salient (2010: 177). The fathers depicted in *Captain Fantastic* and *Leave No Trace* manage to escape the type of conformity that produces norm-related behavior, but their relationships with their children necessarily involve a certain degree of social interaction which they acquired in civilized society and are as such a certain form of norm-related behavior. But the real significance lies in the choice of those aspects of normativity that the fathers deem to be of importance and practice with their children, and those which they choose to reject. Will's resistance to adhere to social commitments inspires Tom to question standardized social practices, and we also see this in the way in which Ben's contempt for authority encourages his children towards free thinking. But the parenting approaches of both fathers demonstrate their emphasis on fairness, consideration and open-mindedness. With "[w]e can still think our thoughts" (Will) or "Well, fuck that!" (Ben), viewers are confronted with the fathers' urging of critical thinking that ultimately relies on one's accessibility to one's true self, which happens to be, or so the two films certainly seem to suggest, more accessible in the wilderness.

In the process of acquiring the ability to access one's true self, and thereby to experience the authenticity of life, the role of the father figure is just as important as the environment in which the process takes place. The study of environments also explains how one's perception of (non-)social environments can be influenced when primed with significant others such as parents, partners or other authority

figures (Stapel et al. 2010: 177), suggesting that the idea of the forest in itself will not significantly motivate norm-relevant thoughts when such an environment is not associated with people. However, when the concept of the forest is associated with the authority of a significant other, it can induce norm-relevant thoughts, thereby transforming the forest from a non-social environment to a social one. Through their insistence on authentic living experiences which are freed from all social, political, cultural and economic bonds restrictive of one's identity, the fathers protect and raise their children in the forest to ensure that their methods remain undisturbed by society.

4. Conclusion

The forests depicted in the two films are not immediately recognizable locations such as Monument Valley or similar sites which have enjoyed much wider representation as iconic or geographically and culturally defining images. The American forest is different. It is both autonomous and anonymous. It is far from "the urban space in which men began to be affected by anxieties generated by the intensity of the postmodern world, where extraterritorial realities are experienced" (Bauman 2007: 73). It is an original and authentic space without socially established boundaries and as such acts as an alternative. Or so it seems. The films discussed in this study play with the concept of authenticity on several levels, placing a significant emphasis on the types of unadulterated experience which are only possible in this kind of environment. Firstly, the forest isolates the fathers and their children not only from civilization itself, but also from women, from wives and mothers. On the one hand, the absence of women emasculates both of the fathers, depriving them of any sexual ambition, yet on the other hand, it successfully demonstrates their nurturing character and capabilities. Their isolation from feminine figures is a crucial element in allowing them to display their masculine authority, presenting them with the opportunity to escape from what Fiedler calls the "inexplicable loyalty" of men towards women, and the "helplessness" (1966: 320) they are confronted with in this union. Freed from the influence of the feminine, it seems, men can and will do better.

The forest or the wilderness is a concept which is also associated with the masculine world, and this proves to be another effective association that supports the desired characterization of the father figures in these films. The forest becomes a kind of boys' paradise, a playground that is identified with "sport and anti-civilization" and is "simple and joyous" (Fiedler 1966: 355). The fathers' well-being —their confidence and authority— benefits from the simplicity of everyday life in the forest and it is only for the sake of their children that the fathers contemplate a

return to civilization; yet while Ben allows himself to be drawn back into the world of obligations and restrains, Will can only withdraw from it in desperation. Both of these decisions echo the need to preserve the experience of authentic living for the generations of the 21st century whose access to their true selves is severely challenged by the effects of Bauman's 'liquid modernity' (2007). The fathers' desire to expose their children to this kind of experience is also strongly reminiscent of the ambition to restore the energy of the American man whose only aim is to make the world a better place in which to live. This is best expressed in the words of Rellian, who in *Captain Fantastic* points out that "[i]f you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, that there are opportunities to change things, then there is a possibility that you can contribute to making a better world" (Ross 2016: mins. 1.38.40-1.38.60). Ultimately, this is what both fathers do.

The forest in *Captain Fantastic* and *Leave No Trace* is also an environment which places no restrictions on identities or experiences. The settings of both films are defined by this sense of escape from civilization, and the fathers demonstrate features of social impotence that are projected by the at times complete absence of speech —attributes that are, according to Lipovetsky, demonstrations of how postmodernism and its economic intensification of the power of the market and consumerism can influence individuals (2015: 159). This focus on consumerism, as Lipovetsky explains, generates extreme forms of individualism where pathological problems, psychological disturbances and excessive behavior are the most common manifestations of the pursuit of interests in most spheres of life (2015: 159). The American wilderness as a space for moral, spiritual and aesthetic regeneration, promoting the idea of opportunity and a new beginning for civilization, is used in these two films as a setting that prompts the regeneration of the contemporary American man.

Culturally, to complete the mythical cycle of death and rebirth, the forest cleans and heals the fathers of the wounds inflicted by society and it secures the education of a new generation which can continue to challenge society. Fathers here abandon the traditional space used in American cinema to depict either professional or domestic spheres, and choose to seek out an adventurous life, to escape to the wilderness and pursue the alternative American Dream that is transcendental and freed from all material and monetary considerations, for in the forest one either simply is or ceases to be. The only advancement and progress in this environment is towards the acceptance of one's identity, which seems to be the most authentic experience possible and one that ensures the recovery of civilization for future generations, ultimately reaffirming the American Dream. Authenticity here thereby serves the narrative purposes as a device to reconstitute the myth of the American Dream.

And yet, authenticity is a social construct, and the two films depict the forest as an environment which lies outside economic, social and political bonds. The setting is used primarily as a tool to assist the processes of the deinstitutionalization of the American man and his growing inability to conform to social constraints in a civilized setting (Lipovetsky 2015: 158-159). And if cinema is a site of social and cultural exchange (Hallam and Roberts 2014: 3) that can visually articulate our understanding of reality and convey what we believe to be true about a situation or experience, then the films reflect authenticity by presenting the real-life experience of the postmillennial father. On a deeper level, however, they also suggest that these fathers provide a different kind of parenting, either willingly or unwillingly. They are unafraid to defend authentic values, as opposed to those constructed by consumerism and cyberspace, and brave enough to accept responsibility and isolate their kids, to deprive them of social bonds, to rely on their own abilities and to declare themselves the sole authority figure. They are also brave enough to grant their children the experience of a strenuous life and to show society the middle finger and do things their own way.[11]

Notes

1. Authenticity, a key term in this study, refers to the level of accuracy achieved via cinematic representations of reality. Cinema is a medium that conveys a human understanding of reality. As such it often attempts to remain faithful to realism to achieve maximal levels of veracity by the application of devices and mechanisms that reflect authentic experiences in cinema (e.g., use of dialects and specific language, costumes, scenery). For further information about authenticity in cinema, see for example Jonathan Stubbs (2013) or Robert A. Rosenstone (2012).

2. The term 'true self' is used in the study to refer to the ability to reach a level of confidence that one's actions are congruent with one's own beliefs and desires, without external social pressures. This ability entails a resistance to corruption and other influences from mass society. Leslie A. Fiedler describes this condition as being "closest to perfection" because it is only when individuals are alone with themselves that they can enjoy their integrity (1966: 431).

3. The American Adam is the pursuer of the American Dream and as an archetype continues to occur in American narratives in order to perpetuate the myth among contemporary audiences. For further information, see R.W.B. Lewis (1959), or Jim Cullen (2003).

4. For further information about fatherhood in American cinema, see Bruzzi (2005) or Hamad (2017).

5. A good example of reconciliation with the emotional absence of an otherwise physically present father in postmillennial cinema is *Tree of Life* (2014)

6. For performative masculinity see, for example, Jeffords (1993), Lehman (2001), or Pederby (2011).

7. The forest as an archetype of the environment that permits the initiation process to take place is understood here in reference to Vladimir Propp's interpretation of the narrative that essentially relies on folktale narratives (1968).

8. The absence of the mother in favor of the father's characterization in the narrative has been analyzed by Hannah Hamad in "Hollywood Fatherhood: Paternal Postfeminism in Contemporary Popular Cinema" (2013) in particular, where she explains that in order for the father to be able to demonstrate masculine authority and a nurturing character, which is the prevailing understanding of post-feminist characterization, the mother needs to be absent. Cinematic depictions of American fathers in the late 20th century and early 21st century seem to focus on either single fathers who have already lost their partner, or fathers whose partners significantly fail in their parenting duties and are presented as incompetent, and who subsequently disappear from the narrative.

9. See https://lnt.org/.

10. The owner of a tree plantation and employer within the rehabilitation program which Will has committed to.

11. This research was supported by the VEGA 1/0447/20 project "The Global and the Local in Postmillennial Anglophone Literatures, Cultures and Media", granted by the Ministry of Education, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

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BODIES THAT FESTER IN THE HOLDS OF THE "COFFIN SHIPS": POSTCOLONIAL NEO-VICTORIANISM, VULNERABILITY AND RESISTANCE IN JOSEPH O'CONNOR'S *STAR OF THE SEA* (2003)

CUERPOS QUE SE PUDREN EN LAS BODEGAS DE LOS "BARCOS ATAÚD": NEO-VICTORIANISMO POSTCOLONIAL, VULNERABILIDAD Y RESISTENCIA EN *STAR OF THE SEA* (2003), DE JOSEPH O'CONNOR

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Abstract

The presence of Empire in the Victorian period and its aftermath has become a new trope in neo-Victorian studies, introducing a postcolonial approach to the re-writing of the Victorian past. This, combined with the metaphor of the sea as a symbol of British colonial and postcolonial maritime power, makes of Joseph O'Connor's novel *Star of the Sea* a story of love, vulnerability and identity. Set in the winter of 1847, it tells the story of the voyage of a group of Irish refugees travelling to New York trying to escape from the Famine. The colonial history of Ireland and its long tradition of English dominance becomes the setting of the characters' fight for survival. Parallels with today's refugees can be established after Ireland's transformation into an immigration country. Following Judith Butler's and Sarah Bracke's notions of vulnerability and resistance together with ideas about 'the other' in postcolonial neo-Victorianism, this article aims to analyse the role of Empire in the construction of an Irish identity associated with poverty and disease, together with its re-emergence and reconstruction through healing in a contemporary globalised scenario. For this purpose, I resort to Edward Said's and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's ideas about imperialism and new imperialism along with Elizabeth Ho's concept of 'the Neo-Victorian-at-sea' and some critics' approaches to postcolonial Gothic. My main contention throughout the text will be that vulnerability in resistance can foster healing.

Keywords: postcolonialism, neo-Victorianism, *Star of the Sea*, vulnerability, resistance.

Resumen

La presencia del Imperio en el período victoriano y sus consecuencias se han convertido en un nuevo tropo en los estudios neo-victorianos, incorporando un enfoque postcolonial a la reescritura del pasado. Esto, junto con la metáfora del mar como símbolo del poder marítimo británico colonial y postcolonial, han hecho de la novela de Joseph O'Connor *Star of the Sea* una historia de amor, vulnerabilidad, identidad y pertenencia. Situada en el invierno de 1847, cuenta la historia del viaje de un grupo de refugiados irlandeses que viajan a Nueva York tratando de escapar de la hambruna. La historia de Irlanda como país colonizado con una larga tradición de dominio inglés se convierte en el escenario de la lucha por la supervivencia. De esta manera se pueden establecer paralelismos con los refugiados de hoy día tras la transformación de Irlanda en un país de inmigración. Siguiendo las ideas de Judith Butler y Sarah Bracke sobre vulnerabilidad y resistencia, además de las ideas sobre la otredad del postcolonialismo neo-victoriano, este artículo tiene como objeto analizar el rol del imperio en la construcción de la identidad irlandesa asociada con la pobreza y la enfermedad, así como su resurgimiento y reconstrucción a través de la sanación en un escenario contemporáneo globalizado. Con este fin, recurro a las ideas de Edward Said y de Michael Hardt y Antonio Negri sobre imperialismo y nuevo imperialismo, así como al enfoque del gótico postcolonial y al concepto de Elizabeth Ho sobre 'lo neo-victoriano en el mar'. Mi principal argumento a lo largo del texto será que la vulnerabilidad dentro de la resistencia puede promover la sanación.

Palabras clave: postcolonialismo, neo-victorianismo, *Star of the Sea,* vulnerabilidad, resistencia.

1. Introduction

Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* (2003) is a neo-Victorian fiction that recreates one of the darkest periods in the history of Ireland: the Famine. It is set in 1847 on board a coffin ship, the Star of the Sea, which was one of the many vessels that crossed the Atlantic carrying thousands of Irish people trying to escape from poverty and devastation to start a new life in America. These people were also fleeing from English oppression and colonisation at a time when many Irish tenants were descendants of English landlords and the British colonial government proved

incapable of managing the Irish situation. The trauma and vulnerability of the Irish population represented in the text reflect contemporary issues that affect our globalised world. In particular, the nightmare of great numbers of vulnerable populations who become refugees in developed countries and live precarious lives under inhuman conditions echoes that of the Irish at the time of the Great Famine. Significantly, Ireland has transformed itself from a migrating to an immigration country and it has recently become a place of dehumanisation and discrimination for newcomers.

Star of the Sea tells the story of a twenty-six-day voyage to New York during which different voices can be heard. One of the main voices is that of the Captain, Josias Tuke Lockwood, who narrates many episodes that take place during the journey and on arrival at the ship's destination; another main voice is that of G. Grantley Dixon, a journalist who writes an account of the journey many years after he lived through those sad events on the vessel. Together with these two men travel several characters whose lives are closely interconnected: Lord Merridith and his family, the servant Mary Duane, and the impostor Pius Mulvey. All of them are escaping their vulnerable pasts, showing resistance and seeking healing after a life of suffering and trauma in Ireland. Although all these characters represent different angles of the same tragedy, I will focus on Mary Duane as a representation of the fallen woman and the Irish other, that is, as a victim of poverty and precarity.

Following the neo-Victorian trend of giving voice to those neglected by history, this article has a two-fold aim: firstly, to re-consider the story of the Irish Famine as a shameful episode of the Irish past where precarity and vulnerability were part of the Irish landscape; and secondly, to add a postcolonial perspective to the history of Irish colonisation and mass migration in the nineteenth century through the recent field of postcolonial neo-Victorianism. In this context, the notion of the neo-Victorian-at-sea coined by Elizabeth Ho as well as the theoretical stance of maritime studies become relevant. This approach has important implications for a British colonial past immersed in a sea culture. Similarly, a postcolonial approach which focuses on ideas of imperialism and new imperialism as put forward by Edward Said, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, is apposite for the analysis of an Irish identity associated with poverty, disease and trauma. This identity finds an echo in our contemporary globalised cultures. Finally, Judith Butler's and Sarah Bracke's notions of vulnerability and resistance will help us to understand the consequences of the Irish Famine and the Atlantic crossing and to establish connections with contemporary situations of precarity. The importance of healing —including national healing— is particularly relevant.

2. Neo-Victorian Sea Narratives and Narratives of Silence

Neo-Victorianism has recently been thoroughly discussed, and even defined, as an aesthetic movement, an academic trend and new genre which is mainly concerned with the revision, re-reading and re-writing of the Victorian past as a period which reflects many of the concerns of the present. Similarly, neo-Victorian fiction tries to fill the interstices of the past giving voice to minorities that were not heard or represented in Victorian mainstream culture. Consequently, the plots of many neo-Victorian novels are populated with situations that convey the unresolved traumas of the period, like those of colonialism and Empire, and with characters that were considered outside the norm, such as outlaws or fallen women (Voights-Virchow 2009: 111).

As early as 2008, after almost two decades of neo-Victorian productions, Marie-Luise Kohlke defined 'neo-Victorian' "as term, as genre, as 'new' discipline, as cultural happening, as socio-political critique, as reinvigorated historical consciousness, as memory work, as critical interface between past and present" (2008: 1). Some years later, in 2014, she described neo-Victorianism in a wider sense as historical fiction related to the nineteenth century and encompassing diverse geographical settings so that it can be understood as a 'liminal zone'. The fact that the UK was a huge Empire during the Victorian period, and the relevance of colonial violence and empire building for the configuration of our modern states, make issues of postcolonialism and new imperialism key elements in neo-Victorian narratives of Empire. These issues, together with ideas of national identity and of reparation for crimes committed against indigenous people, are all crucial topics of concern in neo-Victorian postcolonialism (Kohlke 2014: 28-29). Postcolonial neo-Victorianism tries then to give voice to the subaltern and to the victims of colonial and racial violence and discrimination.

In this sense, Dana Shiller's notion about the redemptive past in the neo-Victorian novel is very convenient for my analysis. She contends that neo-Victorianism is involved in a historical commitment to redeem the traumatic past. She also argues that neo-Victorian fiction offers a significant revisionist approach questioning the accuracy of existing historical knowledge and giving protagonism to certain events that had not been resolved or had been omitted by history. She considers both history and fiction to be human constructs, and neo-Victorian novelists are aware of this in their own relation to the truth about the past (Shiller 1997: 538-541). All these arguments are very useful in my approach to the Irish Famine and the Irish national identity through the analysis of *Star of the Sea*.

Sea narratives can be interpreted as cultural responses to the sea; they convey the different modes in which people interact with the sea and represent trans-national contexts. The sea becomes an imaginative space beyond land while the ship becomes a socially constructed space, as is the case in O'Connor's novel (Mathieson 2016: 2-4). The association with the unknown and the mysterious makes of the sea a feared space linked with the notion of 'the other'. It is in this context that the Irish coffin ships represent places where national history and cultural memory can be reinscribed, and imperial history and histories of colonialism can be re-enacted. Thus, oceanic cultures are "drawn together across nationalities by their shared sea experiences more than by their national contexts" in keeping with aspects of contemporary globalisation (Mathieson 2016: 13).

The history of Britain in the Victorian period is also the history of Empire. Nineteenth-century imperialism can be identified with a set of beliefs that the British were superior to other races —including other Europeans— and the most civilised and progressive power in the world. Although this idea pervaded mid-to late-Victorian and Edwardian discourses, it was also an important preoccupation for early Victorians. Colonial affairs as well as migration were part of the everyday life of the metropolis, affecting both domestic issues and various reform initiatives. Besides advocating territorial expansion, this imperialism was also concerned with the 'civilising mission' to bring light to other parts of the world, including Ireland (Bratlinger 1988: 4, 14). However, there are other representations of Empire different from those traditionally given in English literature and culture, as Gayatri C. Spivak argues (1997: 146), and O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* is one example.

Ho's idea of the ocean as a political space that reflects national ideologies is pertinent here. As she argues, "[t]he neo-Victorian-at-sea serves as a reminder that the British Empire was above all an 'empire of the seas', forcing us to re-think the usual structures of centre and periphery that mark most postcolonial fiction" (2014: 166). She goes on to state that this concept is "an attempt to move beyond conventional neo-Victorianism's bounded territorial spaces and status as national literatures and argue instead for a global memory of 'the Victorian' that is attuned to the conditions and experience of transnationality" (2014: 166). It is from this perspective that I would like to analyse the Irish exodus in the 1840s as a postcolonial project that not only encompasses the history and cultural memory of colonial atrocities, but also calls for healing and restitution in the present. It is evident that contemporary globalisation has become possible thanks to massive flows of people, that is, bodies in transit, a phenomenon which is partly the result of nineteenth-century and current imperialism. The latter caters for the needs of "global consumption, trade and labour" today (Ho 2014: 168). We can attach the label of postcolonial not only to texts that are produced in Europe and North

America, but also to those produced in ex-colonies. This opens up the possibility of contesting political implications in literature examined through the lense of postcolonial theory (Punter 2000: 5, 8).

Additionally, neo-Victorian fictions of Empire also provide us with the means to discuss English and Irish identities and anxieties in the aftermath of de-colonisation, which in turn will lead us to re-consider postcolonial politics. It thus becomes necessary to map neo-colonial and neo-imperial ways of dealing with contemporary cultures and identities. In this respect, neo-Victorian postcolonial fiction provides the means to develop "discourses and strategies of representation" (Ho 2012: 5-9).

Joseph O'Connor is a reputed Irish writer who began his career writing for newspapers and magazines. He then started writing short stories and novels; he is also the author of some plays and film scripts. In an interview with José Manuel Estévez Saá, he explains his purpose when writing *Star of the Sea*: he wanted to present a collection of characters of which the Famine could almost be considered as one. It was not so much a question of historiography as of breaking the silence about such a traumatic episode in the history of Ireland, while simultaneously questioning cold statistics and political propaganda. He believes in the possibilities of remembering through fiction and involving the reader in the process of storytelling (in Estévez Saá 2005: 163). Given these ideas together with its time setting, the novel can be analysed as part of the neo-Victorian project of re-writing the past and giving voice to those Victorian discourses which were silenced, as well as finding connections with our contemporary societies. Eckart Voights-Virchow argues that "contemporary readers encounter in the neo-Victorian novels not only the Victorians, but also their own culture" (2009: 108). For this critic, "the aim of cultural hermeneutics is to arrive at an understanding as a result of historical processes by analysing historical narratives, both fictional and non-fictional" (2009: 108). Unresolved traumas of subcultural transgressions in our current culture can be said to have their origin in Victorian subcultures, as *Star of the Sea* shows (Voights-Virchow 2009: 111-112).

The Great Famine (1845-49) resulting from the potato crop failure is one of the most traumatic episodes in the history of Ireland. According to the online *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the potato blight was caused by the water mold *Phytophthora infestans*, which destroys potato leaves and roots. It arrived accidentally in Ireland from North America, causing the failure of the potato crops which were the main means of subsistence for the rural Irish population of the time. As a result of the spread of the disease, about one million people died from starvation or typhus and other famine-related diseases. The result was that the population of Ireland decreased from almost 8.4 million in 1844 to 6.6 million in

1851. Also, mass emigration to North America, Canada or Australia ensued with about two million people leaving the country, while at the same time birth-rates declined drastically, further diminishing the population (Mokyr 2004).

Younger generations of historians have tried to write a revisionist history of the Famine, especially since the 1980s, and more particularly on account of the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the event. This new perspective on this ecological and civic disaster attempts to contest the anti-imperial nationalistic Irish discourse following independence from British rule (Baucom 2000: 127). O'Connor himself stated his position regarding the historical treatment of the conflict when the novel was published: the idea that English colonisers were responsible for the disasters of the Famine was disseminated to support the political propaganda of the IRA and its militant republicanism, indulging in the repudiation of the English (in Estévez Saá 2005: 164). All these facts reflect the wish of contemporary Ireland to learn more about the Famine and have access to historical and literary accounts, which is symptomatic of cultural trauma. In this context, O'Connor wrote *Star of the Sea* as a way to provide an alternative discourse to those traumatic ones surrounding the Irish Famine, as he considers the novel to be the appropriate means to provide a historical account with a different perspective on the topic. In his view, narratives of trauma can also be the means whereby some kind of healing can be achieved. He makes use of various historical sources and fictional elements so that the boundaries between story and history become blurred. The novel is written as the one-hundredth edition of a journalistic chronicle, which clearly points to the need to re-think and re-write the event, very much in line with the neo-Victorian agenda previously explained. Furthermore, the polyphony of voices in the novel does not allow for a single authoritative account. The Famine is a kind of ghost that can scarcely be put into words (O'Malley 2015: 135-138).

The novel makes it clear that one of its main purposes is to unearth the suppressed dark side of the history of the Irish Famine:

> And yet, could there be silence? What did silence mean? Could you allow yourself to say nothing at all to such things? To remain silent, in fact, was to say something powerful: that it never happened: that these people did not matter. They were not rich. They were not cultivated. They spoke no lines of elegant dialogue; many, in fact, did not speak at all. They died very quietly. They died in the dark. (O'Connor 2003: 130)

The novel articulates a discourse of Irish precarity which relates the Famine with groups of people who did not apparently deserve to be regarded as human in the eyes of the English colonial authorities, as they were poor and ignorant. O'Connor tries to convey the idea that these people's lives had no value and that one cannot

remain silent in the face of such atrocities. Although the Famine had already been verbalised by many historians, he wants to bring another perspective on the subject in *Star of the Sea* where the voices of the victims can be heard. As Punter claims, "personal and historical traumas, can never be recounted in linear narrative fashion, they can never be considered to be 'over', consigned to an untroubled or untroubling past" (2000: 67).

3. Irish Precarity, Trauma and Postcolonial Gothic

In her reflections on precarity, Judith Butler meditates on contemporary violence and on global events that make her wonder: "Who counts as human, Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, What *makes for a grievable life*?" (2004: 20, emphasis in original). This scenario can be taken back to the Irish past when many people were not considered human or worthy of public mourning after death, being under English colonial rule. Butler also defines bodies as associated with mortality, vulnerability and agency; she affirms that we live in communities and we are all interdependent. And yet, there are certain groups who are more vulnerable to violence than others, such as the bodies of the poor, the sexually 'deviant' and the racialised 'other'. These are all bodies vulnerable to political and social conditions and, as such, victims of different forms of violence (Butler 2004: 26-29). Butler's discourse of the dehumanisation of certain individuals and groups is a complex one, and the thousands of Irish deaths at the time of the Famine offer just one historical example of such discourse. In her view, subaltern groups do not deserve to be regarded as human, nor in consequence does their loss deserve any grief. When the journalist Dixon talks about the situation of Clifden at the time of the Famine, the population of Ireland was devastated by poverty and disease:

> The town was a dreadful sight, I could never forget it; with a multitude half dead and weeping as they walked through the streets. Worse again to see those for whom weeping was too much effort, and they sitting down on the icy ground to bow their heads and die, the best portion of life already gone out from them. (O'Connor 2003: 39)

Because of the deadly plague, many landowners lost their land and their tenants lost their ways of earning a living, many becoming the victims of eviction. Many Irish labourers were hit by poverty and ended up on the streets. Most of them put the blame on the landlords, the majority of whom were descendants of the English who had colonised the island in the past. One of these landowners was Lord Merridith, who travelled with his family on board the Star of the Sea. Unable to manage the situation, he had lost his land and estate to debt after his father's death. However, he claims that not all landlords are bad, as "many of them subsidise their tenants to emigrate" (O'Connor 2003: 13).

The relations between the Irish and the English had always been difficult. The former were treated by the latter as subalterns, but O'Connor wants to give a more complete vision and interpretation of the disaster. This concerns the shared Irish experience of having to come to terms with the hegemonic Anglophone culture, and the disjunction and disorienting experience of negotiating identities that the knowledge of migration inevitably brought about (O'Malley 2015: 151). This is something common to many other cultures which have been victims of the atrocities of colonisation and exploitation: "'Treat a man like a savage and he'll behave as one' […] 'anyone acquainted with Ireland should know that fact. Or Calcutta or Africa or anywhere else'" (O'Connor 2003: 13). With these words, O'Connor draws a parallel between Ireland and other British colonies. In particular, he tackles Britain's failure to deal with the precarious situation of its Irish colonial subjects (Corporaal and Cusack 2011: 347), as well as other postcolonial scenarios where migrant subjects were not considered as human. However, O'Connor wishes to challenge the nationalist interpretation of the dreadful event, thus making not only the English government but also the Irish establishment responsible for the deaths of up to two million people by not preventing exports of food from Ireland and relying only on workhouses to alleviate mass precarity (Fegan 2011: 326).

The answer to the question "Why is there a Famine in Ireland" as posed by the novel can be found in an article written by Dixon and published in *The New York Tribune* on 10 November 1847:

> Most of the British establishment abjures responsibility, while millions of those they rule in Ireland are left to the cruellest destruction in a long, cruel history; all the while many of the better-off Irish with whom the victims share nationality (if not much else) quietly look the other way. (O'Connor 2003: 19)

This article reflects the sad reality that both parties, the English colonisers and the Irish landowners, did nothing to remedy the situation of thousands of people who died of starvation or emigrated to the colonies in a desperate attempt to find a job to support their families. This attitude toward the dispossessed and migrant subjects is not uncommon in the aftermath of colonisation today. For the Irish survivors of the Famine and their descendants, the lack of funerals, the burials in mass graves of their relatives who died of starvation and the confinement of their family members in workhouses and soup kitchens constituted a shameful episode. The Irish also failed to help the abandoned victims, which was even more shocking (Fegan 2011: 324).

The lack of trustworthy accounts of Irish history is underlined in the narrative by the inclusion of one of the most popular forms of oral history: ballads. Ballads became the Irish means to say things that could not be uttered under a colonial

regime (Fegan 2011: 331). Pius Mulvey, one of the main characters in the story who assumes different identities, becomes a balladeer. Here is an example of one of the ballads he sings:

And if ever we take up the musket or sword,
It won't be for England, we swear the Lord.
For the freedom of Erin, we'll rise up our blade,
And cut off your head in the morning.
(O'Connor 2003: 103, emphasis in original)

Ballads are not reliable historical sources, and they merge Irish forms with English lyrics. According to O'Malley, there is no literary tradition about nineteenth-century Ireland regarding its divided political, religious and cultural colonial context (2015: 146), which makes it necessary to revise and re-write the Irish stories of the Great Famine. In O'Connor's words: "What has happened in Ireland is that we've had history as ballad, with good guys, bad guys, heroes and villains. History has been turned into narrative, that is, into a kind of fiction" (in Estévez Saá 2005: 166).

Star of the Sea is the story of a huge number of Irish migrants travelling from Liverpool to New York escaping the Famine. The vessel was one of the many so-called coffin ships that crossed the Atlantic. It left for New York on November 8, 1847, the first year of the Famine. Coffin ships can be defined as 'heterotopias' in the Foucauldian sense, that is, as "countersites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (Foucault 1986: 24). In other words, during a sea journey, people from different communities and cultures mix together, creating a new social space where all those cultures can be enacted outside their own realities. This allows for the inversion, contestation and representation of real cultural sites during the voyage, and for new identities to be created as a result of the experience. For Foucault, ships are the communities that can best represent heterotopias as vessels for the imagination. In this sense, coffin ships might be seen as semiotic systems within which images of the Famine and the Irish diaspora are incorporated; they are imagined Irish communities in which identity is negotiated halfway between the homeland and the new world. Coffin ships are also repositories of memory as encapsulated in the narratives of migration and death of many of the poor passengers, who were already infected with disease and had to face a journey of six or seven weeks below deck. Consequently, many Irish men and women, about thirty per cent of passengers on board these ships, lost their lives travelling to America and were buried in the Atlantic Ocean (Corporaal and Cusack 2011: 344). The Captain of Star of the Sea, Lockwood, keeps a register of the voyage's everyday happenings, together with the names and

causes of death of all the passengers who die on board, and whose bodies are dumped in the ocean. Most deaths happened among steerage passengers suffering from typhus, dysentry, scurvy or famine dropsy, and of course, hunger.

The passengers and the crew were classified in different groups and followed certain routines. In the Captain's words:

> We have thirty-seven crew, 4021/2 ordinary steerage passengers (a child being reckoned in the usual way as one half of one adult passenger) and fifteen in the First-Class quarters or superior staterooms. Among the latter: Earl David Merredith of Kingscourt and his wife the Countess, their children and an Irish maidservant. Mr. G.G. Dixon of the *New York Tribune*: a noted columnist and man of letters. Surgeon Wm. Mangan, M.D. of the Theatre of Anatomy, Peter Street, Dublin, accompanied by his sister, Mrs. Derrington, relict; His Imperial Highness, the potentate Maharajah Ranjitsinji, a princely personage of India; Reverend Henry Deeds, D.D., a Methodist Minister from Lyme Regis in England (upgraded); and various others. (O'Connor 2003: 3)

Although different ethnicities are together on the vessel, they never actually mix; separate communities that constitute a particular social group create their own sense of Irishness according to their values and principles distinct from external 'others'. A new Irish identity is built through its performance on the Atlantic crossing (Corporaal and Cusack 2011: 352-353). In this context, emigration can be identified with the destruction of previous social relations that occurred because of the travelling experience and the horrors of the Famine, together with a sense of dislocation that also characterises our contemporary global societies (Fegan 2011: 323). The priest is representative of the Irish Catholic identity, whereas the Indian prince stands as an example of the importance of Empire in a colonial setting; the Earl and his family represent Irish traditional society, whereas Mary Duane, the woman servant, represents the precarity of the Irish poor. Thus, the ocean and the ship become a political space where issues of Irish nationalism are discussed.

Elements of neo-Victorian and postcolonial Gothic can be discerned throughout the novel. The Gothic was a literary form that became especially popular at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. This genre celebrated "the irrational, the outlawed and the socially and culturally dispossessed" (Smith and Hughes 2003: 1). Thus, the Gothic and the postcolonial have in common their interest in contesting ideas about rationality promoted by the Enlightment which conceptualised the distinction between the human and the non-human. This conceptualisation was behind the racial hierarchies and the exclusion of 'otherness' that colonialism established. Gothic non-human figures like monsters or ghosts are created to defy the humanist discourse and serve to convey postcolonial ideas. Therefore, colonial binaries such as black/white,

savage/civilised or Orient/Occident that reflect the notion of other/self are challenged in postcolonial Gothic. In this way, fundamental aspects of the dominant culture are discussed, confirmed or interrogated in postcolonial Gothic fiction, questioning particular social, political or historical situations (Smith and Hughes 2003: 1-3). For neo-Victorianism, the Gothic represents notions of postmodern anxiety, excess, instability, hybridity and decline, which lead to the idea of 'otherness' (Kohlke and Gutleben 2012: 1).

Anxiety can be expressed in the dislocation between home and abroad, but it cannot be better represented than in the discomfort and dislocation that death brings. Death was the fate of many Irish who left their country seeking a better future and trying to leave devastation behind. This is the reason why

> [t]he collective memory of the Famine repeatedly approaches and draws back from images of corpses buried in canvas sacks rather than in coffins, of bodies left to rot in collapsing cabins, of bodies tumbled together in lime pits, of bodies left to rot along the roads, and, as the gathering figure for all those accounts of dead matter out of place, of bodies that either fester in the holds of the "coffin ships" that carried the Famine emigrants to the Americas or tumble from the decks of these vessels to the unplaceable deeps of the Atlantic Ocean. (Baucom 2000: 132)

As this fragment shows, the bodies of dead Irish migrants do not seem to deserve proper burial, nor public mourning. Gothic otherness can take many shapes, and neo-Victorianism is "*by nature quintessentially Gothic*: resurrecting the ghost(s) of the past, searching out its dark secrets and shameful mysteries, insisting obssessively on the lurid details of Victorian life, reliving the period's nightmares and traumas" (Kohlke and Gutleben 2012: 4, emphasis in original). The presence of the Gothic is abundant in the text, and the dead become protagonists in the account. Death itself is monstrous as illustrated by the following Gothic scene:

> The badly decayed remains of a youth and a girl were lying in the drainway; side by side, still enfolded in each other's embrace. Surgeon Mangan was called to pronounce death. The lad was about seventeen yrs; the girl perhaps fifteen. The girl had been several months with child. […] We took them out and gave them a Christian rite as best we could, but they had nothing at all by which we might even discover their names. […] Reverend Henry Deedes also assisted me and said a simple prayer. "That these children of God; of Ireland and England; each of whom was child of a mother, and each of whom was beloved of the other, may find their safe home in the arms of the Saviour". (O'Connor 2003: 278)

These two passengers, who happened to be stowaways, remind us of the fact that death makes us all equal, no matter our nationalities. Furthermore, this scene might be a reminder of the many people from underdeveloped countries who nowadays lose their lives in their attempt to reach the developed world. The representation of otherness in the current images of migrants trying to reach

Western European countries is shocking, and an example of contemporary dehumanization. According to Tabish Khair, "the Other is seen as a self waiting to be assimilated […] the Other is cast as the purely negative image of the European self" (2009: 4). Identity becomes essential in this equation, and the Gothic returns to haunt both England and the very notion of 'civilisation'. The aforementioned scene thus illustrates the monstrosity of the civilising mission and the brutality suffered by the Irish other as it evokes similarly devastating images in today's media.

The novel displays the Irish cultural trauma and shame of a humiliating past that always returns to provoke anxiety about the unburied dead of the Famine. The Famine is identified with the Ghost in the novel, a character that makes its appearance on board the ship so that "the stink had an almost corporeal presence; it felt like something you could grasp in gluey fistfuls. Rotten food, rotten flesh, rotten fruit of rotting vowels, you smelt it on your clothes, your hair, your hands; on the glass you drank from and the bread you ate" (O'Connor 2003: xv). O'Connor tries to bury the Famine dead and offer some apology and restitution to the survivors of forced migration and their descendants, thus turning this disaster into "a polymorphous spectral presence that resisted enclosure" (O'Malley 2015: 133).

4. Global Neo-Victorianism, Resistance and Healing

O'Connor's attempt to retrieve the Irish traumatic past is an example of the neo-Victorian duty to bear witness to suffering and the anxiety that this traumatic past generates. Healing can be achieved through trauma narratives that strive to reenact and express what the victims could not possibly articulate. Moreover, working through nineteenth-century traumas such as the Irish Famine can also help us to deal with our current wounds and pave the way for justice and reparation. Trauma and violence are omnipresent in today's mass media, which undoubtedly calls for political action, and the current traumatised subject of modernity in turn re-discovers itself in manifold nineteenth-century others like criminals, perverts, prostitutes, colonial subjects, etc. (Kohlke and Gutleben 2010: 2-9).

Parallels between American slavery and the Atlantic crossing can be drawn in the novel, as there is a clear association between African slaves and Irish migrants, both victims, although in different ways, of the British slave-trading colonial past (Corporaal and Cusack 2011: 347). Both black Africans and Catholic Irish were the victims of colonial oppression, as is clearly stated in the confrontation between the American journalist Dixon and the Anglo-Irish landlord Merridith:

> "My grandfather was an opponent of slavery all his life. *Do you hear me*?"
> "*Did he rid himself of the lands which slavery purchased from his ancestors*? Give back his inheritance to the children of those who made it? Live as a pauper to ease his conscience or the coffee-house pretensions of his mewling grandson? Who is so deeply ashamed of what pays for his vittels that he *aches* to find greater atrocities in the accounts of others".
> "*Merridith*— "
> "*My* father fought in the wars that ended slavery throughout the empire. Risked his life. Wounded twice. Proudest thing he ever did. Didn't ponce on about it, just bloody did it. My mother saved thousands from starvation and death. While your servants were calling you 'Little White Massa'". (O'Connor 2003: 134, emphasis in the original)

Merridith defended himself and his ancestors as an advocate of the end of slavery in his confrontation with Dixon, in contrast with Dixon's position and that of his family towards colonialism. The Irish were victims of English colonial oppression before leaving their country for a new life in America, and subsequently they were also victims of violence when they settled in North America; negative stereotypes about them limited their success in their new country (Corporaal and Cusack 2011: 349). At the end of the nineteenth century three million Irish immigrants were living in North America, thirty-nine per cent of whom had been born in Ireland. Nowadays, forty million Americans have Irish ancestors from the time of the Famine (Estévez Saa 2005: 165). This explains why global issues have become so important for the postcolonial neo-Victorian project, which aims to give voice to the subaltern and the other; also, to heal the trauma of colonial atrocities committed in the Victorian past.

Neo-Victorianism has recently moved from the boundaries of the UK to the colonial geographies of Empire. Neo-Victorian imaginations of Empire have thus acquired a distinct global character in keeping with contemporary new forms of imperialism. Traditionally, history has been made up of a series of historical narratives with a mostly national perspective. Through a global history of the present, neo-Victorian modes of commemoration can be discerned, but this change to the global entails the risk of imposing collective memory over cultural specificity (Llewellyn and Heilmann 2013: 29-30). In this sense, postcolonial neo-Victorianism can be identified as part of a global project to re-write the history of the British colonial past. As Cora Kaplan affirms, we are currently involved in a debate about "historical memory and the direction of the political future in which we, as readers and citizens, do have a voice and a role to play" (2007: 162). We must move beyond Western and Anglophone stances to encompass a plurality of attitudes, contexts and mindsets; global exchanges include the dissemination of cultural products, and neo-Victorian literature is accessed by a global audience via digital media and the Internet. Therefore, neo-Victorianism can rely on a variety of historical and geographical perspectives to

analyse Victorian legacies like those of Empire (Primorac and Pietrzak-Franger 2015: 4-9), in such a way that the study of the past can throw some light on the present. As Said argues:

> Appeals to the past are among the commonest strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions —about influence, about blame and judgement, about present actualities and future priorities. (1994: 1)

This is clearly the message put forward by *Star of the Sea*: we must learn from past errors to build a better future. However, new forms of imperialism are taking the upper hand. This is the reason why Hardt and Negri talk about globalisation in terms of a new empire:

> War, suffering, misery, and exploitation increasingly characterise our globalising world. There are so many reasons to seek refuge in a realm "outside", some place separate from the discipline and control of today's emerging Empire or even some transcendent or transcendental principles and values that can guide our lives and ground our political action. One primary effect of globalisation, however, is the creation of a common world, a world that, for better or worse, we all share, a world that has no "outside". (2009: vii)

The same horrors that characterised Empire and colonialism in the past can be found in our current cultures and a new form of Empire is determining our globalised societies. The ship is a microcosm that represents a common globalised world. Many of the characters in the novel are victims of suffering, misery and exploitation. In particular, Mary Duane of Connemara, the Merridiths' maidservant, symbolises extreme vulnerability while simultaneously showing resistance to adversity. She was Merridith's first love and, after his desertion, she got pregnant by her second lover, Pius Mulvey. She was once again abandoned and became a fallen woman, but eventually married her seducer's brother, Nicholas Mulvey, who took care of the child. Both her husband and her little daughter died of starvation, and there was no other way for her to survive than becoming a prostitute in Dublin. Then, she decided to leave Ireland for America to start a new life and leave poverty behind:

> Three hundred miles north-west of the point where he was standing, a woman was passing a milestone for Chapelizod. She was hungry, this idle tramp. […] Her feet were bleeding badly and her legs were very weak. Not so long beforehand, she had given birth in a field; but the ratepayer would not be burdened by having to keep the child alive. […] On the sea must be a ship that could take her to Liverpool. Glasgow or Liverpool. It did not really matter. All that mattered now was to stay on her mangled feet. […] Her name would not be mentioned in the House that sunny evening; nor in *The Times* for the following day. (O'Connor 2003: 256)

Mary's precarious life is valueless for both English and Irish people in positions of power. Nonetheless, as Butler claims, "there is plural and performative bodily resistance at work that shows how bodies are being enacted on by social and economic policies that are decimating livelihoods" (2016: 15). Moreover, "these bodies, in showing this precarity, are also resisting those very powers; they enact a form of resistance that presupposes vulnerability of a specific kind, and opposes precarity" (2016: 15). This is the case of Mary, whose endurance and agency enable her survival. Sarah Bracke's definition of resistance "characterised as the ability of something or someone to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, pressed, or bent" (2016: 54) becomes essential to my analysis. Resistance leads to resilience, and subjects who are victims of trauma and violence often want to preserve their subjectivities and identities through "denial of vulnerability" and "a disidentification with dependence", that is, choosing and advocating agency (Bracke 2016: 59).

Verbalising her trauma allows Mary to work it through, as when she talks about her tragedy in front of Captain Lockwood and his men so that her seducer can be prosecuted:

> _everything said by the people about p**s M***** is true. i denounce him as a land robber, a seducer and a blackguard. he is after harryin his own brother and my only child into a grave and i would like something done on him by you and yeer men._ (O'Connor 2003: 275, emphasis in original)

In this quote, the reader can hear Mary's voice —the voice of a poor Irish woman— in her attempt to denounce the violence and suffering inflicted on her and her child by a particular man, Pius Mulvey. She accuses him of crimes connected with seduction and robbery and wants him to be condemned for his actions. O'Connor tries to convey her sense of dislocation by using italics to express her anger and anxiety. However, telling her story can also be curative.

Narratives of healing become essential to cure cultural trauma like that resulting from the Irish history of suffering. A narrative can be a source of consolation, as when Mary talks about the death of her child and many other children, also victims of the situation in Ireland:

> she wept that night on the *Star of the Sea*, as perhaps only the mother of a murdered child can weep. Nobody ever drew Alice-Mary Duane, whose ruined father snuffed out her agonised life. Her mother wept as she uttered her name. 'Like a prayer', as many of the witnesses said.
>
> And as the name was uttered, some began to pray; and others began to weep in sympathy. And others again who had lost children of their own began to utter their children's names. As though the act of saying their names —the act of saying they ever had names— was to speak the only prayer that can ever begin to matter in a world that turns its eyes from the hungry and the dying. (O'Connor 2003: 374)

As this quotation shows, children are particularly vulnerable since they are often victims of poverty. The novel makes a plea for empathy, social justice and political action to protect victims of famine of all periods and in all parts of the world. As is well known, it is the world economy, and not food scarcity, that is responsible for hunger and poverty. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), almost one billion people suffer from chronic hunger, almost two billion are under- or over-nourished, and nearly five million children die every year due to poor nutrition (Elver 2015). Like the victims of the Irish Famine, many people today are hungry, which leads them to become migrants desperately searching for a better life for themselves and their families. In his novel, O'Connor subtly connects the period of the Irish Famine with the current situation of Ireland as a destination country for refugees escaping poverty, war and violence.

The passengers on the Star of the Sea were treated as refugees upon their arrival in New York. Steerage and first-class passengers alike were denied entry and, to make matters worse, had to remain isolated in quarantine. Disease and hunger were widespread, and their condition became extreme:

> Significant number (about twenty-five several infants among them) in most urgent need of hospitalisation. [...] Everyone I saw showing symptoms of gross malnutrition and badly underweight, some dangerously so. [...] Very poor supply of clean blankets. No safe, clean place to store or cook whatever food they have taken on themselves. No safe, clean place for personal cleanliness and necessary matters. No privacy whatsoever, a matter of obvious distress particularly to the women. Steerage cabin very dark and devoid of clean air. (O'Connor 2003: 342-343)

As can be seen, the conditions on the ship were inhuman for the passengers on board: disease, hunger and dirt were all around. As a result, some steerage passengers were prompted to rebellion, and the Captain had to adopt more strict rules to govern the ship. Groups of Irish people already living in New York approached the vessel to see if some of the relatives they were expecting were on board and called out their names. Some desperate passengers, mainly women and children, tried to leave the ship on the lifeboats, and others jumped overboard, losing their lives in the cold water. A total of ninety-five deaths were counted at the end of the journey. Situations like this have become quite familiar to contemporary readers. Unaccompanied minors from places such as Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Libya, Morocco, Georgia, Iran and Sudan come to Ireland "seeking protection from conflict, persecution or serious harm, or to reunite with family" (Pollak 2018).

Ireland has become a destination country for many migrants nowadays, mainly due to the prosperity that the Celtic Tiger period brought to the country and to Ireland's belonging to the European Union. The experience of famine, dislocation,

and anxiety that shapes the lives of all these migrants and refugees should prompt Irish postcolonial society to give them shelter and hospitality. This could be a way to commemorate and remember the former Irish tragedy in a globalised world (O'Malley 2015: 151-152). However, this is not always the case because, as Fegan contends, the story of the Irish Famine repeats itself and has "been transferred to more vulnerable internal and external others" in contemporary "multicultural" Ireland (2011: 340) as Irish people do not always give shelter to migrants. In this sense, O'Connor invites his readers to become aware of the fallacy of portraying the Western world as progressive and morally superior to the rest. He affirms that writing a novel is not only at the service of art and beauty but should also be an attempt to change the world (in Estévez Saá 2005: 173, 175). This idea is in keeping with one of the aims of neo-Victorian fiction to echo the reflection of contemporary traumas in the Victorian past because, as O'Connor states:

> Many years have passed but some things have not changed. We still tell each other that we are lucky to be alive, when our being alive has almost nothing to do with luck, but with geography, pigmentation and international exchange rates. Perhaps this new century will see a dispensation, or perhaps we will continue to allow the starvation of the luckless, and continue to call it an accident, not a working-out logic. (2003: 386)

As we can see, things have not changed much since colonial times. However, many Irish finally settled in North America and left a life of hardship, suffering and precarity behind. They endured and contributed to the building of a nation which has paradoxically become an imperial power. Nonetheless, as O'Connor affirms, there are still many victims of hunger and dispossession who need the empathy and support of the 'civilised' world to survive.

5. Conclusion

After having analysed different aspects of the fictionalised history of the Irish Famine as embodied by the characters travelling on board the coffin ship Star of the Sea, we can conclude that this neo-Victorian novel deals with past and current issues associated with identity, migration, vulnerability and precarity of the colonial and postcolonial other. The narrative also upholds agency and endurance as the best means to work through trauma and survive. Coffin ships are presented as repositories of memory, as transformative spaces where the Irish identity and, by extension, the migrant identity of transported people become transnational and testify to the need to retrieve cultural memory and rewrite history. The ethics of justice allow us to connect the related traumas of the Irish past with many present-day conflicts. Colonial and postcolonial ideas about the

sea allow contemporary sea narratives in a global world to establish a dialogue between the past and the present. Ho's notion of 'the neo-victorian-at-sea' becomes essential for the analysis of the novel in that it creates a global memory of the Victorian Empire associated with sea travel and its implications of transnationality and globalisation. The British Empire becomes the epitome of disease and disorder, and this image can be extrapolated to contemporary forms of imperialism as put forward by Hardt and Negri's concept of New Imperialism. Postcolonial theory becomes an approach to historical memory that denounces long-silenced imperial atrocities, and this neo-Victorian endeavour strives to fill in the gaps of an incomplete archive.

The dead are conspicuously present throughout the novel, which gives it a Gothic touch. We can argue that their spectral presence, like that of the Famine, turns the transnational present into another version of the cruel Victorian past. Although millions of Irish people died, both in their country at the time of the potato disease and during their journey to the new world, many of them testify to a history of survival and resistance, despite their former precarious and vulnerable condition. This was the case of Mary Duane: just as she managed to work through her trauma by articulating it into a trauma narrative, O'Connor writes his fiction to make readers learn from the errors of the past and thus pave the way for a better future.

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Reviews

LA TRANSFERENCIA LINGÜÍSTICA: PERSPECTIVAS ACTUALES

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Although language transfer is not a frequently discussed topic, it attracted the interest of researchers even before the 20th century. Attention to the phenomenon intensified in the mid-20th century when authors such as Fries (1945) identified the role of L1 in learning second languages. Since then, the concept of transfer has been explored in relation to different theoretical perspectives, currents of thought, and teaching methodologies (Odlin 1989; Gass and Selinker 1992). This polyhedral concept is presented in a recent work by Rosa Alonso Alonso, professor and researcher at the University of Vigo (Spain), who works in the field of language acquisition and applied linguistics. She specializes in the role that languages play in the learning of other languages. In this work, published in the "Interlingua" collection by Editorial Comares, the aim is not to provide new perspectives on the subject but rather to offer a global overview of the concept for those, especially students, who do not have sufficient command of English to access the vast literature on the subject. This ambitious project condenses a diachronic and synchronic review of the most important internationally published works on the subject in roughly 120 pages. It also aims to fill a gap in the literature, since there have been no previous studies of this nature in Spanish.

The first chapter offers a historical review of the concept of transfer. It explains where we come from and where we are going and shows why transfer is regarded

today as beneficial for language learning. It concentrates on the major trends —generativism, cognitive perspective, interlanguage, etc.— based on which a theoretical and applied approach is used. The presentation of theories helps to explain how some currents are informed by others and how the concepts associated with transfer are interwoven. Since the text has a strong pedagogical focus, it contains graphics (too few, perhaps), definitions of concepts, conclusions, and a collection of effective examples that help the reader to understand the theories. However, readers of this text, who are likely to be primarily neophytes in the subject, may be overwhelmed by so many new and complex concepts. The chapter ends with the idea that transference and fossilization were the greatest achievements of the previously mentioned trends.

In order to better understand the concept of transfer, all of its various characteristics are considered in Chapter 2. The 1990s were the key period for the study of the relationship between language and cognition. The concepts derived from this relationship and presented in this section include directionality, positive and negative transfer, transferability, rhythm and route, linearity, perception and production, etc. Each section starts with key authors, presents examples and ideas, and formulates questions yet to be answered. The main objective is to demonstrate that interlinguistic influence is a complex phenomenon determined by multiple variables (age, mother tongue, context, etc.). At all times the author tries to elucidate —albeit with varying success— the relations between these ideas and the theoretical advances discussed in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 3, the author highlights the absence of shared ideas among current theoretical models. This chapter offers a detailed description of the current fundamental theories: the inhibitory control model (Green 1986), the competition model and the unified model (MacWhinney 1987), the generativist universal models, and finally linguistic relativism beyond the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Carroll 1956). The examples provided are not only linked to adulthood (see p. 45), and the concept of transfer is always approached from an interdisciplinary perspective. Moreover, the author extensively explains the transfers that occur at the conceptual level and investigates the mental representations that flow between L1 and L2 (Jarvis 2007).

Chapter 4 focuses on new technologies and innovative data-collection procedures. This chapter discusses a new stage in studies of language transfer, placing emphasis on the importance of nonverbal communication and new technologies (magnetic resonances, eye tracking, etc.). Although traditional tools used in the field of transfer studies (grammatical judgments, discourse analysis, etc.) are ignored, these tools could be very useful for potential studies proposed by the author throughout the work, which include longitudinal ones. This is especially

important bearing in mind that this work is intended for those with no expertise in the field.

Chapter 5 defines the concept of transfer using the language acquisition approach. Specifically, it addresses the contemporary multilingual reality that introduces new aspects into the paradigm. The author mentions the importance of an in-depth analysis of L3 acquisition models: prediction models, empirical models, and linguistic processing models. However, it is explained that despite the differences between them, all these models have proven the influence of languages other than L1 on language learning. Again, concrete examples from a variety of languages help to explain these phenomena and identify future lines of action.

Chapter 6 follows on from the ideas discussed in Chapter 4 and deals with the following three topics: the use of L1 in the classroom, various approaches to teaching and classroom activities, and native and nonnative teachers. It is surprising, however, that the *Common European Framework* (Council of Europe 2001) is not mentioned until this chapter despite the fact that the concept of transfer is central to the Framework and that the document helped to generate the concept of transfer as it is used today. Neither is there any mention of socio-constructivism, which is the basis for the models of language teaching (L2, L3, Ln) most widespread in the West today, and in which transfer is a key element. Finally, after emphasizing the need to break the myth that native speakers are better language teachers, in Section 6.3 the author goes on to describe the Integrated Multilingual Approach. The description of this new approach is superficial, not effectively linked to the communicative approach, and is only contextualized in Catalonia. In light of this, it should be emphasized that the Integrated Plurilingual Approach, or Integrated Language Treatment ("Tratamiento Integrado de Lenguas"), is the educational model in force in the Basque Autonomous Community (Gobierno Vasco 2020) and aims at creating synergies between school subjects so that transfer between languages can be facilitated. The model therefore represents a whole curricular revolution that is already being applied in different contexts. Since the book deals with current perspectives, it would have been interesting to delve into this topic further.

All in all, *La transferencia lingüística: perspectivas actuales* is a highly informative treatise, aimed at those who wish to discover the world of transfer and obtain clues on what to read, how to research, or how to teach. In addition, it is a rich source of ideas about the questions that remain open and that can stimulate readers to continue exploring the research field of linguistic transfer.

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CORPUS-BASED RESEARCH ON VARIATION IN ENGLISH LEGAL DISCOURSE

Teresa Fanego and Paula Rodríguez-Puente, eds.
Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2019

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Corpus-based Research on Variation in English Legal Discourse is a collection of chapters that aim to examine and summarise the great range of research on legal discourse undertaken over the past 30 years. As explained in the introduction (Chapter 1), the main interest of the editors, Teresa Fanego and Paula Rodríguez-Puente, is the synergy of forensic linguistics with register analysis, register variation and historical pragmatics. The introduction offers an in-depth exploration of forensic linguistics, highlighting its main aims and its strict relationship to corpus-based methods, followed by an overview of the most renowned contributions to register analysis and variation (Biber 1988; Bhatia 1993; Šarčević 1997), as well as of the main features of historical pragmatics. Finally, the introduction provides an overview of the volume and the chapters included in it. The book comprises two sections: the first is dedicated to the synchronic approximation of legal language, sub-divided into chapters on cross-linguistic and cross-genre studies, and the second focuses on diachronic studies. The editors explain that this organisation permits the representation of each of the four trajectories into which, according to Łucja Biel, corpus-based research on legal language can be classified: external, internal, temporal, and cross-linguistic variation (2010: 10).

Due to its prominence in the area, *Corpus-based Research on Variation in English Legal Discourse* has already been reviewed by several scholars (Feng 2019; Xin and

Wang 2019; Han 2020; Williams 2020), each of whom is as concerned as the editors with classifying the collected contributions. Feng (2019) divides the chapters into three groups according to the data-analysis techniques adopted by the editors: descriptive, predictive and prescriptive. Xin and Wang (2019) follow the four trajectories proposed by Biel (2010), whereas Williams (2020) and Han (2020) maintain the division into synchronic and diachronic studies by describing the 11 chapters according to their order of appearance in the book. Considering the great variety that characterizes the volume, whose contributions in some cases offer interesting results in both synchronic and diachronic terms, the present review will follow yet another order. According to the disciplinary perspective from which the collected contributions approach legal language variation, the 11 chapters will be divided into five groups representing linguistic, pragmatic, rhetorical, functional and social perspectives.

Chapters 2, 4, and 7 start from the linguistic prism to analyse the specific features or general tendencies of a particular legal subgenre. Giuliana Diani (Chapter 2) performs a cross-linguistic analysis of land contracts. After studying the distinctive textual and linguistic features of these contracts in American English and Italian texts, the author concludes that the legal register presents a similar macrostructure in both languages but with different punctuation and linguistic resources. Land contracts share similarities in both languages with regard to the scarce use of pronouns, the abundance of long and complex sentences, hypotactic structures, and anaphors, but they differ in their expressions of modality: American English texts show a preference for deontic modals (expressing obligation, prohibition and permission) that result in a greater use of collocations and formulaic expressions, whereas Italian texts display a tendency for the "normative indicative" (Šarčević 1997: 138-140) —i.e. simple present indicative with a clear prescriptive function, as in "*Il venditore* […] si impegna *a cedere la stessa libera da oneri iscrizioni ipotecarie* 'The seller […] *agrees* to assign the same free of charge mortgage registrations'" (43, emphasis added)— and "deontically-charged nominals" —such as *diritto* 'right', *obbligo* 'duty', or *carico* 'responsibility' (44)— and hence greater variation. Ruth Breeze (Chapter 4) aims to identify similarities and differences across four legal genres, contrasting their parts of speech patterns with the British National Corpus (BNC). Specifically, the selected documents represent four different genres from the broad area of commercial law: legal academic writing in the form of research or opinion articles; judgments and opinions from courts of higher instance in the UK and USA; documents from business law, including different types of contracts and agreements; and legislation relating to commercial law, in the form of the Companies Act 2006 (UK) and the Model Business Corporation Act 2005 (USA). The results reveal two main trends: on the one hand, academic articles,

judgments and opinions are characterised by complex sentences and, on the other hand, legal documents and laws are marked by passive constructions and elliptical relative clauses. In Chapter 7, Douglas Biber and Bethany Grey diachronically compare law reports with non-legal registers (fiction, newspaper articles and science research articles) in terms of their use of colloquial linguistic features (popularisation) and phrasal complexity (economy). In particular, the authors focus on the similarity of the register of law reports with that of academic writing, due to the formal and dense style shared by both registers. However, while academic writing has changed dramatically over time, law reports have undergone a perceptible but very limited diachronic change resulting from an increase in phrasal complexity features, such as phrasal modifiers, and in the use of some features related to traditional literate discourse, like relative clauses, noun complement clauses and nominalizations.

From a more pragmatic perspective, Chapters 6 and 8 focus on subjectivity and interpersonality. As Stanisław Goźdź-Roszkowski states in Chapter 6, "[a]ccording to a stereotypical and somewhat idealized perception of legal discourse, there should be no need for stance expressions" (123), as the register should be completely objective without any kind of emotive or opinion expressions. To provide a contrast to this general idea, Goźdź-Roszkowski explores the relationships between stance, discipline, and genre, regarding 'noun-that' constructions (e.g. 'the fact that') as a productive resource to express evaluation and comparing the use of these constructions in academic journals and judicial opinions. In most cases, the constructions examined include epistemic nouns used to express certainty (e.g. 'assertion', 'conclusion', or 'knowledge', mostly in academic journals) and likelihood (e.g. 'argument', 'idea', 'impression', or 'possibility', mostly in judicial opinions), demonstrating the importance of expressing stance in legal texts. In chapter 8, Paula Rodríguez-Puente describes the evolution of law reports between the 16th and 20th centuries in contrast to developments in other legal subgenres (i.e. parliamentary acts, proclamations, and statutes) in the same period. Specifically, Rodríguez-Puente discusses the presence and function of nominative, accusative, genitive and reflexive pronouns across the examined subgenres. Again, the study demonstrates the existence of authors' presence in law reports, hybrid texts that present both subjective and objective linguistic features.

Using a rhetorical approach, Nicholas Groom and Jack Grieve (Chapter 9) examine the types and sequences of rhetorical moves in a set of patent specifications over 150 years (1711-1860) to corroborate the three conditions underlying the evolutionary theory of genre change: variation, reproduction, and selection. The fulfilment of all three conditions offers the authors the chance to reflect on the

paradoxical character of textual genres, which represent normative stable conventions (i.e. the reproductive aspect) but which are, at the same time, affected by continuous diachronic changes (i.e. variation and selection).

Chapters 3 and 5 examine courtroom discourse from a functional perspective. Cristina Lastres-López (Chapter 3) focuses on the function of 'if-conditionals', comparing courtroom and parliamentary discourse in English, French and Spanish. Following a cognitive-functional approach based on Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) metafunctions, the author shows that in all the analysed languages and contexts, conditionality is mainly used with an ideational normative function to explain the conditions under which an action is performed. In Chapter 5, Randi Reppen and Meishan Chen depart from a previous study conducted by Culpeper and Kytö (2010) to explore the variation over time (Modern versus Contemporary English), across subregisters (dividing each courtroom discourse into four sections, representing the different stages of the trial and their respective functions), and across diatopic varieties (British versus American English) of three-word lexical bundles in spoken courtroom language, such as 'in this case', 'at that point', or 'evidence will show'. The several similarities identified across time and subregisters demonstrate the complementary nature of the different stages of the trial, each with its own functions but sharing a common purpose.

Finally, Chapters 10 and 11 consider the social representation that arises from legal texts. Anu Lehto (Chapter 10) examines the evolution of the representation of citizens and the monarchy in British Acts of Parliament from the 19th to the 20th century, analysing the semantic preferences and prosodies of the collocates of each social group. The results show that in the passage from a more traditional monarchy to the modern nation-state, citizens' social and political prominence (and collocates) augments and their depiction, which was initially focused on crimes and punishments, changed gradually towards an increasing interest in their rights and wellbeing. From the same perspective, Claudia Claridge (Chapter 11) analyses the evolution of the representation of drunkenness in courtroom discourse from the 17th to the 20th century. Drunkenness seems to have been used as a negotiation tactic within courtrooms, used by defendants to reduce citizens' legal responsibility and by judges as a cause for blame. Moreover, the diachronic interpretation of the results further emphasises the relationship between legal discourse and socio-political transformations, showing how references to drunkenness changed across the four centuries analysed according to changing social attitudes to alcohol consumption: from its 17th-century acceptance as a common activity in any social group to its moral condemnation during the Victorian era. The variations examined in Chapters 10 and 11 indicate the necessary correlation between legal language and society, underlined by the

change in the former in relation to the social roles of the participants and the socio-political tendencies of any given period.

The emphasis on the practical implications of legal language in the real world and on the strict relationship between language and law (Schane 2006) is another main strength of the volume, which clearly displays the mutual influence of linguistic, political and social aspects within legal discourse. Such a correlation between language and either specific or general human phenomena is demonstrated in each chapter of the book. Thus, for example, Chapter 5 shows how the different stages and goals of a trial are reflected in courtroom language; Chapter 6 demonstrates how language is affected by the necessary subjectivity of human nature, which leaves its trace even in legal texts that are supposedly objective and free of opinions; Chapter 7 describes the effect of the progressive democratisation of legal processes and institutions on the increase in colloquial linguistic features in law reports; and Chapters 10 and 11 explicitly demonstrate the influence of social perceptions on the linguistic representation of social groups.

In conclusion, one of the most valuable features of the volume is indeed its great variety. *Corpus-based Research on Variation in English Legal Discourse* offers multiple visions of the current state of legal corpus linguistics research on variation in the English language, presenting some of the various methods, topics, subgenres and perspectives from which it can be approached as well as some of its main social and political implications. On the one hand, such ample variety, which represents the expansiveness of the legal language field, makes the volume a valuable reference for students, scholars and professionals of both Linguistics and Law, who can find in its pages valuable contributions to the main aspects of the English legal register and its variation. The volume also provides some inspiration for further studies and useful data about a wide range of methodological resources for their realisation, including analytical techniques and specialised corpora and tools. On the other hand, the variety of aspects dealt with in the volume is also the source of its main limitation: it attempts to cover an area of study which is perhaps too wide to be presented in a single book and offers only a superficial overview of the discipline, prioritising the variety of the themes over their in-depth analysis. Similarly, such great variety hinders the organization of the volume, making it difficult to follow a rigorous classification, as demonstrated by the chapters which could have been included in any of the sections (e.g. Chapter 5). In fact, even if the case studies share a common methodological corpus-based approach, each one focuses on specific registers or subgenres, analysing different features and adopting diverse perspectives rather than contributing to the exhaustive examination of a specific aspect of the variation affecting legal discourse.

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DOCUMENTACIÓN DIGITAL Y LÉXICO EN LA TRADUCCIÓN E INTERPRETACIÓN EN LOS SERVICIOS PÚBLICOS (TISP): FUNDAMENTOS TEÓRICOS Y PRÁCTICOS
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Public service interpretation and translation (PSIT) has been attracting more and more attention as a field of study in the last few decades. This has contributed to a growing amount of scholarly research (cf. Hale 2007; Mikkelson 2017) and the creation of programmes within higher education studies aimed at preparing informed professionals (Valero-Garcés 2019). The book submitted for review is about digital documentation for the purposes of PSIT, representing a useful addition to the literature on the latest trends within the field. The topic falls within the framework of translation and interpreting in various settings where two languages, two cultures and two different viewpoints meet and interact. It relates to new technologies used by public service interpreters and translators as tools for creating glossaries and advanced lexical databases as well as for post-editing machine translation.

The main body of the publication is divided into four chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusions section. Moreover, the book contains references, an index of charts (179) and an index of tables (181), which help organize the text and navigate its content.

In the introduction, the author underlines the importance of public service translation and interpreting and of raising awareness among (prospective) practitioners of the successive stages of the translation and interpreting process. Moreover, the introduction includes short descriptions of the content of the

individual chapters and, interestingly, a separate paragraph concerning the bibliography in which the author justifies the selection of publications included in her book. Such a justification could be a regular component of monographs, whose authors cannot carry out an all-encompassing and updated literature review on the topic in question, due to the mere impossibility of reviewing all previously published sources and because of the sometimes long publishing process. In addition, it has the potential to act as an apology to those scholars who might feel offended by not being included in an extensive literature review.

Chapter 1 is a literature review relating to concepts and definitions of PSIT, with special attention paid to its development and evolution within university studies in Spain. The author lists the following features of PSIT as distinct from other modalities of interpreting and translation: a knowledge of both source and target language and culture, the scarce recognition of the profession, and the fact that it exceeds the borders of mere translation and/or interpreting by assuming responsibility for coordinating the transfer between two languages and two cultures. Although the author focuses on the situation of PSIT in Spain, the three above-mentioned characteristics are universal. For example, in Poland the recognition of the profession in terms of gaining a position and reputation in the market is still low despite the existence of the Act on the Profession of the Sworn Translator of 25 November 2004, which is binding upon PSIT practitioners who render their services for the courts, public prosecutors, the police and public administration bodies (cf. Biernacka 2019: 41-42). Chapter 1 also discusses a teaching programme successfully implemented at the University of Alcalá, Spain, aimed at preparing specialists in the field of PSIT. Due to the fact that training for the purposes of PSIT is of vital importance for many countries worldwide, a detailed description of the original programme can be appreciated not only from a theoretical but also from a practical point of view. In other words, by including this information, the author both satisfies the needs of researchers in PSIT involved in an academic discussion of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and attitudes) included in such programmes and provides guidelines for other universities which may now be considering the introduction of a similar training programme.

The aim of Chapter 2 is to contextualize the lexis within translator competence models. The author points out that linguistic and documentary needs are of prime importance among those reported by public service interpreters and translators (27) and this is a point of departure for the study as a whole presented in the book. To support this statement, the author elaborates on various approaches to a definition of translation competence and, in particular, on a communicative approach as occupying an important place in PSIT. She then moves on to discuss different models of translation competence. Finally, and most importantly, the

author indicates that technology is, according to the EMT Competence Framework (2017: 4), one of the five main areas of translation competence. This last part is particularly interesting. It confirms that the approach adopted by PSIT training programmes should rely on the assumption that the candidates for the profession, their trainers, as well as the practitioners, are fully computer-literate and that they are capable of using new technologies to retrieve information, create digital documentation and translate texts.

Chapter 3 highlights the importance of lexical competence in the teaching of translation. This provides food for thought for public service interpreter and translator teachers who may wrongly assume that the knowledge of technical terms comes in passing and naturally. The author shows that the contrary is true. First, it is stated that the lexis used for PSIT purposes can be considered within such fields of studies as discourse analysis and second language learning. Afterwards, the author discusses translation teaching models and the way they address the lexis. The lexis is considered as one of the stages of approaching the source text, as a means to discover the social condition of the interlocutor, as an element of knowledge of the target culture and as one of the translator's general objectives (87). Finally, the author presents and discusses her proposal for the development of lexical competence in PSIT, which comprises three components: a knowledge of the structure and functioning of lexical systems in both the source and target languages, a knowledge of the use of these systems for the purposes of text comprehension and production, and a knowledge of mechanisms of adapting the lexis to the cultural context of the source and target languages (103). The main objective of the model is to facilitate and enhance the learning of the lexis within PSIT academic programmes.

Chapter 4 discusses the use of electronic dictionaries, corpora, matching programmes, machine translation and post-editing tools. This is based on the assumption that, as stated in the EMT Competence Framework, the ability to "[e]valuate the relevance and reliability of information sources" (2017: 8) and to then correctly classify and archive documents is key to interpreting and translation processes. Furthermore, the author rightly observes that the information obtained from documents is of linguistic (i.e. terminological and phraseological), thematic (specialized), textual (related to the existence of a variety of texts with which the translator copes) and cultural (communicative) character (118-119). In addition, the author lists the competences which a public service translator and interpreter should possess. It would have been relevant to discuss these competences against the background of earlier sets of competences in PSIT, for example the one proposed by Hertog (2016). Furthermore, the author indicates the quality of translation as being the objective pursued by public service interpreters and

translators. The chapter ends with a test verifying the quality of machine translations from English into Spanish of a medical text made with the free DeepL and SYSTRANet online translators (153-155). The source text and the two target texts are transparently presented, but the lack of a comparative analysis of these three texts by the author is disappointing. Presumably, the author intended to only give an idea of how the two tools work; however, leaving the reader without any explanation is somewhat unsatisfactory and creates a need for resorting to other —non-academic— sources which offer similar presentations accompanied by expert opinions on the quality of the translation (cf. Rubio 2020).

The conclusions are very short and comprise a review of the main issues discussed in the book. They refer back to the main aim of the book, which, in general, is to shed light on the necessity of including new technologies in PSIT in terms of training candidates for the profession and its practice by interpreters and translators.

The references comprise 289 items published between 1961 and 2019. The list is impressively extensive, and the publication can thus be considered as a serious source of knowledge of PSIT and a reference point for further research in the field.

To sum up, the book can be recommended as a source of knowledge about PSIT and the potential of new technologies to serve as useful tools for public service interpreters and translators. However, the publication is not free of minor shortcomings. One of them is the lack of a clearly identifiable empirical part which, based on an analysis of particular examples, could have shown in what way the new technologies presented in Chapter 4 contribute to the digitalization of documentation for the purposes of PSIT. This would have been of particular interest not only for scholars but also for prospective users of digital documentation tools. Another drawback is that the author emphasizes translation while interpreting is referred to only because PSIT covers both. As far as the strengths are concerned, the book includes a solid and comprehensive literature review on PSIT and thus can be a reference in itself. Moreover, it certainly contributes to the development of research into PSIT in that it presents this particular type of translation and interpreting as an object of interest for new technologies, which are usually considered as tools applied in specialized (but not public service) translation and conference interpreting. In other words, the author demystifies digital documentation and successfully shows that public service interpreters and translators have the potential to be rightful users of such tools as digital databases, corpora, machine translation and post-editing. Furthermore, apart from the valuable content offering a meticulous literature review and indicating the importance of digitalization of the work of public service interpreters and translators, the language of the publication needs to be stressed; the book is written in Spanish, which is added value. In a world where a large majority of

academic writings are published in English as a lingua franca, it is a real scholarly *fiesta* to come up with such an important book in a different language. In addition, from this reviewer's point of view, whose mother tongue is Polish, it is an important issue not only because of the author's obvious contribution to spreading knowledge in a language other than English but also for *technical* reasons. The scholars involved in pedagogical activities are now able to refer their students —with Spanish as a second or third language— to such publications also as a source of language input of the highest possible quality. And last but not least, I would like to express my own words of appreciation as a sworn translator and interpreter, conference interpreter, and legal translator of Spanish, as well as to emphasize, on behalf of the translation and interpreting community, that we look forward to further scholarly research in this field. All in all, the book is a useful source of knowledge for various stakeholders: scholars researching the field of PSIT, students willing to explore past, present and future perspectives of PSIT as a field of study, translators and interpreters who would like to catch up with state-of-the-art knowledge of new technologies as applied to PSIT, as well as university decision-makers interested in introducing PSIT as a necessary teaching programme reflecting current social and academic trends.

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ETHICS AND AESTHETICS IN TONI MORRISON'S FICTION

Mariangela Palladino

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This volume is an interesting addition to the scholarship on the novels of Toni Morrison, the 1993 Nobel Prize winner and a key African American writer. Palladino's book takes into account previous criticism on Morrison's fiction and examines the role that ethics and aesthetics play in the second phase of her career, i.e. in the novels *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1997) and *Love* (2003). Palladino explains that by aesthetics she means the "representation of human emotions in the arts" (19), particularly in literature. She clarifies that by "examining ethics" she refers to observing discourse, the linguistic contexts of Morrison's novels, and the relations between texts and otherness (19-20). Palladino studies how ethics affects the representation and interpretation of emotions in the four novels under study. She leaves aside Morrison's early works —*The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), and *Tar Baby* (1981)— arguing that they deal with identity formation, and focuses on *Love* and the books that make up Morrison's black history trilogy (1987-1998), an alternative narrative about the black experience in the United States.

In the Introduction, the author explains that the common thread of the trilogy and the 2003 novel is love and its different manifestations, for instance motherly love in *Beloved*, lustful love in *Jazz*, friendship in *Paradise*, and family love in *Love*. The main body of Palladino's book consists of six chapters that discuss key issues in these four novels, such as the narrative voices, memory, orality, and the role

played by the characters' hands. Chapter 1 focuses on previous studies of narrative discourse and explores pragmatics and speech acts. Following this overview, Palladino argues that "[t]o tell a story implies a responsibility for both the teller and the receiver" (29), since the narrator gives readers a series of fragments that they have to piece together and interpret.

Chapter 2 looks at memory as a mode of narrating and analyzes it in both *Beloved* and *Paradise*. The latter novel introduces the concept of 'loud dreaming', meaning that the African American community has a need for collective memory as a way of escaping from the dominant version of history, telling their own stories, and coping with their traumatic past. Most of Chapter 2 revolves around *Beloved* and how this fragmented neo-slave narrative deals with the trauma of slavery. The protagonist, Sethe, is a former slave who kills her own daughter because she fears they will both be returned to the plantation. In her essay "The Site of Memory", Toni Morrison explains that authors of slave narratives often had to omit some details —usually the most gruesome ones— when describing the horrors of slavery because they feared their readers' response and critical hostility (1995: 88). This is not the case with *Beloved*. By retelling Sethe's story and how it affects her black community in Ohio, Morrison writes about what has been omitted from canonical versions of American history. Palladino considers Morrison's remarks and convincingly explains that the author's quest for memory turns into the ethical imperative of her fiction. The black communities in *Beloved* and *Paradise* need to share their traumatic past in order to face the future together and move on. Palladino opens up a promising line of discussion when she addresses the role played by the discourses of salvation and redemption in these two novels since both books deviate from traditional patterns and advocate collective memory as a way of revisiting the past and redeeming communities. It will be interesting to read where this line of discussion takes the researcher in her future studies.

In Chapter 3 Palladino analyzes how Morrison plays with multiple narrative voices and sheds some light on African American history. This section is reminiscent of Yagüe González's comment on how Morrison's fiction "giv[es] voice to previously mute individuals" (2016: 197). Looking back at her notion of ethics, at this point Palladino observes how Morrison gives the dispossessed others their own voice. This chapter provides a compelling reading of *Love*'s anonymous third-person narrator and its first-person narrator, simply known as 'L'. Relying on classical mythology, the author observes how these two narrators provide readers with opposite perspectives and fragmented stories that need to be pieced together. In Palladino's reading, L actually stands for Love and she can be identified with a postmodern re-figuration of Aphrodite. She sees the novel as the story of two conflicting narrative voices that embody the tensions between the past and the

present, love and hate, and the feud between the women related to the late Bill Cosey. Palladino emphasizes the key role played by female characters in *Love*, matching Gates and McKay's observation that in Morrison's fiction black women "occupy a more central role as subjects [and] the diversity of black communities [is] persistently explored" (1997: 2096).

Chapter 4 considers Toni Morrison's insistence on orality as being a central element in the African American literary tradition. This chapter follows Gates's reflections on Morrison's prose style, which experiments with spirituals and gospel music, "as well as jazz, blues, and the whole range of Black secular vernacular speech rituals and discourses" (1993: ix). *Love* emphasizes that orality is a valid way of telling stories and remembering them, in contrast to writing. This novel questions the reliability of written texts through the example of Bill Cosey's fake last will, which triggers a violent family feud. Palladino also explains that orality is an essential feature of blackness in literature, representing the connections with ancestors and the stories that were passed down from generation to generation, even by slaves who were not allowed to read and write. The author shows that this notion of oral literature is emphasized by Morrison's novels, specifically *Jazz*. Formed by several stories fragmenting the linear course of events, this novel is based on repeating patterns that give the text the rhythm of jazz music. It could be read as a written text that aspires to be oral, demanding some response from readers, so, quoting Justine Tally, Palladino concludes that *Jazz* is a "story about the ways and means of storytelling itself and the language of the narrative process" (97).

The last two chapters in the book focus on *Beloved*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988 and one of Morrison's most celebrated novels. In "The Site of Memory", she describes it as an attempt "to fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left" (1995: 93-94). The novel deals with slavery as an institution and with the traumatic memories of those who survived it. In contrast to relatively benign accounts of slavery in highly popular novels —namely Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976)—, several scholars have argued that *Beloved* "shows that wildly different forms of slavery could result simply from different masters" (Ryan 2008: 146), a point also discussed in Palladino's last two chapters. The arrival of schoolteacher and his cruel overseers results in Sethe's escaping the Sweet Home plantation and murdering her baby child. When Sethe's daughter comes back as a revenant, she represents "the embodiment of the past that must be remembered in order to be forgotten" (Rushdy 1992: 571), an idea adopted by Palladino. Chapter 5 explores how the characters' hands are represented in *Beloved*. It displays several instances of nurturing and harmful hands. For example, Amy Denver heals Sethe with her

hands when the protagonist runs away from the plantation and tries to reach Ohio. Palladino argues that hands work as a "depository of knowledge and recollections" (115) in Morrison's fiction. Baby Suggs's preaching and holding hands with her black peers may serve as an illustration of collective memory for ex-slaves. The key example of violent hands is when Sethe kills Beloved, an episode that is told numerous times in the novel. Despite its brutality, Palladino reminds us that it is the protagonist's "only way to exercise motherly love and preserve her child" (128).

Chapter 6 addresses fragmentation in Toni Morrison's fiction, particularly in *Beloved*. Dismembered, wounded and disjointed female bodies often appear in her novels, as can be appreciated in the cases of Sethe's scarred back and in Beloved's head being severed by her own mother. On this issue, Morrison explained that she had read a newspaper clip about Margaret Garner's true story and how the slave had beheaded her own child (McKay 1999: 3). Years later, Morrison saw the publication of *Beloved* as "a conscious act toward healing a painful wound" (McKay 1999: 3). The text itself is fragmented into several unnumbered chapters, resembling these wounded bodies. Palladino argues that this is a way of actively engaging readers in the making of the story; i.e. readers have to pick up the pieces, re-construct, and interpret the narrative. This point echoes Mobley's observation that "Morrison's text challenges the Western notion of linear time that informs American history and the slave narratives" (1993: 358).

Ethics and Aesthetics in Toni Morrison's Fiction is an interesting addition to the study of this renowned writer's novels. Mariangela Palladino has produced a comprehensive volume with abundant and relevant notes that, together with an up-to-date bibliography, provides a valuable resource for those concerned with the analysis of Morrison's fiction. Nevertheless, the book lacks a closing section focusing on the conclusions reached by the author, which would have been an intriguing way of bringing together the different points made throughout the six chapters. The book gives the impression of being a collection of papers with a common thread rather than a cohesive and unified volume. However, the absence of a final section does not detract from the achievements of such a concise book, which offers compelling insights into Morrison's fiction and can be read as an interesting addition to the debate on the black history trilogy and *Love* that may be found in *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* —specifically in chapters 5 and 6—, edited by Tally in 2007.

As mentioned above, *Ethics and Aesthetics in Toni Morrison's Fiction* is not concerned with earlier novels like *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. Further research could take these into consideration. It may be revealing to analyze the interplay of Palladino's notions of aesthetics and ethics in these earlier books since they portray

the protagonists' progression from girlhood to womanhood and are "novels of poetic realism and Gothic fables about growing up poor, black, and female in a male-dominated, white middle-class society" (Bell 1987: 270). Palladino's work could also be expanded in the future to study how Toni Morrison, in the late phase of her career, continued to find ways to express what is often unspeakable, for example in her novels *Home* (2012) and *God Help the Child* (2015), which involve the representation of wounded black female bodies. It would also be interesting to study how *A Mercy* (2008) focuses on the role played by women in colonial America, given that it "traces the process of racialization that was just beginning to take root in late-seventeenth-century America as a means of rationalizing slavery" (Dubey 2010: 340). A study of this novel could be linked to the issues discussed by Palladino, since in *A Mercy* "Morrison revisits themes of her earlier work: the destruction of the family unity by slavery, mother and daughter relationships, obsessive love, degrees of freedom, the importance of community, class and race conflicts, and patriarchal dominance" (Anderson 2013: 131). For these reasons, together with the parallels between Sethe murdering Beloved and the separation of a slave mother and her child at the beginning of *A Mercy* (Jennings 2009: 646), this novel could be included in future studies, taking Palladino's thought-provoking contribution as a starting point.

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TRANSMODERN PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Pertusa, eds.
Abingdon: Routledge, 2019

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The many changes in recent decades have strongly marked contemporary society. The overexposure to sources of information, the unavoidable instability of life, the radical influence of technology on our lives —and in particular on social relationships—, our interconnectedness, and the fragility of human life, exposed to wars, climate change and new diseases, have altered the world and the way we inhabit it. As a manner of understanding life, the arts have portrayed in various ways how contemporary communities acknowledge and live through these social and cultural changes. The feeling that there has been a significant shift explains the relatively recent need to answer the question of whether literature, and the arts in general, have moved beyond Postmodernism and, if so, what term can best be applied to our present time to encapsulate its characteristics. Some authors have suggested labels such as "post-postmodernism" (Turner 1996), "pseudo-modernism" (Kirby 2006), or "cosmodernism" (Moraru 2011), to name a few. The editors of the volume *Transmodern Perspectives on Contemporary Literatures in English*, Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Pertusa, propose "Transmodernity" as the term that best conveys an ongoing move towards a new paradigm shift. In their view, the conceptualisation of Transmodernity has evolved in parallel with contemporary transformations, becoming a promising alternative to the aforementioned labels and providing an interesting perspective from which to observe and analyse the social construction of reality. Focusing on the critical perusal of a wide variety of contemporary

literary texts, the contributors to the present volume offer a valuable approach to the fields of literature and cultural studies.

The volume opens with an introduction in which the editors provide an overview of the concepts of the Transmodern and the paradigm shift. It quickly becomes clear that the contributors' perspectives will mostly rely on Rosa María Rodríguez Magda's approach to Transmodernity since it is she who first coined the term during a conversation with Jean Baudrillard in 1987. The book, however, addresses many other critics, sociologists and philosophers who have explicitly referred to Transmodernity, explaining its political and cultural characteristics and pointing, in particular, at the array of possibilities that this new paradigm offers, especially regarding cultural and ethical interconnectedness. These include authors such as Enrique Dussel, Ziauddin Sardar, Marc Luyckx Ghisi, Étienne Le Roy, and Nicanor Perlas. The volume also discusses other writers such as Alan Kirby, Irena Ateljevic, Linda Hutcheon and Alison Gibbons, to mention but a few, who have been announcing the end of Postmodernism since the eighties, expressing the need to define a new cultural paradigm aligned with the characteristics and concerns of current times. This broad view of Transmodernity allows the reader to understand this notion articulated in the book as an encompassing concept, as the contributors do not seek to present it as an ideal, unique or perfectly defined model, but rather as "a new complex paradigm which begs for multiple readings" (6).

Given the heterogeneity of the notion, the most theoretical part of the collection, which opens the book, is perhaps one of its strongest points. This first section of the volume, "Transmodernity: A Paradigm Shift", is made up of three chapters that provide the theoretical basis for the contributions that follow. The first chapter, Aliaga-Lavrijsen's translation of a plenary lecture given by Rodríguez Magda in 2017, manages to maintain the orality of the philosopher's discourse, making her thesis clear, engaging, concise and effective, while simultaneously providing a solid foundation on which most of the following chapters rely. Among her key ideas, two can be emphasised: first, her definition of Transmodernity as simply "[t]he paradigm that allows us to think our present" (21), to turn towards the future (25) and understand societies that are "no longer liquid but gaseous" (27); secondly, the updated categorisation of texts into those that fit better within the open Transmodern model, "narratives of the limit", and those "narratives of celebration" that keep responding to the dominant discourse (21). In this way, Rodríguez Magda distances herself from other sociological conceptualisations such as Zygmunt Bauman's "liquid modernity" (2000) and offers a new understanding of textual analysis. In the second chapter, David Alderson assesses the limits and potential of the theories of Transmodernity offered by both Rodríguez Magda and Enrique Dussel. He deals with them in connection with

capitalism and queer theory through an analysis of Sebastian Barry's *Days Without End* (2016). This first part of the volume ends with an enlightening chapter by Susana Onega focused on David Mitchell's first novel, *Ghostwritten* (1999). Onega demonstrates that the pluriversality (Dussel 2001) of this experimental novel aligns it with the humanistic changes leading to the Transmodern paradigm. For Onega, *Ghostwritten* reflects the "complexity, instability, and ungraspability of this pluriversal world" (51) that the novel relates to the transpersonal configuration of the self's identity, no longer individually constrained but open to multinational and ethical connectedness.

Part II, "Transmodern Ethics", explores the ethical potential of the Transmodern paradigm from two different perspectives. First, Jean-Michel Ganteau analyses Harry Parker's *Anatomy of a Soldier* (2016) as a narrative of the limit. Ganteau offers an insightful study of this novel that, in his view, resists Transmodern totalisation at the same time that it fosters an ethical encounter with the other's singularity through attentiveness and vulnerability. Bárbara Arizti's contribution analyses the Transmodern elements in Tim Winton's *Eyrie* (2013) as a narrative of celebration. Apart from Rodríguez Magda's conceptualisation of Transmodernity, Arizti draws on Rifkin's theory of empathy, Moraru's cosmodernism and Held's ethics of care to re-evaluate Transmodern relationality. Both chapters in this section point at the importance in Transmodernity of both relationality and care for human and non-human others, which represents an advance on Modernity and Postmodernity.

The third part of the collection offers three approaches to the Transmodern paradigm focusing on space and identity. The contributions in this section share ideas that are again addressed in the fourth section, such as the poetics of the self, Transmodern space (Puschmann-Nalenz, Bayer, Herrero), marginality (Herrero and Ibarrola-Armendariz), and spirituality (Bayer, Kocot, and Ibarrola-Armendariz). The chapters in these two sections analyse texts from a remarkably wide variety of genres, including the dystopian novel, poetry and autobiography, which underlines the possibilities of application of the Transmodern paradigm in diverse contexts.

Part V, "Transcultural Femininities", consists of two chapters that again broaden the limits of Transmodernity. In the first one, Marc Amfreville challenges the traditional idea of adaptation by comparing the short-story collection *Runaway* (2004), by the Canadian author Alice Munro, with the Spanish film *Julieta* (2016), directed by Pedro Almodóvar, to conclude that the latter is a transcultural interpretation that exiles Canadian texts from their own gendered frames of understanding. In the following chapter, Violeta Duce analyses two short stories taken from the collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) by the Nigerian

feminist writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. By citing the presence of themes such as globalisation, the glocal, transculturality and translingualism, she demonstrates that Adichie's oeuvre is a good representation of Transmodernity. In Duce's reading, Adichie clearly portrays women's challenges and possibilities in the globalised era of the Transmodern.

In their conclusion to the volume, the editors reiterate the need to name the current paradigm shift and the usefulness of analysing it through literature which "has often been the forefront of social changes when society as a whole was unaware of them" (238). They make an important point: Transmodernity distinguishes itself from Modernity and Postmodernity in that it "avoids confrontation" (240), that is, it does not exist in contradistinction to a centre or point of reference. Instead, it seeks to encompass multiple voices, to decentralise the main discourse, and to incorporate and expand on previous ideas in order to create new spaces, connections and commitments. As pointed out by Ganteau (2020: 92), this vision is contrary to Enrique Dussel's theory —even though this theory is also referred to throughout the volume— because Dussel considers Transmodernity as completely distinct from Modernity, which he is very critical about, looking at it from outside European academia. The editors, however, recognise that Transmodernity and the reality attached to it are "culturally sensitive" (238).

Overall, the book achieves its main goals despite minor drawbacks. By drawing on multiple philosophers, critics, writers and literary texts from varied parts of the globe, all the contributors in this collection engage in an interdisciplinary, multifaceted dialogue on the Transmodern paradigm, showing its usefulness as a critical literary and cultural tool. The arrangement of the chapters, however, does not throw light on Rodríguez Magda's distinction between narratives of the limit and narratives of celebration. It is not always clear whether the texts analysed are representative examples of one or the other type, as the editors themselves recognise: "the borders between ones and others [are] not always […] easily identifiable" (10). To some extent, this obscures a distinction that is repeatedly acknowledged as important and useful and, as such, should have been clearer by the time the reader reaches the end of the volume. As the chapters are instead organised ranging from more general topics to more specific ones, this results in useful cross-references but also repetitions of certain approaches throughout the different sections. However, this does not undermine the merits of a collection that will be of interest to anyone working in the fields of critical theory, contemporary literature, and cultural studies. The editors' and the contributors' approaches to Transmodernity create a valuable framework for cultural and literary criticism, and they also open up a promising path towards a new relational and connective humanist paradigm.

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Notes for contributors

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- 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".
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