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Abstract

Vocabulary learning is pivotal for language learning as it is a cross-sectional aspect related to both receptive and productive skills. L2 vocabulary learning has given way to a substantial body of research in which the role of implicit and explicit instruction has been central. Bearing in mind the importance of communicative tasks as sources for vocabulary learning, this study will explore how vocabulary presented with context and without context is retained. 39 undergraduate students were assigned to each of these conditions, and after performing a communicative task which included a warm-up activity with a set of 15 target words, they completed a word meaning test (post-test) and repeated the same test after two weeks. The data gathered was analyzed using a quantitative approach. Findings indicate that the type of vocabulary test with context-embedded words is more effective for vocabulary retention in the short term. Nevertheless, multi-word items were better identified with the no-context vocabulary test, a finding supported by previous research. The present study raises the possibility that different vocabulary strategies are used by EFL learners, and that warm-up activities may contribute to L2 vocabulary learning.

Keywords: communicative tasks, vocabulary retention, incidental vocabulary learning; speaking skills, vocabulary enhancement.

Resumen

El aprendizaje del vocabulario es fundamental para el aprendizaje de un idioma ya que es un aspecto transversal relacionado tanto con las habilidades receptivas como productivas. En este sentido, el aprendizaje del vocabulario en una lengua extranjera (L2) ha dado lugar a una gran cantidad de investigación en la que el papel de la enseñanza implícita y explícita ha sido central. Teniendo en cuenta la importancia de las tareas comunicativas como fuentes para el aprendizaje del vocabulario, este estudio explorará cómo se retiene el vocabulario presentado con contexto y sin él. 39 estudiantes de grado fueron asignados a cada una de estas condiciones, y después de realizar una tarea comunicativa que incluyó una actividad de calentamiento con un conjunto de 15 palabras objetivo, completaron una prueba de significado de palabras (prueba posterior), y repitieron la misma prueba después de dos semanas. Los datos recogidos se analizaron utilizando un enfoque cuantitativo. Los resultados indican que el tipo de prueba de vocabulario con palabras en contexto facilitan la retención del vocabulario a corto plazo. Sin embargo, las palabras múltiples (*multi-word items)* se identificaron mejor con la prueba de vocabulario sin contexto, lo cual está respaldado por investigaciones anteriores. El presente estudio plantea la posibilidad de que los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) utilicen diferentes estrategias de vocabulario, y que las actividades de calentamiento puedan contribuir al aprendizaje del vocabulario L2.

Palabras clave: tareas comunicativas, retención del vocabulario, aprendizaje de vocabulario de forma incidental, destrezas orales, mejora del vocabulario.

1. Introduction

When learning a second language (L2), one of the primary lexical objectives is to increase vocabulary breadth and knowledge, and "the means for achieving these objectives are skill-based and include training learners to effectively learn decontextualized lexis, consolidate and elaborate previously met lexis, consult dictionaries, infer from context, and engage in reading for meaning" (Hunt and Beglar 2005: 26). Additionally, the knowledge of L2 vocabulary is regarded as an essential cornerstone to being successful in language learning. Previous research has attempted to demonstrate that vocabulary knowledge learning and acquisition are dependent on a number of variables such as frequency of exposure, input, output, strategies to learn vocabulary, reading and speaking skills, and the use of tasks as sources of vocabulary learning. Tasks constitute the core of most teaching approaches, and depending on their sequencing, they might be included within

the area of explicit or implicit instruction, or both. Thus, the importance of tasks as sources of incidental vocabulary learning (Keating 2008) has made it necessary to observe the degree of retention of lexical items on the learners' part. Similarly, few studies of incidental learning have been conducted considering other modes of input apart from the combination of different types of input (Webb 2019).

The present study intends to add new empirical evidence on the role of communicative tasks, by means of a pedagogically tested L2 task for use in Higher Education (see Garcés-Manzanera 2021a) in an attempt to test further vocabulary retention. Thus, the objective is two-fold: (a) to provide an exploratory insight into the role of communicative tasks for vocabulary retention, and (b) to explore the possible value of context or absence of context when students are tested on the target words retained.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. L2 Vocabulary Learning

L2 vocabulary learning and acquisition is dependent on a number of cross-sectional variables that enable learners to build their lexicon repertoire. Among these, the frequency of exposure when receiving input has been a major concern given its influence on the retention of vocabulary (see Webb 2007). In this vein, the more frequent number of encounters of a word or expression, the higher the possibilities for these words to be retained (Laufer 2003). However, another variable together with the frequency of exposure in conditioning vocabulary retention is the presentation of this vocabulary; that is, how lexical items are presented in the input.

Determining the best conditions inducing efficient vocabulary processing has been a major concern of research on L2 vocabulary learning (Laufer and Rozovski-Roitblat 2011). However, no consensus has been reached thus far, and more evidence should be obtained in this respect. Among these conditions are the language-oriented tasks —allegedly related to the manner of presenting the vocabulary in the input. Research has examined how the type of task may contribute to vocabulary learning and retention on a short-term and long-term basis. Studies on L2 vocabulary learning have relied on different types of tasks: communicative tasks (e.g. Huckin and Coady 1999), decontextualized Focus-on-Form activities without a communicative component (e.g. Laufer 2003, 2006), and Focus-on-Form activities with target words in the conversation (e.g. De La Fuente 2002).

Besides the importance of the type of task, L2 vocabulary learning has been part of a dichotomous view of instruction: explicit vs implicit instruction (see Hulstijn et al. 1996; Hunt and Beglar 1998).

2.2. Explicit vs. Implicit Instruction

L2 vocabulary learning cannot be understood without the role of explicit and implicit instruction (Hunt and Beglar 2005). Explicit instruction involves learners' attention being focused on vocabulary items while implicit instruction aims to spark the learners' attention toward the element of interest "minimizing any interruption to the communication of meaning" (Doughty and Williams 1998: 231). Hunt and Beglar (2005) pioneered this distinction: explicit lexical instruction builds on the role of the use of dictionaries, decontextualized lexis and vocabulary inference from context. Previous research has considered the role of decontextualized lexis as ineffective for vocabulary retention (Nagy 1997), although others have advocated its efficiency when combined with large amounts of written input (Hunt and Beglar 2005). In this regard, explicit lexical instruction has equally been supported as an ecologically valid L2 vocabulary learning technique given its relation to vocabulary inference from context, which, in essence, is intentional. However, much of this context in which vocabulary is embedded should be 98% comprehensible, according to previous research (Hirsh and Nation 1992).

Implicit lexical instruction has been characterized by the reception of rich, contextualized comprehensible input in *great amounts* (Hunt and Beglar 2005). Indeed, implicit lexical instruction involves a more relaxed approach to vocabulary learning, since the focus is placed on meaning-focused aspects. That is, learners are not enticed to focus on specific words or multi-words. To illustrate this, some tasks contain a reading component that allows lexical instruction to be purely implicit —for instance, when learners are asked about content-based information from the text without referring to a specific vocabulary word or expression. As a result, the primary aim of the activity is not learning vocabulary but rather answering to show comprehension. Should vocabulary learning occur, such a process would be framed within what has been defined as *incidental vocabulary learning* (Chen and Truscott 2010).

2.3. Incidental Vocabulary Learning

Incidental vocabulary learning has received varied definitions given the difficulty of conceptualizing the construct. Traditionally, incidental vocabulary learning has been defined from two different perspectives. Hulstijn (2001) regarded it as the type of vocabulary learning that occurs when learners are not forewarned of a vocabulary test after the activity or lesson. The second definition, which is the commonest one in the scientific literature, views incidental vocabulary learning as a by-product of a meaning-focused task (see Ellis 1999; Chen and Truscott 2010). The many definitions have provided

varied perspectives in the conceptualization of incidental vocabulary learning. In essence, some intention may be present in incidental learning vocabulary learning, which has been viewed as a challenge (Webb 2019). Previous research using novel methodological techniques such as eye-tracking has revealed that learners attend to novel vocabulary more, contributing to learning (Pellicer-Sánchez 2017; Godfroid et al. 2018). Thus, there is some intentionality underlying the incidental perspective of vocabulary learning. Additionally, the dichotomy between explicit and implicit learning is equally of relevance in the area of L2 vocabulary learning. Explicit learning may occur either intentionally or incidentally (Laufer and Hulstijn 2001), and implicit learning is purely incidental. In other words, L2 learners must be informed beforehand for explicit learning to be purely intentional.

Research on incidental vocabulary learning has traditionally relied upon meaning-focused comprehension tasks instead of word-focused tasks such as flashcard learning. The main rationale behind meaning-focused comprehension tasks is rooted in the fact that learners' attention is geared towards comprehension and not towards vocabulary learning (see Swanborn and de Glopper 2002). However, as pointed out by Uchihara et al. (2019), the use of a methodological procedure (e.g. announcing a vocabulary test or the use of a specific type of task) does not rule out that learners may engage in intentional vocabulary learning (see also Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt 2010).

In this scholarly domain, one of the earliest attempts to accumulate evidence on the role of incidental learning was Nagy et al.'s (1985) seminal study. Framed within the first language (L1) context, their study intended to determine whether students acquired measurable knowledge about unknown words when reading natural texts. Their findings revealed that word knowledge through context was slightly increased thanks to reading. In essence, Nagy et al. (1985) demonstrated that encountering a word multiple times pointed to further retention in the long-term memory. Their study paved the way for future L2 research on vocabulary learning, and more importantly, the role of repetition for incidental vocabulary learning. The bulk of research on L1 (e.g. Nagy et al. 1987; Jenkins et al. 1989) and L2 words (Day et al. 1991; Waring and Takaki 2003) and collocations (Webb et al. 2013; Pellicer-Sánchez 2017) has revealed that these lexical items are usually learnt incidentally through reading (Webb 2019). Additionally, the focus of research on L2 incidental vocabulary learning has primarily relied on the frequency of occurrence as a key variable in the process, especially when these words appear in written input. For instance, studies have revealed that words encountered in context with a higher frequency are more likely to be retained (Waring and Tataki 2003; Pigada and Schmitt 2006; Chen

and Truscott 2010). Yet, studies have not concluded the existence of a threshold that ensures learning as well as the retention of a word or lexical item (Webb 2019). Research in this respect has shown that the number of encounters necessary for substantial learning is variable, and more importantly, what implications it might have for vocabulary retention. Equating word knowledge with form recognition (Webb 2019), studies such as Chen and Truscott (2010) or Webb (2007) suggested that one word encounter may suffice for learning to occur in reading. Nevertheless, meaning recognition has been reported to require more than one encounter ranging from two (Rott 1999) to four (Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt 2010) to ten or more (Pigada and Schmitt 2006). In spite of the vast amount of research conducted, more empirical evidence has to be accumulated in an attempt to amplify other variables that might come into play in incidental vocabulary learning.

In this regard, Webb (2019) also mentions another important methodological variable, which is the *timing* of administering vocabulary posttests; that is, observing the temporal extent of vocabulary retention. Scholarly works have revealed varied findings. For instance, Waring and Takaki (2003) observed that a drastic loss of meaning recall occurred after three months (42% to 6%). This is aligned with Webb and Chang's (2015) study whose findings revealed that only 7.2% of words were retained after three months. These studies were conducted in a tertiary-level setting, and they relied exclusively on extensive reading. Nevertheless, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduate students usually draw on word knowledge seen in the classroom rather than engaging in extensive reading, which is a purposeful learning technique. As a result, exploring word knowledge with on-the-spot classroom tasks that are not *exclusively* focused on one skill (e.g. reading as a pre-task of a communicative activity) may aid in observing whether incidental vocabulary learning genuinely occurs and whether it is retained in the medium or long term.

The importance of methodological variables has also been considered, and their inclusion in research designs has yielded varied results. Research has considered the use of non-words, which are words not belonging to the lexical repertoire of any language, in an attempt to control for learners' pre-existing knowledge of target words (e.g. Reynolds 2018). However, non-word use does not reflect actual L2 learning in a real-life situation given the overestimation of learning (Chen and Truscott 2010). Yet, the use of non-words is reported to constitute a methodological constraint. This is why the use of real words in testing conditions in research on L2 incidental vocabulary learning deserves further exploration (Webb 2019). Similarly, studies have exclusively relied upon meaning-recognition and meaning-recall tests. However, to date, the role of contextualized words has not been considered in the

methodological procedures. Testing conditions in which participants have to recognize isolated words or words in context have not been explored sufficiently in this scholarly area.

Another important methodological variable has been the announcement of a comprehension test since, as mentioned above, when learners are informed of a vocabulary test after meaning-focused tasks, more vocabulary is incidentally or intentionally learned (Webb 2019). In terms of learning gains, informing participants of an upcoming vocabulary test may be helpful as they might direct their attention to aspects such as topic-related lexis (Swanborn and de Glopper 2002). Other studies, such as Paribakht and Wesche (1997), revealed that informing participants may lead to intentional repeated encounters, requiring more mental effort in understanding unfamiliar words.

In the case of the type of words, i.e. single-word or multi-word items, recent studies have explored their incidence on L2 vocabulary learning. Chang and Chen (2022) looked into the vocabulary retention of these two types of words in both written and oral vocabulary exercises using different vocabulary tests. Their findings indicated that participants obtained higher results in the L2 meaning recall test, and that retention was more marked in multi-word items than in individual words.

The role of repetition in L2 vocabulary learning has been regarded as dependent upon the measures used to assess learning, that is, form recognition and meaning recall, both of which are types of exercises in vocabulary tests. This was suggested by earlier studies (Webb 2007). Parallel to learner-related variables —e.g. age (de Vos et al. 2018) or vocabulary knowledge, i.e. the degree of active and passive vocabulary as well as the effective use of these items of vocabulary (see Zahar et al. 2001; Elgort and Warren 2014)— treatment variables deserve our attention: (i) *spacing* in terms of treatment-testing intervals has been a concern in L2 incidental vocabulary learning, whose study (e.g. Tekmen and Daloğlu 2006; Webb and Chang 2015) has revealed that massed learning conditions, in which learners practice a task continuously without rest (Namaziandost et al. 2020), are more likely to increase the effects of frequency on learning vocabulary; (ii) *the mode of input* is equally relevant since the presentation of the input may condition the manner in which a word is retained. In this case, written input is more salient than spoken input (Brown et al. 2008; Vidal 2011), thus favoring incidental vocabulary learning.

Building on all this previous research on L2 incidental vocabulary learning, there is still a concern on the frequency of words, that is, on the number of times a learner needs to encounter a specific word to retain and learn it. In this regard, no consensus has been reached and the lack of a specific threshold makes

it necessary to accumulate more evidence, especially on one-time encounters (Chen and Truscott 2010). Similarly, the bulk of research has focused on assessing learners' vocabulary retention on extensive reading (e.g. Boutorwick et al. 2019; Song 2020) and on auditory or visual stimuli, such as television (e.g. Rodgers and Webb 2020) or listening to songs (Pavia et al. 2019). To date, no study has explored the extent to which pre-task activities (e.g. warm-up reading input as part of communicative tasks) may contribute to L2 vocabulary learning. This is a topic of research interest worth exploring since it constitutes a key site for incidental vocabulary learning. Webb (2019) alludes to the benefits of other more auditory or visual modes (e.g. TV watching or listening) for incidental learning; however, the value of the written text for lexical development is still a key source for incidental L2 vocabulary learning (see Godfroid et al. 2018). As a result, there are no studies focusing on reading and speaking combined in L2 vocabulary learning. The following section aims at exploring conceptually both skills, and their theoretical and empirical implications for this area of research.

2.4. Reading and Speaking for L2 Vocabulary Learning

Studies on L2 vocabulary learning have shown that vocabulary is primarily acquired through reading input (Laufer 2003). Reading is an interactive activity since the reader proceeds to "extract, or build, meaning from a text" (Grabe 2014: 8). When reading in an L2, comprehension efforts are directed toward learning. Thus, the reader's effort is channeled through monitoring the difficulties in the mental representation of the meaning (Perfetti and Adlof 2012). Such effort is directly connected with incidental vocabulary learning, since learning a word or phrase in an effortful manner —thus, activating cognitive operations— may lead to subsequent better retention. The cognitive operations involved in reading are part of both receptive and productive skills, for instance, linguistic encoding, comprehension, and the comparison of the input with previous knowledge (Garcés-Manzanera 2021b).

Reading is certainly a skill that contributes to incidental vocabulary learning (see Nagy et al. 1985), and such a characteristic has been echoed by some voices (e.g. Swanborn and de Glopper 2002) since word-meaning connections are established without purpose. Reading for L2 vocabulary learning is related to the focus on, or absence of, vocabulary instruction *per se* (Stallman 1991). Reading has to be coherently coupled with the learners' objectives. In other words, learners who are focused on reading a text but pay special attention to vocabulary are more likely to retain it. This is why it has been put forward that reading with a purpose has a positive effect on incidental vocabulary learning (Swanborn and de Glopper 2002).

This purpose entails, for instance, answering reading comprehension questions despite the fact that the purpose will not be communicative.

Several theories emerged on the basis of the motivational-cognitive construct of involvement (Laufer 2003; Laufer and Hulstijn 2001) as a highly reliable predictor of task effectiveness and retention of new words. This *involvement* is composed of three different components: (1) need, (2) search, and (3) evaluation, and they are related to the need for reading to be linked to the learners' purposes. In the case of the *need* component, it is a fully motivational dimension since it suggests that L2 learners are driven by either an external or internal agent when reading a text. An external agent would be the role of the teacher as director of the task. Learners are the external agents since they shoulder the burden of looking up a word in a dictionary while reading instead of asking an external source. The *search* component, on the other hand, is pivotal in order to foster the creation of mental mapping connections that further ensure the retention of new words. Finally, the *evaluation* component is a certain type of cognitive comparison given the establishment of hypotheses between a given word and other words in an attempt to discover its meaning.

Laufer (2003) claimed that, despite the obvious efficient role of reading and its contribution to L2 vocabulary learning and retention, it is certainly not the only source whereby L2 learners may learn and acquire vocabulary. In this context, reading has equally been part of tasks mainly aimed at other skills, such as communicative tasks. This type of task is communicative in nature, and generally includes a reading or listening component. This leads us to consider the potential role of speaking and reading combined in the retention of L2 vocabulary. As mentioned previously, the cognitive effort while reading a text in an L2 is considerable and may be conducive to learning, but the introduction of a speaking component may guarantee that this retention is more long-lasting given the role of negotiation of meaning while speaking (see De la Fuente 2002).

The connection between reading and speaking has already been explored in previous research (e.g. Garcés-Manzanera 2021a). Oral production is regarded as a productive skill since it involves the production of utterances to convey meaning to words. It involves the connection of speech, the use of expressive devices so that ideas are coherently linked, the appropriate use of lexis and grammar, and finally, negotiation of meaning and language (Harmer 2001). These components are associated with the four dimensions in the communication framework: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Firstly, L2 learners have to possess an appropriate command of the L2, allowing them to carry out cognitive operations in an automatic manner (McLaughlin 1990). The automaticity in the process of speaking and reading has

been reported to allow for the recognition of words, and hence, rapid lexical retrieval in the case of speaking. Second, the purported connection between reading and speaking is essential vis-à-vis vocabulary learning. Vocabulary knowledge reinforces L2 learners' ability to develop speed at reading, and automaticity at speaking. In the same vein, the de-codification of meaning while reading a text in the L2 contributes to all competences, as effective communication must occur at both written and oral levels. Third, Garcés-Manzanera alludes to the benefits of combining both reading and speaking as a way of fostering vocabulary learning, since "certain linguistic structures, and vocabulary words may become part of this discourse" (2021b: 6).

Reading plays a significant role in helping the retention of new words and expressions in the L2 as the most efficient and widespread source of vocabulary learning. However, mere reading tasks would not be sufficient without the use of productive skills that allow for the activation of these new words in a context that is relevant to the L2 learner. A real-life communicative situation was selected for the present study on the basis of this task-inducement involvement load in order to examine whether the purported presence of these words in a warm-up section of the pre-task phase could lead to learners' further vocabulary retention.

3. Aim and Research Questions

On the basis of the above review, the objective of this paper is to add new empirical evidence that supports the efficiency of the type of task, in this case, communicative tasks, to further L2 vocabulary learning. Hence, the aim is to analyze the students' retention of some vocabulary when it is presented through communicative tasks and when these words appear in a vocabulary test in the absence or presence of context. Thus, the study seeks to provide an answer to the following research questions:

1. To what extent will the target words be retained when participants complete a vocabulary test in which such words are presented with context after incidental learning/teaching?
2. To what extent will the target words be retained when participants complete a vocabulary test in which such words are presented without context (in isolation) after incidental learning/teaching?
3. Does the presentation of the target words (in context and without context) in a vocabulary test play a significant role in lexical retention of these words when learning vocabulary incidentally through a communicative task?

4. Method

4.1. Context and Participants

A total cohort of 39 undergraduate students took part in the study. They were aged 19-20. Out of the total number of participants (N= 39), 17 participants were randomly assigned to a 'context' group and 22 participants were assigned to a 'without context' group. As will be more clearly explained in later sections, both conditions refer to the manner in which students were presented with the target words, that is, words embedded in a context or without context when completing a test after undertaking a communicative task where these words appeared. Our participants were pursuing the third year of a Degree in Primary Education at a Spanish university, receiving EFL lessons with a frequency of 3.5 hours a week. Their average proficiency level was B1-B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

4.2. Research Design

The study is exploratory as we intend to shed light on the potential influence of a very specific type of L2 communicative task on vocabulary learning. The research is framed within classroom-based experimental research (DeKeyser and Prieto-Botana 2019) since participants belonged to an intact group of students. Similarly, the research study was conducted under a natural environment. Table 1 below displays the data collection procedure:

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Pre-task engagement: • Reading component (warm-up) containing target words (5-10 minutes) • Preparation of the communicative task (pre-task planning) • Presentation of the communicative task outcome	Immediate post-test	Delayed post-test (2-week timespan)

Table 1. Research design

In order to collect the data, in Phase 1 the students were provided with the communicative tasks. They were first presented with a warm-up activity that allowed them to engage with the topic that was going to be dealt with in the communicative task. This warm-up activity was text-based, that is, reading, and

it included the target words (see Figure 1). The topic was not selected specifically for this research, but rather, to safeguard the ecological validity of the study, it was designed on the basis of the vocabulary unit that had to be taught in that specific week.

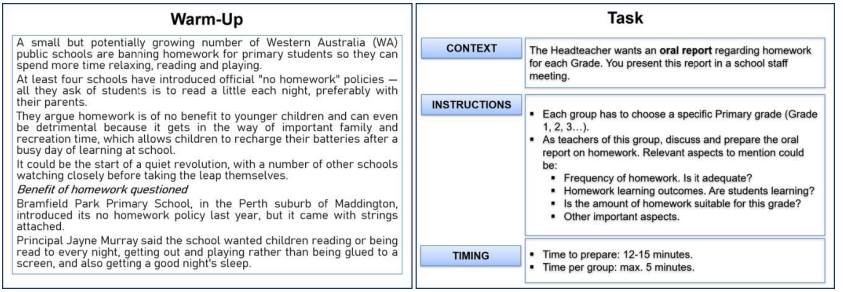

Figure 1. The education-oriented communicative task

Firstly, students were encouraged to read the text, and afterward, they were asked about its content and the topics covered. Ultimately, the meaning of words could be explained or provided in the L1 when students asked for it. This could include target words which are part of this study. Nevertheless, participants were not told about those words that were going to be elicited in the immediate post-test after the communicative task. After this warm-up activity, participants were given 15 minutes to prepare the task outcome, and they were not forced to use the words appearing in the warm-up text. This activity was carried out in groups, and in order to favor mutuality, participants were able to decide who they were going to form groups with. After the 15-minute preparation time, each group presented their task outcomes to the rest of the class in an oral manner.

Immediately after the task outcome, participants were led to Phase 2, in which they had to complete an immediate post-test. It is worth noting that it is called "immediate post-test" since having introduced a pre-test before doing the task itself would have drawn the students' attention towards the target words. Hence, this would have interfered in the appropriate ecological validity of the present research, and thus vocabulary learning would have been more intentional than incidental. As will be clarified in the sub-section 4.4. "Measurement instrument", two types of post-tests were provided to each group (Table 1). The immediate post-test of the 'context' group was a meaning-recognition test in which the words were embedded in a sentence. Conversely, the 'no context' group was

given a meaning-recognition text with isolated words. These tests were delivered using *Google Forms*.

Two weeks after phases 1 and 2, Phase 3 involved the provision of a delayed post-test that was identical to the immediate post-test in Phase 2. According to previous research (e.g. Teng 2016), two weeks seems to be an appropriate timespan that, on the one hand, does ensure that students do not recall the words as a mere effect of immediateness. On the other hand, the two-week distance in time would help us consider the degree of retention, and the existing possibility that one condition might be more influential than the other. On this basis, such a distance in time was also applied in an attempt to neutralize other confounding variables (e.g. recalling the words due to the recent provision of the test) that may affect the outcome of the study.

4.3. Variables

Following the research design, the present study contains a number of variables. Firstly, the independent variable contains two levels which are based upon the type of presentation of the words: 'context' and 'no context'. The manner in which these were presented will be described in section 4.4. The dependent variable includes the target words, which are chosen differently according to the frequency within a specific corpus. Participants in this study were tested with a set of 15 words which, based on the researcher's teaching experience, would be unfamiliar to learners. Additionally, the relevance of these words within a corpus was observed in order to discern whether these words would be regarded as more difficult —given their infrequency— or much easier. To do so, the iWeb Corpus (<https://www.english-corpora.org/iweb/>) was used. This corpus is freely available on the Internet and contains roughly 14 billion words. As can be observed in Table 2, the frequency is provided in raw numbers, which is based on the iWeb Corpus frequency list composed of the top 60,000 words. The third column shows "accumulated frequency" on the basis of the frequency in the second column. Bearing in mind the learners' level (B1-B2 level), these target words are thought to be varied in terms of (i) difficulty, e.g. the appearance of cognates (e.g. *detrimental*) with respect to the participants' L1 and (ii) the presence of both single word and multi-word items (e.g. *take a leap*).

As can be observed in Table 2, not all target words were equally frequent, which in some sense may have an influence on the results of our study. This is an important limitation that will be taken into consideration in the discussion of the results.

Code	Target word	Frequency (raw numbers)	Accumulated frequency
P1	*several*	4,000,965	100%
P2	*suitable*	564,978	80%
P3	*time-consuming*	53,032	20%
P4	*elsewhere*	391,836	60%
P5	*detrimental*	58,120	26.66%
P6	*take a leap*	2,467	6.66%
P7	*closely*	563,797	73.33%
P8	*growing*	1,537,889	93.33%
P9	*principal*	474,001	66.66%
P10	*outcome*	379,879	53.33%
P11	*suburb*	60,691	33.33%
P12	*benefit*	1,479,431	86.66%
P13	*leap*	143,398	40%
P14	*ban*	274,242	46.66%
P15	*infrequently*	17,512	13.33%

Table 2. Target words with frequency and accumulated frequency

4.4. Measurement Instrument: Meaning-recognition Vocabulary Tests

The main instrument used in this study was a vocabulary test which includes the passive recognition of the word in the L1 (Laufer and Rozovski-Roitblat 2011; Mohamed 2018). Meaning-recognition seems an ecologically valid technique for two reasons: (i) it is the least demanding test, thus favoring the students' concentration on it (Laufer and Goldstein 2004), and (ii) it has pedagogical validity and usefulness since "it reveals knowledge [to the teacher] that could be further developed" (Webb 2021: 457). In addition, the use of meaning-recognition tests is justified in terms of test practicality, since meaning-recall test formats (i.e. tests in which students have to write the meaning of the L2 words or vice versa) are more cognitively demanding. Similarly, grading meaning-recall test formats is more time-consuming and challenging (Webb 2021).

This meaning-recognition test allowed the collection of data using two versions of this test: one with the words in sentences and the other one with the words in isolation. Both meaning-recognition tests involved: (1) passive recognition of words

in the L1, with both a correct and an incorrect option, and (2) the inclusion of an option "I don't know the word", given its usefulness to detect the lack of knowledge about a particular word, and to avoid random selection of answers. When learners chose the correct answer, they were given 1 point; in the case of an incorrect answer or choosing the "I don't know the word" option, no point was awarded.

In the 'context test', the target words were presented within a context different from the one in which the target words appeared in the warm-up section of the education-oriented communicative task:

*I made **'several'** mistakes in the exam.*

a) un número de.

b) varios.

c) no conozco la palabra.

Conversely, in the 'no context test', the target words were presented in an isolated manner with no context, thus similar to the format used in previous research (e.g. Teng 2016).

'several'

a) un número de.

b) varios.

c) no conozco la palabra.

4.5. Statistical Analyses

In order to calculate the retention score of vocabulary knowledge, the percentage of correct answers was calculated per target word for each condition (context vs no context). Proportions were used to observe the number of correct answers for each target word. The calculation of the magnitude of the effect between proportions within-groups (that is, the potential change from post-test to delayed post-test) and between-groups (differences in the post-test between context and no context conditions) was carried out using Cohen's *h*-statistic (Cohen 1988). Cohen's *h* is regarded as an appropriate effect size statistic to compare two proportions. Effect sizes were considered small (0.2), medium (0.5), and large (0.8).

5. Results

First, the results for the differences between the immediate post-test and delayed post-test within-groups, that is, for the 'context' and 'no-context' groups,

respectively will be presented. Then, the second part of this section will report the results corresponding to the differences between-groups, that is, between the 'context' and 'no-context' groups.

Figure 2 below shows the proportions obtained in the immediate post-test and delayed post-tests as well as the magnitude of Cohen's *h*. The most relevant results are observed in P1 (*several*), where there was a slight increase in terms of learning gains as evidenced by the medium effect size (h= 0.61). In the case of P2 (*suitable*), P4 (*elsewhere*), and P14 (*ban*), no differences between the results in the immediate post-test and delayed post-test were observed and a high degree of retention was maintained after the two-week timespan. Additionally, a moderate increase was observed in P6 (*take a leap*), with a medium effect size (h= 0.41). Such a tendency was also observed in P8 (*growing*). Nonetheless, for P10 (*outcome*) a decrease was observed in the proportion of correct answers, with a medium effect size (h= 0.54).

Moving on to the within-group differences in the 'no-context' group, there are a number of results regarding the 'no-context' condition which are worth highlighting (see Figure 3). One important aspect is that P1 (*several*), P6 (*take a leap*), and P15 (*infrequently*) did not seem to have been affected by the two-week timespan. Conversely, P7 (*closely*) seems to have been slightly retained, although there was a slight decrease with a medium effect size (h= 0.70). In the case of P8 (*growing*), a very slight decrease was observed with a small-to-medium effect size (h= 0.49). P10 (*outcome*) was shown not to have been retained, since the proportion of correct answers to this question decreased with a medium effect size (h= 0.50). In the case of P12 (*benefit*) and P13 (*leap*), the former was shown to be retained with a medium effect size (h= 0.49) while the latter decreased the percentage of retention (h= 0.41).

The third research question aimed to discern whether there were any statistical differences in the delayed post-test between the 'context' and the 'no-context' testing conditions. As observed in Table 3, the effect sizes indicate that, in the 'context' condition, retention was higher for P1 (*several*) and P2 (*suitable*) with medium and almost high effect sizes (h= 0.49, and h= 0.70).

Another important result shows that participants in the no-context testing group retained the multi-word item *take a leap* (P6) to a greater extent than the context testing group with a medium effect size (h= 0.45). Nevertheless, the values were still low. In the case of *growing* (P8), the difference between the 'context' and 'no-context' condition was not very large, but the former showed better retention with a medium effect size (h= 0.49). The situation is the reverse in the case of both P12 (*benefit*) and P13 (*infrequently*), for which retention was higher in the 'no-context' condition with an equal medium effect size (h= 0.43).

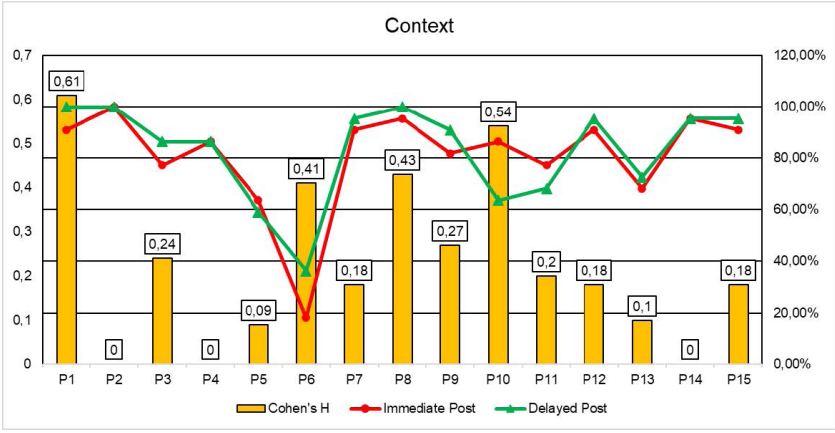

Figure 2. Context-embedded target words: immediate post-test and delayed post-test differences

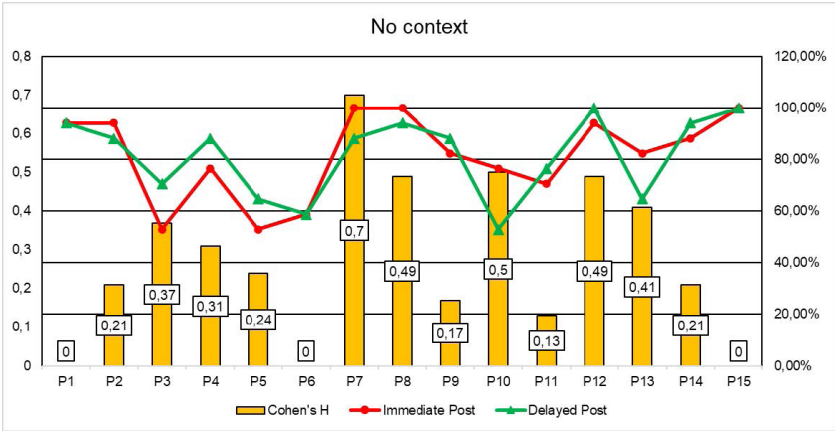

Figure 3. No context-embedded target words: immediate post-test and delayed post-test results

			Delayed post-test		Between-groups comparison
			Context	**No context**	Effect Size
Code		Frequency	Proportion	Proportion	Cohen's h
P1	*several*	100%	100%	94.1%	**0.49**
P2	*suitable*	80%	100%	88.23%	**0.70**
P3	*time-consuming*	20%	86.36%	70.58%	0.39
P4	*elsewhere*	60%	86.36%	88.23%	0.05
P5	*detrimental*	26.66%	59.09%	64.7%	0.12
P6	*take a leap*	6.66%	36.36%	58.82%	**0.45**
P7	*closely*	73.33%	95.45%	88.23%	0.27
P8	*growing*	93.33%	100%	94.11%	**0.49**
P9	*principal*	66.66%	90.9%	88.23%	0.08
P10	*outcome*	53.33%	63.63%	52.94%	0.22
P11	*suburb*	33.33%	68.18%	76.47%	0.19
P12	*benefit*	86.66%	95.45%	100%	**0.43**
P13	*leap*	40%	72.72%	64.7%	0.17
P14	*ban*	46.66%	95.45%	94.11%	0.06
P15	*infrequently*	13.33%	95.45%	100%	**0.43**
		Total	83.03%	81.56%	**0.04**

Table 3. Results showing the between-group results with the frequency of the word, the proportion of correct answers in the test (in percentages), and Cohen's *h* effect size

6. Discussion

This study intended to shed light on whether the testing conditions of vocabulary appearing in a pre-task phase (i.e. the warm-up activity) of a communicative task could lead to incidental learning, looking specifically at the degree of correct and incorrect answers. Ultimately, the purpose was to provide further empirical evidence on the role of single word and multi-word items regarding the presentation of these words when they appeared contextualized or in the absence of context. To this end, we compared fifteen different words both within-groups (that is, differences in the post-test and delayed post-test

for both the 'context' and 'no-context' testing groups) and between-groups (that is, the differences in the delayed post-test between both 'context' and 'no-context' testing groups).

Findings from this study point to the beneficial effect of context-embedded target words. As observed in the results section, more frequent words as per the corpus used were better retained by the group that undertook the test with words presented in context. This is in accordance with previous studies, such as Webb's (2008), in which the presence of a context led to greater incidental retention of word meaning. However, this is not sufficiently consistent; for instance, the expression *take a leap* (P6) seems to have been better retained in the 'no-context' testing situation. However, despite the higher retention value in this testing condition (58.82%), vocabulary gains increased in the 'context' testing condition from 18.82% to 36.6% for this multi-word item. This is indicative of context exerting some influence on the recognition of a word, possibly by comparing previous knowledge (i.e. the original input of the words) with that presented in the meaning-recognition test. Additionally, there are several reasons why the 'no-context' condition maintained a higher retention percentage than the 'context' one in the case of *take a leap*. First, the restricted options in the context condition might not have prompted learners to infer the meaning of the word, and thus it might have led to confusion (Hulstijn et al. 1996). Likewise, previous research has also revealed that one-time word encounters tend not to be affected by context type (Teng 2016). This could explain why, for instance, in words that tend to be less frequent, such as *detrimental* (P5) or *infrequently* (P15), the absence of context might have favored focusing on both the form and meaning. The retention of these words was higher in the 'no-context group', thus pointing to the effect that eliciting or highlighting the word may have had when dealing with the warm-up part of the communicative task. Additionally, another explanation might be that these words have cognates in Spanish, leading Spanish learners to deduce their meaning by resorting to their knowledge of the L1 words. In the case of *detrimental* (P5), the proportion of correct answers decreased slightly (63.63% to 59.09%) in the 'context' group, while learning gains were higher in the 'no-context' condition (52.94% to 64.70%). As observed, *detrimental* is a less frequent word (26.66%), and yet the absence of context seemed to favor, at the very least, the recognition of its meaning. This finding contradicts previous research such as Waring and Takaki's (2003) which, albeit methodologically different, also explored how learners retained new vocabulary from extensive reading. Their findings in terms of meaning-recognition tests indicated a purported decrease in the one-week delayed post-test and the three-month delayed post-test (0.8 > 0.7 > 0.5).

Another potential reason that might explain why multi-word items such as idioms (*take a leap*; P6) were better retained by participants being tested with no context could be related to wild guessing, which is considered a noise factor when recognition measures are used (Webb 2007; Chen and Truscott 2010). Additionally, the absence of context seems to have been detrimental to the recognition of more frequent words, such as P2 (*suitable*). A potential explanation for this could be related to the type of word. *Suitable* is an adjective whose meaning may be recognized within a sentence when context is provided. Thus, participants in the 'no-context' testing condition might not have been able to establish the appropriate map-meaning connections given the presentation of the word in isolation.

Additionally, a series of conflicting findings emerged from the study. There seem to be more learning gains with words such as *leap* (P13), a single-word item and a less frequent word (40%), in the 'context' condition. Results revealed that the 'context' testing group maintained the same gains (68.18% to 72.72%) while the 'no-context' group decreased significantly the retention of this word (82.35% to 64.70%). Hence, the appearance of unfamiliar words may have paved the way for their use in productive communication (Newton 2013), although the exploration of this variable was beyond the purposes of the study. Learners might have concentrated more on words that they might not have been familiar with during the preparation of the task. Although this would be taken as a different variable, the way of eliciting the target words during the warm-up could have equally affected vocabulary retention in both groups.

Its presentation in a sentence with context might have influenced the retention of *outcome* (P10), which is a moderate frequent word (53.33%). In this case, there was no statistical difference between the 'context' (63.63%) and the 'no-context' condition (52.94%). As can be observed, the 'context' testing group maintained higher learning gains even if both groups had decreased the recognition of this single-word item. In this respect, a potential explanation behind this finding may be related to two factors: (i) the lack of quality of the context may have conditioned the lasting effect of incidental vocabulary learning (Webb 2008), and (ii) the nature of *outcome* as a less frequent word may have contributed to this loss of retention, as participants might not have recognized it or might not have been able to map form-meaning connections with previous encounters.

7. Conclusion

This exploratory study has looked into how the presence or absence of context in a vocabulary test may contribute to retaining vocabulary after the completion of an education-oriented communicative task. Studies on the use of these tasks to

explore vocabulary retention have been scarce in the scholarly literature (with the exception of Newton 2013), hence the important contribution of this study to this area of knowledge. An additional contribution has been observing the plausibility of the type of vocabulary test as a variable determining vocabulary retention. In this respect, this has been an attempt to observe whether L2 learners tested with a meaning-recognition test with the presence or absence of context conditioned not only the amount of vocabulary learned but also the retention time.

The findings in the study revealed that context plays a pivotal role in vocabulary retention in incidental learning through a communicative task although, given the small scale of the study, our findings cannot be definitive in terms of the dichotomy of the 'context' vs 'no-context' condition (Teng 2016), and thus further research is needed. Similarly, an important finding has been the fact that multi-word items (such as idioms) were retained in a more efficient manner when the vocabulary items were presented in context in a sentence. This constitutes important proof that more empirical evidence has to be accumulated regarding this type of lexis and, more specifically, to determine their degree of retention after incidental learning. As mentioned, previous studies exploring multi-word items in contrast to single-word items, such as Chang and Chen (2022), have revealed that the former are retained more efficiently, which is consistent with the findings in our study. Yet, the 'context' testing group was not able to recognize one of the multi-word items. This certainly needs further empirical evidence.

There is a series of pedagogical implications that may be derived from the present study. Our findings seem to indicate that vocabulary learning is fostered by the presence of context. Nevertheless, the absence of context equally contributes to favoring short-term retention of certain words. These findings might indicate that learners do not solely rely on one-time strategies to develop vocabulary learning and, consequently, words that appear in second encounters —even in a vocabulary test— are also identified when context is not present. Secondly, teachers might benefit from the plausibility of using varied testing conditions. Although all the target words in this study were presented using the same reading input, the testing conditions were different. Thus, besides input and the frequency of exposure, second encounters after a reasonable period of time might indicate that learners retain some content from the input presented in warm-up activities. Finally, the frequency of the word does not seem to have a direct relation to whether it is tested in a 'context' or 'no-context' condition. This provides modest evidence that unfamiliar words may be retained and, thus, elicited either in aural or written form to pave the way for further vocabulary learning.

Our study is not without its limitations. Firstly, the absence of a pre-test in the form of a global vocabulary knowledge test would have brought to light what the

participants' initial vocabulary size was. Second, the appearance of these words should have been equally explored by including the variable of frequency of exposure. Additionally, individual differences among the vocabulary knowledge of L2 learners should have been a concern in our study inasmuch as variability may lead to different levels of lexical coverage and degrees of comprehension, as has been suggested by Webb (2021). Finally, one important limitation of our study was the use of test formats. Using a meaning-recognition test (L2 to L1) with the variation in the presentation of the target words certainly contributes to adding more empirical evidence to this scholarly domain; however, the inclusion of other vocabulary tests such as meaning recall tests (L2 to L1) would have shed more light upon the degree of vocabulary retention to a larger extent. Despite this obvious constraint, meaning-recognition has been recognized as a better predictor of reading comprehension than meaning recall (Laufer and Aviad-Levitzky 2017), which seems a relevant research finding to consider given the nature of the reading component of our communicative task.

On this basis, future research avenues should explore vocabulary retention in a more longitudinal manner, observing the degree of retention throughout a period extending from one to three months. Additionally, the inclusion of several input modes deserves more investigation (Uchihara et al. 2019), as well as comparing the effectiveness of different types of tests. Equally important, studies should also explore how vocabulary gains are affected when the same target words are used with different communicative tasks.

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FOSTERING EFL LEARNERS' NARRATIVE SKILLS THROUGH CONTEMPORARY MUSIC: THE CASE OF COUNTRY MUSIC

LAS HABILIDADES NARRATIVAS DE LOS APRENDIENTES DE ILE: EL CASO DE LA MÚSICA COUNTRY CONTEMPORÁNEA

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Abstract

Facilitating oral skills through authentic materials such as music has been essential in language teaching. Nonetheless, a study whose core element is to foster adolescent English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' narrative skills through contemporary music with highly emotional lyrics is still non-existent. A questionnaire was administered to fifty-eight EFL learners to know their attitude towards the implementation of social issues and music in class. Additionally, both the themes and the structure of two hundred and sixteen songs which constitute the *Corpus of Contemporary Country Songs* (CCCS) were analysed. A possible connection between the narrative and linguistic elements of the songs in the corpus was also considered. The results show that there exists a narrative structure in contemporary country music songs and a wide range of themes towards which students have shown a positive attitude. Furthermore, a positive connection between the different narrative and linguistic criteria employed to analyse the songs included in the corpus was also detected. These results suggest that these song lyrics may serve to promote EFL students' narrative skills.

Keywords: contemporary country music, culture, emotions, foreign language teaching, narrative skills.

Resumen

Facilitar las habilidades orales a través de materiales auténticos como puede ser la música ha sido esencial en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras. Sin embargo, no existen estudios cuyo elemento central sea desarrollar las habilidades narrativas de los estudiantes adolescentes de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (ILE) a través de canciones con letras emotivas. Así, se administró un cuestionario a cincuenta y ocho estudiantes adolescentes de ILE para conocer su actitud en cuanto a la implementación de temas sociales y música en clase. Por otro lado, tanto la temática como la estructura narrativa de las doscientas dieciséis canciones que conforman el *Corpus of Contemporary Country Songs* (CCCS) han sido analizadas. Se ha explorado también la posible conexión entre los criterios narrativos y lingüísticos que han servido para analizar las canciones. Los resultados muestran que existe una estructura narrativa en las canciones del género country contemporáneo y una amplia gama de temas hacia los que los estudiantes han demostrado una actitud positiva. Además, se ha identificado una relación positiva entre los diferentes criterios utilizados para analizar las muestras del corpus. Estos resultados sugieren que las letras de estas canciones podrían servir para fomentar las habilidades narrativas del alumnado de ILE.

Palabras claves: música country contemporánea, cultura, emociones, enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, habilidades narrativas.

1. Introduction

One of the most frequent activities of adolescents is listening to foreign music while paying attention to song lyrics. Indeed, music has a tremendous influence on adolescents. From an educational point of view, songs can be used for a wide range of purposes in language teaching, including that of facilitating oral skills (Bora 2012). Moreover, songs have the ability to promote the affective-social relationship among students, providing a pleasant classroom environment, reducing anxiety levels and increasing motivation (Toscano-Fuentes and Fonseca-Mora 2012). In addition to this, one of the essential elements of songs is their linguistic content, that is, their lyrics. Song lyrics may induce several emotions, such as sadness or astonishment, as well as activate different psychological mechanisms, like visual imagery or memory (Barradas and Sakka 2022). It should be noted that there are songs whose lyrics may transmit radical messages, affecting learners' democratic values (Sánchez-Vizcaíno 2022). By contrast, some songs convey emotions in different ways, some tell memorable and moving stories with which students can empathize or understand from their own experiences (Shen

2009; Williams 2022). This may be the case of the vast majority of songs in the country music genre, whose main characteristic is the faithful reproduction of daily life while telling their characters' story (Armstrong and Greider 2013; Fell and Sporleder 2014; Eaton et al. 2022). At the same time, these musical resources represent authentic material, allowing cultural aspects to be brought closer to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Likewise, foreign language (FL) learners consider authentic videos to be effective tools to acquire cultural knowledge (Sinyashina 2022). Despite the availability of a variety of multimodal resources in the language classroom, learners normally have few opportunities to explore foreign cultures in class (Sobkowiak 2021).

Using storytelling in EFL teaching helps develop cognitive and affective abilities. Stories include a plot that produces enthusiasm among language learners with the possibility of being able to empathize with the characters, and it can serve as an effective resource to create debates where students can give their own opinion (Kennedy 2014). According to El Majidi et al., "debate is an interactive pedagogical tool" (2018: 35). The problem lies in that adolescent EFL learners sometimes find it difficult to participate in topic discussions (Cunningham 2014). Likewise, the lack of communicative activities based on relevant topics may also hinder the learners' participation in class (Green et al. 2002; El Majidi et al. 2018).

The increasing interest in multimodality and the development of literacies beyond the written word has seen a shift to a pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group 1996; Cope and Kalantzis 2015) in language learning. This pedagogical shift is characterized by the active role of learners who engage in meaning-making by means of different modes of communication such as music, images or gestures, and the opportunities which may arise in the language classroom to represent multiple experiences. In this respect, music is regarded as an effective tool to foster affective-social relationships which enable students to engage in communicative activities from multiple points of view. Despite the fact that music-mediated communicative activities could promote students' narrative skills, this type of activity is not very frequent in the EFL class. Similarly, research frequently focuses on the beneficial use of songs with young learners, but research on song use with adolescents is limited (Tegge 2018).

This paper aims to analyze whether contemporary country music could help to develop adolescent EFL learners' narrative skills. For this reason, a corpus of contemporary country songs was created. To explore whether contemporary country songs contain a narrative structure and a variety of themes, a series of narrative elements as well as a thematic analysis were considered. Additionally, the relationship between a series of narrative and linguistic criteria was also considered to determine the suitability of this music genre as a pedagogical tool. Moreover,

getting to know adolescent EFL learners' opinion and attitude towards certain social issues was also of interest to establish a connection with the themes found in contemporary country songs.

2. Music in FL teaching

Both music and language can be used as instruments of communication. The elements that unify this relationship are the vocal and auditory channels, as well as the similarities with respect to melody and rhythm (Patel 2007; Sacks 2007; Fonseca-Mora et al. 2011). Similarly, according to Thompson and Quinto, "music is viewed as a language of emotion, with melodic features signifying distinct emotions" (2011: 363). Thus, considering that music plays a very important role in the emotional development of adolescents, it can also be regarded as a fundamental element in language teaching.

In addition to music, song lyrics are also an essential tool in language teaching (Shen 2009). Songs provide students with an approach to oral discourse through lyrics that are easy to remember (Christiner and Reiterer 2013). It should be noted that memory can be activated by the melody and rhythm of songs, being greater when musical elements are combined with movements and images (Iwata 2005). In addition, song lyrics often represent the discursive characteristics of spoken language and, accordingly, students are exposed to the authenticity of speech and the different varieties of the English language. In this regard, deviant clippings such as *gonna* or *wanna* are repeatedly used in music (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007).

With respect to the role of multimodal resources in the language classroom, the use of auditory input linked to images or texts like music videos is considered very popular (Sankey et al. 2010), especially among secondary students due to their familiarity with multimedia. In this sense, multimodal learning by means of audiovisual products is regarded as one of the most effective techniques in the field of FL teaching (Becerra and Muñoz 2013), since this music-mediated learning experience plays a pivotal role in students' learning process (Cores-Bilbao et al. 2019).

Another important element when using songs in the language classroom is the fact that most of the time their lyrics make reference to cultural aspects of the target language (TL), promoting learners' cultural competence (Reina 2010). The fact of experiencing cultural diversity makes it possible to establish both cognitive and affective links between people and cultures (Beacco et al. 2016). Conversely, a culturally-alienated individual shows a lack of interest towards the

culture of others (Krishnappa 2020) and has no cultural empathy (Ridley and Lingle 1996).

All things considered, song lyrics may serve as a medium for class discussion, providing students with the perfect scenario so that they can give their own opinions on topics they may find motivating, since song lyrics carry shared meaning with which adolescents may identify (Messner et al. 2007). Song lyrics also have the capacity to raise awareness about social issues like gender equality or mental health. In this regard, students may feel confident enough to develop their narrative skills while reducing the state of anxiety that they normally feel during the act of speaking in front of their classmates.

2.1. The Emotional Factor in Music

Music can be considered a very important part of teenage life. Adolescents are at a stage in which they start to develop their personalities and feelings. They no longer receive affective input through motherese or the language used in educational centers, but they require another affective source with which they feel safe. Murphey (2013) argues that adolescents feel the need to receive this affective input and that they can find it through songs, which also create a positive classroom environment. In a similar vein, Thompson and Quinto (2011) focus on the importance of understanding how music can communicate and induce emotional states, and stress the different ways in which music affects us.

With respect to the relationship between song lyrics and emotions, song lyrics can create mental images that, in turn, evoke emotions in the listeners and facilitate memorization (Eschrich et al. 2008). Likewise, song lyrics express emotions which allow listeners to empathize with the 'persona' created (Levinson 2006), engaging them in a kind of emotional contagion (Juslin and Västfjäll 2008). Thus, this musical and emotional input could be very effective for adolescent students who study a FL, as these experiences could trigger psychological processes in a group capable of reflecting different emotions (Lewis 1999).

The problem is that adolescents lack the ability to recognize and label emotions across different situations as well as to communicate them properly by means of their emotional lexicon even in their L1. Recent studies suggest that students with higher levels of emotional competence or emotional understanding are more willing to participate in class than those who show lower levels in this competence (Bora 2012; Fernández-García and Fonseca-Mora 2022). Similarly, prior research highlights the significance of meaningful communicative tasks through music, which allow students to express themselves from an affective point of view (Shen 2009).

2.2 Narrative Structure of Song Lyrics

In the light of the studies that have focused on EFL learning through different authentic materials, music has undoubtedly been one of the most used resources (Murphey 2013; Kennedy 2014). Moreover, these studies have also proved the benefits of using songs to develop students' narrative skills (Bora 2012). Nonetheless, little has been studied on how to improve EFL learners' narrative skills through contemporary music, especially country music with highly emotional lyrics.

Stories provide students with opportunities to develop acquired language within a context and are an inexhaustible source of authentic material (Deacon and Murphey 2001). Likewise, stories bring language learners closer to the culture of the TL (Ryshina-Pankova et al. 2021). The approach to what constitutes the center of narrations and the characteristic features of narrative discourse allows us to reflect on what elements are necessary for students to develop their narrative skills. The influential narrative model by Labov (2006) specifies the parts of narratives, namely, *abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution,* and *coda*. Thus, once the characteristic elements of the narrative text are known, there is a myriad of stories that students can produce with the possibility of being based on personal experiences, popular tales (Deacon and Murphey 2001) or, as proposed in the present study, contemporary country songs.

The analysis of narrative discourse focuses on aspects such as the way a story is told or its basic elements, like the figure of the narrator, the characters or the sequential order within a timeline (Gillig 2000). Similarly, importance is also given to the theme on which a narrative revolves. Thus, the development of students' narrative skills could be facilitated through vivid discussions on relevant topics extracted from certain song lyrics (Murphey 2013). Furthermore, stories help us make sense of the world around us (Deacon and Murphey 2001) and create a feeling of belonging to a specific culture. In this regard, songs also provide multiple cultural contexts that can serve as a resource in the development of narratives of personal identity (Loseke 2007).

2.3. Contemporary Country Music

Popular culture, and hence popular music, is an essential part in the development of identity in adolescence. In addition, it seems that the most determining factor for choosing a specific music genre among adolescents is emotional and the greatest influence comes from the media. As far as contemporary country music is concerned, a recent study indicated that this is one of students' musical preferences in the USA (Petitbon and Hitchcock 2022; Wright 2022). However, this music genre is not very popular among Spanish adolescents because they are not normally

exposed to it and, therefore, they have no opportunity to develop a musical taste for it whatsoever.

Contemporary country music is rooted in a culture that has the less favored social classes at the center of its creation. This type of music is normally associated with a low status because it is related to the social class that lives in rural areas or in less populated areas of the south of the USA (Dyck 2021). These musical compositions are full of feeling and culture typical of the working-class people from which they first originated (Armstrong and Greider 2013).

Like folk tales or traditional songs, the origin of country music is also found in the oral tradition. As far as the tone of most contemporary country songs is concerned, the natural use of speech permeates them with authenticity (Armstrong and Greider 2013; Eaton et al. 2022). Moreover, both the voiced southern drawl and twang are distinctive characteristics of this music genre (Mann 2008). These songs are often described as rhyming dialogues in which the melody that accompanies them is simply an extension of the conversation. In addition, spoken opening lines or spoken last lines can also be found through a narrative voice (Fox 2004). With regard to how the narrative develops in these song lyrics, it is normally oriented towards the succession of events within a timeline (Lewis 1999). Additionally, dialogues between the characters sometimes appear through the use of direct style, creating a more natural scenario within the story that is being told (Fox 2004). In addition, as in any story, there also exists a moment of greater tension or climax that normally corresponds to a bridge near the end of the song and that also involves a change in the musical rhythm and tone, giving an unexpected perspective on the theme. In a study carried out with algorithmically generated lyrics, Tee et al. (2022) found that the most common terms in country song lyrics are *got*, *yeah* or *oh*. These terms are generally related to colloquial speech and affect, especially those that express an emotional state.

The discourse of country music has evolved as a social construct and no longer are certain issues considered taboo in Western society, such as the dominant role of women, same-sex relationships or social policy discontent (Hubbs 2014; Shooter 2022). Fox (2004) refers to this music genre as the synthesis of the working class, which recounts its daily experiences within its working-class world. Contemporary country song lyrics also tell stories about real life, memories and reactions to things that are authentic and that happen to all of us (Armstrong and Greider 2013; Engh 2013). Unlike other music genres, these songs are characterized by combining instrumental simplicity with lyrical stories that are told in just three minutes. On occasions, instrumentation occupies much of these compositions, evoking a wide range of emotions. At a textual level, students can benefit from the schematic structure of this genre in order to develop their communication skills.

These structures include intertextuality, intensification, inversion, reported speech as well as everyday language, therefore adding authenticity to the discourse (Fox 2004). All in all, the authenticity of contemporary country song lyrics is undoubtedly the most important element of these musical compositions, and they represent a fundamental source of cultural and emotional socialization.

3. The Study

The main objective of this study is to show the usefulness of contemporary country songs in developing EFL learners' narrative skills. A series of quantitative and qualitative analyses were used. Firstly, information was collected on students' opinions towards the topics that are dealt with in this music genre. Secondly, the *Corpus of Contemporary Country Songs* (CCCS) was created with a two-fold aim; on the one hand, it is intended to carry out a thematic analysis of the song lyrics to know their suitability in relation to the adolescent students' interests; and, on the other, it is aimed at determining whether this music genre can serve to develop the students' narrative skills. Finally, to determine the appropriateness of this musical resource for adolescent students, the relationship between a series of narrative and linguistic elements was also analyzed.

3.1. Participants

A total of fifty-eight Spanish adolescent students from three different high schools participated in the present study. The first group (n=20) is in the fourth year of Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE) and the average age is sixteen years. As for the other two groups (n=38), they study post-Compulsory Secondary Education (Post-CSE) and their average age is seventeen years. Both groups receive four hours of English lessons per week at school. Informed consent was obtained from all individuals included in this study.

3.2. Research Questions

The questions informing this current study are the following:

1. What do teenage students think about the use of the themes of contemporary country music in EFL teaching?
2. To what extent are the themes of contemporary country music suited to the interests of teenage students?
3. To what extent can contemporary country song lyrics serve as a discourse model to develop EFL students' narrative skills?
4. Is there any connection between the narrative and the linguistic elements which are found in contemporary country songs?

3.3. Research Instruments

In order to know the students' attitudes and opinions towards the implementation of social issues and music in the EFL class, a questionnaire with ten items based on a 5-point Likert scale was administered. In addition, references were included with respect to students' attitudes towards contemporary country music (see Appendix 1).

Additionally, it was necessary to know whether contemporary country songs deal with topics with which adolescent students can identify. For this reason, the CCCS was created. The number of songs that constitute this corpus is two hundred and sixteen, and they have been selected mainly taking into account the year of publication, that is, those songs that were published between 2000 and 2017. The main reason for this time span was to offer a diachronic analysis, considering the continuous social changes in relation to adolescents' tastes and attitudes as well as the changes that have occurred in the country music genre in terms of the treatment of certain social issues, such as the empowering of women in all spheres of life, same-sex relationships or the social discontent over aggressive policies.

To determine whether there exists a narrative structure in contemporary country song lyrics, a total of thirteen narrative criteria were taken into account based on different studies and models (Gillig 2000; Deacon and Murphey 2001; Labov 2006) on the characteristics of narratives. Thus, this quantitative analysis was performed following the main features of the narrative discourse, such as the identification of a spatial and temporal sequence, the existence of a narrative voice or the presence of characters.

Along with the analysis of the narrative elements, a series of linguistic elements was also considered. To find out the appropriateness of the linguistic contents, the descriptors required in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Companion Volume* [CEFRL/CV] (Council of Europe 2020) and the linguistic contents established for each level in the Spanish education law were consulted. Thus, the use of cohesive elements in the text, the difficulty of the vocabulary with respect to idiomatic expressions or cultural references, and the grammatical structures were considered. To assess the degree of difficulty of the American variety, the artists' accent was taken into account, which in this case corresponds to the so-called twang or nasal voice. In this way, it was possible to determine the degree of suitability of these songs as didactic tools in EFL teaching. Likewise, to explore whether the language used in the CCCS was appropriate for the students' proficiency, the most frequently used words of the most representative themes in this CCCS were analyzed using the tool *AntConc* (Anthony 2011). All the song lyrics were processed in *AntConc,* but only lemmas were taken into account. Therefore, non-content words such as determiners, conjunctions or

prepositions were excluded from the search. In addition to this, a correlation analysis between the narrative and linguistic elements was performed using the 21.0 SPSS statistics package. This allowed us to consider whether there is a trend in contemporary country songs with respect to these elements and their suitability in EFL teaching.

3.4. Procedures

First of all, to know how much the students agree or disagree with the ten items included in the questionnaire on their attitude and opinion towards certain social issues in the language classroom, they were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale. This questionnaire was administered in only one session and its completion took approximately five minutes.

As regards the CCCS, the sources that have been consulted to select the most representative songs in this music genre were the charts produced by popular sources such as *Billboard, CMT, The Boot*, or *Taste of Country*. Due to the rapid evolution of this music genre in recent decades and the emergence of so-called crossover artists,[1] these sources have been indicative to reflect which artists fall into the country genre; hence, constituting inclusion criteria for the CCCS. The song lyrics were collected using a variety of sites.[2] For every song retrieved, a detailed manual analysis of its thematic content was carried out. Although the content was generally unambiguous, interviews that both artists and authors of the songs have given to different media were also taken into account as inclusion criteria. With regard to exclusion criteria, out of the two hundred and fifty-eight songs that originally made up the corpus, forty-two songs were excluded because they contained either inappropriate language or references to some addictions such as alcohol or drugs in a celebratory way; therefore, the CCCS consists of two hundred and sixteen songs.

Once the songs were categorized by theme following the lists created by the aforementioned sources as well as through a detailed analysis of their lyrics, the next step was to establish narrative criteria following different studies (Gillig 2000; Deacon and Murphey 2001; Labov 2006) to determine whether there exists a narrative structure in contemporary country song lyrics. Thus, a quantitative analysis was carried out in which thirteen narrative elements have served to establish whether a song meets the essential characteristics of a narrative. Moreover, the socioemotional component was also included in one of these elements by means of the use of interjections. In addition, different linguistic criteria were also considered to determine whether the use of these song lyrics was appropriate for the students' proficiency level. Thus, the descriptors of the CEFRL/CV (Council of Europe 2020) as well as the basic concepts required for

each group as established in the Spanish education law were consulted. Appendix 2 shows a list of the narrative and the linguistic criteria that were considered to explore the suitability of contemporary country songs in EFL teaching.

4. Results

4.1. Students' Attitudes

To know the students' attitude and opinion towards the implementation of social issues and music in class, information was collected and the percentage was calculated for each group, that is, CSE (n=20) and post-CSE (n=38). A brief clarification of the defining characteristics of the country music genre was made prior to the administration of the questionnaire (Table 1).

Statements	CSE (%)	Post-CSE (%)
1. I think democratic values should be taught in class.	55.00	62.90
2. I can give my opinion on social issues.	25.00	53.91
3. I think drug addiction should be discussed in class.	20.00	35.21
4. I think bullying should be addressed in class.	45.00	75.80
5. I think gender equality should be addressed in class.	55.00	88.98
6. I think freedom of sexual and gender identity should be discussed in class.	50.00	58.40
7. It is very important to know the culture of the TL.	55.00	88.98
8. Learning a FL through songs is very important.	60.00	58.40
9. Music is an effective medium for dealing with social issues.	45.00	40.72
10. I am interested in contemporary country music.	30.00	38.40

Table 1. Students' attitude towards social issues and music in language learning

As can be observed, the most valued item for those EFL students in CSE was the use of songs in language learning (60.00%), followed by the treatment of gender equality in class (55.00%), the teaching of democratic values (55.00%) and the incorporation of cultural elements (55.00%). Similarly, the students reported a positive attitude towards the discussion of sexual and gender identity (50.00%). With respect to the degree of maturity or attitude towards certain social issues such as drug addiction, only 20% reported a positive attitude.

By contrast, those students who study post-CSE selected gender equality issues (88.98%) and the teaching of culture (88.98%) as the most valued items. Regarding their opinion towards social issues, 53.91% reported a positive attitude. With respect to the use of music in language teaching, 58.48% of post-CSE students considered it to be a very effective tool. Whilst less than half of CSE students reported a moderate attitude towards the discussion of bullying in class (45.00%), those post-CSE students reported a favorable attitude (75.80%). Concerning the implementation of contemporary country music in the English classroom, 30.00% of CSE students and 38.40% of post-CSE students reported a positive attitude. This may be due to their ignorance of this music genre and their lack of exposure to it.

4.2. Contemporary Country Music Themes

The analysis of the contemporary country song lyrics that make up the CCCS (n=216) made it possible to identify twenty-four different themes, including an additional category '*Others*' which contains themes whose representation was not explicit enough to establish an independent category (Table 2).

As the data show, an attempt was made to be accurate with theme selection without going into subcategories or details. However, it was possible that two different themes coexist in the same song, so the most prominent theme was

Themes	(n=216)	(%)	Themes	(n=216)	(%)
Abuse	5	2.31	Love	8	3.70
Adolescence	23	10.64	Memories	14	6.48
Addictions	5	2.31	Others	13	6.01
American culture	20	9.25	Patriotism	3	1.38
Arms	4	1.85	Religion	7	3.24
Fame / Money	9	4.16	Sexuality	2	0.92
Family	17	7.86	Social criticism	6	2.77
Free time	6	2.77	Sports	7	3.24
Freedom	14	6.48	Values	6	2.77
Friendship / Feud	4	1.85	War	13	6.01
Heartbreak	9	4.16	Women in society	7	3.24
Illness	8	3.70	Working class	6	2.77

Table 2. Contemporary country music themes

assigned in these cases. One particular case was the distinction between *American culture* and *Patriotism*. In this regard, the former was selected for those songs which focus on certain American cultural customs or cultural references, whereas the latter was reserved for those songs with a powerful pro-American message.

The results indicated that the most representative theme in the CCCS was *Adolescence* (10.64%), in which concerns towards bullying or feelings of an inferiority complex are raised in songs such as "Invisible" or "Road less travelled", respectively. Regarding issues related to adolescence, the students showed interest in topics that normally occur during this stage, such as drug addiction or bullying.

The second most representative theme was *American culture* (9.25%). This theme is characterized by intertextual references to American culture, as evidenced in songs such as "Southern comfort zone" or "Dustbowl children", and even textual fragments from other country pieces, as is the case in "This is country music". It is not surprising that this is a recurring theme in this music genre, since American society in general is often associated with a feeling of deep patriotism. With respect to the students' attitude towards the culture of the TL, it seems that there are numerous songs through which the students could come into contact with the socio-cultural elements of the USA.

Songs about *Family* issues accounted for 7.86%, a topic in which secondary school students showed great interest. Similarly, there were also songs whose main theme was *Memories* (6.48%) as in "Laughed until we cried or I go back". Likewise, songs which represent the sense of *Freedom* accounted for 6.48% of the CCCS, especially through the use of means of transport such as trains or trucks. A list of the songs which make up the CCCS categorized by themes can be found in Appendix 3.

4.3. Narrative Elements in Contemporary Country Songs

The next stage in the data collection analysis was to observe whether contemporary country song lyrics follow a narrative structure. A quantitative analysis was carried out in which thirteen narrative elements were established to determine whether a specific song meets the essential characteristics of a narrative (see Table 3).

The results revealed the significance of the existence of a narrative voice or narrator (93.06%) throughout the song. Within this criterion, the use of a first-person voice or narrator (59.26%) should be highlighted in comparison to the use of the third person or dialogues (33.80%). A dialogue was considered when two narrative voices are

Narrative elements	(n=216)	(%)
1. Spoken introduction	7	3.24
2. Identification of a temporal sequence	118	54.63
3. Identification of a geographic location	140	64.81
4. Existence of a narrative voice: Songs with an articulated self Songs without an articulated self	201 128 73	93.06 59.26 33.80
5. Description of a character or a space-time setting	171	79.17
6. Use of direct speech to introduce characters' words	76	35.19
7. Use of characteristic linguistic elements of a narrative	11	5.09
8. Use of a specific theme throughout the song	216	100.00
9. Use of socio-emotional elements by means of interjections	135	62.50
10. Use of a rhythmic scheme that adds continuity to the song structure	153	70.83
11. Features which hold the listener's attention throughout the song	145	67.13
12. Internal repetitions that produce unification and maintain the listeners' attention	194	89.81
13. Use of a climax corresponding to a bridge at the end of a song	122	56.48

Table 3. Analysis of narrative elements

present in the same song. An example can be found in "Two black Cadillacs" (*And the preacher said 'he was a good man' / And his brother said 'he was a good friend')*.

In addition to the identification of a geographic location or region (64.81%), there was also a description of it or of the characters of the song (79.17%). Similarly, a temporal sequence was also identified through specific connectors related to time (54.63%), which contribute to its development. In addition, the use of interjections (62.50%) reflected the different ways of expressing emotions, like *Oh*, which normally expresses surprise, or *Yeah*, which may express approval but also joy and enthusiasm. Furthermore, the use of repetitions constituted 89.81% of the songs. This was mainly achieved by repeating words or phrases, which help to evoke different emotions such as sadness or surprise. An example of this can be found in "Road less traveled" (*Put your hands up / put your hands up)*. This gives continuity to the plot line of the song, as also happens with the existence of a rhythmic scheme (70.83%), which is mainly achieved by the use of rhyming pairs (Fell and Sporleder 2014). The following rhythmic pattern could be found in "Whiskey

lullaby" (*We found him with his face down in the pillow / And when we buried him beneath the willow*). This continuity is also reflected in elements which hold the listener's interest (67.13%), for example, personal pronouns like *You* or *We*. This is also achieved by means of a chorus in which the same verses are repeated throughout the song (89.81%). Another characteristic element could be found at the end of the song through the bridge, which would correspond to the moment of greatest tension or climax in a story (56.48%). In contrast to this data, only 5.09% of the songs included characteristic phrases of stories as in "Boy gets a truck" (*It ain't a story as old as time)* or in You were mine (*It was happy ever after)*.

4.4. Linguistic Elements

Along with these narrative elements, linguistic criteria were also considered. The linguistic descriptors of the CEFRL/CV (Council of Europe 2020), as well as the basic contents as established in the Spanish education law for each group were consulted. Despite the difference of age between both groups, levels of proficiency do not differ considerably. On the one hand, the presence of cohesive devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, connectors and lexical cohesion suggested the degree of textual complexity. The appropriateness of the lexical variety was determined with regard to the topics which are normally covered in each educational stage such as entertainment, jobs or family matters. As regards grammatical structures, the degree of complexity was informed by the presence of complex sentences or structures intended to be studied at a specific level. On the other hand, the degree of difficulty in understanding the song was determined considering the characteristics of the American variety with regard to the artist's accent and the use of twang or nasal voice (Table 4).

As far as the linguistic elements are concerned, a high percentage of songs included grammatical structures (85.19%) and cohesive devices (78.24%) that are suitable for the students' proficiency level according to the CEFRL/CV (Council of Europe 2020) and the basic contents required for each group in the Spanish education law. Song lyrics included the use of modality, relative clauses or reported

Linguistic elements	(n=216)	(%)
1. Use of cohesive elements	169	78.24
2. The vocabulary is appropriate for the students' proficiency level	156	72.22
3. The grammatical structures are appropriate for the students' proficiency level	184	85.18
4. No listening comprehension difficulty	148	68.52

Table 4. Analysis of linguistic elements

speech, which is appropriate for both groups. Similarly, a wide variety of lexis referring to entertainment, jobs, emotions or transports was detected. Although the English variety used in contemporary country music is marked by colloquialisms, 72.22% of the songs contained lexical content that can be easily recognized by EFL learners. Finally, despite the fact that this music genre is normally associated with the southern states of the USA where the use of drawl or twang is characteristic, 68.52% of the songs did not include phonological aspects that make them difficult to understand.

The most frequently used words of the five most representative themes of the CCCS —that is, *Adolescence, American culture, Family, Freedom* and *Memories*— were analyzed using the tool *AntConc* (Anthony 2011). This allowed us to determine whether the language used in this music genre is suitable for the students' age. Non-content items like conjunctions, prepositions or determiners were excluded. Thus, the use of verb clippings and nouns such as *gonna* or *love* was representative of the category *Adolescence*. This is indicative of the trend of adolescents to use colloquialism and abbreviations. The most frequently used words for the category *American culture* were *country, ain't* or *southern*. Within the category *Family,* we could find words such as *love* or *home,* which are connected with the emotional lexicon. Within the category *Freedom* both *car* or *truck* represented the most frequently used words, whereas *time* and *change* were the most representative words within the *Memories* category. In this regard, we can observe that students at this stage of their learning process would be familiar with the most representative words of these categories.

4.5. Relationship between Narrative and Linguistic Elements

The correlation analysis between the different criteria allowed us to know whether there is any relationship between them and whether they can explain any trend with regard to the type of elements which can be found in contemporary country song lyrics. This will allow us to establish whether this music genre may be of interest to facilitate the development of EFL learners' narrative skills. In order to establish a possible connection between both elements, a correlation analysis was performed. Figure 1 shows the connection between the linguistic and narrative criteria.

As can be observed, a positive and statistically significant connection was detected between the narrative and the linguistic criteria ($r = 0.244$; $P < 0.001$). This data reveals that the higher the number of linguistic criteria met, the higher the number of narrative elements in a song. In this sense, those song lyrics that meet the linguistic criteria established for this study —that is, use of cohesive

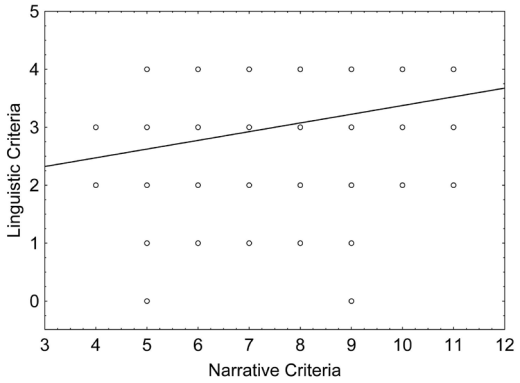

Figure 1. Relationship between linguistic and narrative criteria

devices, appropriateness of both vocabulary and grammatical usage— and phonological appropriateness, include a higher number of narrative elements. This positive trend may be indicative of the relevance of the sample that constitutes the CCCS for its implementation in the EFL classroom to foster students' narrative skills.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The secondary education curriculum establishes that pedagogical actions should facilitate the development of students' narrative skills in everyday situations by means of authentic material to create meaningful learning. In order to determine the effectiveness of contemporary country songs in this respect, a total of two hundred and sixteen songs which make up the CCCS were analyzed. The classification process coincides with other studies on lyrics-based analysis (Fell and Sporleder 2014). In addition, a questionnaire was administered to fifty-eight EFL students seeking their opinion about current social issues.

The data revealed that students have an overall positive attitude towards certain social issues being discussed in the EFL classroom. Similarly, the students at a more advanced stage reported a more positive attitude towards the discussion of issues considered controversial such as domestic violence or drug addiction. Whereas CSE students showed more interest in the use of music in language

learning, post-CSE students displayed a more favorable attitude towards issues such as bullying or gender equality. This suggests that students would be mature enough to deal with various issues in class. In this regard, students would have the opportunity to discuss different topics found in contemporary country songs. Some of these topics may be considered controversial, but if used properly, they may contribute to engaging class discussions. In line with studies carried out by Murphey (2013), this type of resource could be used in class discussions to facilitate the students' narrative skills.

By exploring the most representative themes of this music genre, it was demonstrated that songs about adolescence, American culture, family, freedom or memories constitute a large part of the CCCS. This is in line with the themes explored by Engh (2013) on the representation of certain themes in country music songs. These results are consistent with previous studies that highlight the importance of providing students with meaningful communicative tasks on everyday topics with which they can feel identified (Shen 2009; Zhang and Head 2009). All these themes can be easily recognized by EFL learners, and they may even feel identified with them at some point. As for cultural themes that focus on American society, these may be introduced into teaching through these song lyrics, therefore establishing a connection between the students' culture and that of the TL.

Moreover, the results of the present study also showed that contemporary country song lyrics have a structure which is similar to that of a narrative. Consistent with studies that highlight the effectiveness of stories to develop a narrative voice (Gillig 2000; Loseke 2007), the present study detected certain characteristic elements of storytelling such as the presence of a narrative voice, the use of dialogues or the identification of characters in a spatial and temporal dimension. To a lesser extent, direct speech is also used to represent the characters' words. We can conclude that the narrative elements of contemporary country song lyrics coincide with those included in relevant studies and models (Gillig 2000; Deacon and Murphey 2001; Labov 2006). There is no doubt that this is a fundamental characteristic of the stories, in addition to the existence of the description of the characters or the location where the story takes place, which may be associated with the *orientation* in a story. All this implies that these song lyrics may be used with these groups to deal with issues of daily life and applied in class to facilitate the students' narrative skills.

It can be said that having developed their critical thinking and having the ability to give their opinion on certain issues at such an age, students can also engage in emotion-based communicative activities. The incorporation of affective tools into this educational stage is of great importance, especially if we attend to

musical tastes, since there are some musical genres with recurrent messages of misogyny and violence. Moreover, the emotional element of this music genre has also been detected in the song lyrics through the use of a bridge at the end of the song and the persona created in such musical compositions. At the same time, this may be associated with the resolution in a story, that is, the climactic moment. Similarly, the data revealed the ubiquitous presence of socio-emotional elements by means of interjections or emotion-laden words such as *love* or *family*. This is in line with the study performed by Tee et al. (2022) with regard to the presence of emotion-related words as the most common elements in country song lyrics. These songs may evoke different emotions and provoke different responses, such as laughter, sadness or compassion. Indeed, since stories activate our feelings, song lyrics can be associated with a specific theme and developed into a narrative as an emotional and intellectual reaction to the events that are presented in the song (Hirvela 2001).

With respect to the linguistic criteria and the students' proficiency level, it was found that adolescent students, especially at higher stages, would be familiar with the linguistic elements. This was determined by consulting the descriptors of the CEFRL/CV (Council of Europe 2020) and the contents required for CSE and post-CSE. The linguistic elements found in the songs coincide with those reported by Fox (2004). Despite the presence of the American variety in most country artists, this may not imply a barrier when it comes to oral comprehension, since more than half of the songs (68.52%) did not include a marked accent or the use of distinctive phonological characteristics such as drawl or twang. We can conclude, then, that the analysis of the linguistic criteria shows that the cohesive, lexical, grammatical and phonological elements are suitable for students at this stage. In addition, the analysis of lyrics with regard to the most representative words coincides with the results found by Kreyer and Mukherjee (2007), showing that deviant clippings characteristic of spoken language are repeatedly used. Thus, this may suggest that the students would be familiar with the most frequently used words in the songs which constitute the CCCS.

A positive trend between the narrative and the linguistic criteria used to determine the appropriateness of this music genre was detected. Thus, the more linguistic elements a song contains, the more narrative elements are included. This could suggest that country songs resemble stories in the sense that their lyrics are similar to structures in which different grammatical forms and the use of cohesive elements provide coherence to the narrative. As regards the most frequently used words in this music genre, the results are in line with those reported by Fell and Sporleder (2014). All in all, these findings may suggest that contemporary country music may serve as an effective pedagogical resource which can be used in different

multimodal ways to facilitate the development of EFL students' narrative skills; therefore, students will be engaged in heterogeneous narratives from multiple points of view (Cope and Kalantzis 2015).

Among the limitations of this study, reference to the linguistic elements should be made with respect to the generalization of these items. For a more accurate analysis, future studies should include more elements in a clearer manner. In addition, the number of participants turned out to be rather small for a study of these characteristics, so future studies should include a larger sample of students. Moreover, these results should be treated with caution, as the questionnaire on the students' attitudes was not validated. Finally, further research might focus on students' awareness of the usefulness of country music to facilitate their narrative skills in the EFL class.

To conclude, this study has explored the potential impact of contemporary country music on EFL students' narrative skills. Recognizing the effectiveness of authentic materials which include both music and affect is a preliminary step for their implementation in the EFL class. In this regard, EFL students may benefit from the use of contemporary country song lyrics as authentic materials to develop their narrative skills.

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Notes

1. The term 'crossover' refers to those artists who attract different types of audience. On occasions, this term has had negative connotations since it has been associated with a cultural appropriation that implies the dissolution of the characteristics of a genre.

2. The following sites have proven to be the most reliable sources: www.songfacts.com, www.cowboylyrics.com, www.azlyrics.com and www.metrolyrics.com

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire on students' attitude and opinion towards social issues and music in class

The questionnaire consists of ten statements on your attitude and opinion towards the implementation of social issues and music into the EFL class. You need to indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement considering the following codes: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I think democratic values should be taught in class.					
2. I can give my opinion on social issues.					
3. I think drug addiction should be discussed in class.					
4. I think bullying should be addressed in class.					
5. I think gender equality should be addressed in class.					
6. I think freedom of sexual and gender identity should be discussed in class.					
7. It is very important to know the culture of the TL.					
8. Learning a foreign language through songs is important.					
9. Music is an effective medium for dealing with social issues.					
10. I am interested in contemporary country music.					

Appendix 2. Narrative and linguistic elements

Narrative elements
1. Spoken introduction
2. Identification of a temporal sequence
3. Identification of a geographic location

Narrative elements
4. Existence of a narrative voice: Songs with an articulated self Songs without an articulated self
5. Description of a character or a space-time setting
6. Use of direct speech to introduce characters' words
7. Use of characteristic linguistic elements of a narrative
8. Use of a specific theme throughout the song
9. Use of socio-emotional elements by means of interjections
10. Use of a rhythmic scheme that adds continuity to the song structure
11. Features which hold the listener's interest throughout the song
12. Internal repetitions that produce unification and maintain the listeners' attention
13. Use of a climax corresponding to a bridge at the end of a song
Linguistic elements
1. Use of cohesive elements
2. The vocabulary is appropriate for the students' proficiency level
3. The grammatical structures are appropriate for the students' proficiency level
4. No listening comprehension difficulty

Appendix 3. List of songs included in the CCCS categorized by themes

Themes (n=24)	**Songs (n = 216)**
Abuse	"Black eyes, blue tears" (Shania Twain), "Blown away" (Carrie Underwood), "Church bells" (Carrie Underwood), "Concrete angel" (Martina McBride), "Two black Cadillacs" (Carrie Underwood)
Adolescence	"18 inches" (Lauren Alaina), "A place in this world" (Taylor Swift), "After 17" (Alan Jackson), "Cop car" (Sam Hunt), "Don't laugh at me" (Mark Wills), "Fifteen" (Taylor Swift), "Georgia rain" (Trisha Yearwood), "Get out of this town" (Carrie Underwood), "God love her" (Toby Keith), "Invisible" (Hunter Hayes), "Long teenage goodbye" (Lady A), "Love story" (Taylor Swift), "Nothin' like the first time" (Lady A), "Peter Pan" (Kelsea Ballerini), "Pretty" (Lauren Alaina), "Road less travelled" (Lauren Alaina), "Sierra" (Maddie and Tae), "Suds in the bucket" (Sara Evans), "Stealing Cinderella" (Chuck Wicks), "Storm warning" (Hunter Hayes), "Storyline" (Hunter Hayes), "You belong with me" (Taylor Swift), "Young love" (Kip Moore),
Addictions	"Copperhead road" (Steve Earle), "Hemingway's whiskey" (Kenny Chesney), "Whiskey and you" (Tim McGraw), "Whiskey Lullaby" (Brad Paisley and Alison Krauss), "Wine after whiskey" (Carrie Underwood)

Themes (n=24)	Songs (n = 216)
American culture	"Alabama song" (Allison Moorer), "Airstream song" (Miranda Lambert), "Automatic" (Miranda Lambert), "California" (Tim McGraw), "Chicken fried" (Zac Brown Band), "Country and Western" (Tim McGraw), "Dustbowl Children" (Alison Krauss and Union Station), "Gonna come back as a Country song" (Alan Jackson), "Hard way to make an easy living" (Toby Keith), "Huntin' fishin' lovin' every day" (Luke Bryan), "It's alright to be a redneck" (Alan Jackson), "Mississippi girl" (Faith Hill), "Southern comfort zone" (Brad Paisley), "Southern drawl" (Josh Turner), "Southern style" (Darius Rucker), "Southern way of life" (Deana Carter), "Telluride" (Tim McGraw and Faith Hill), "The rocket that grandpa rode" (Jimmy Buffett), "There's a girl in Texas" (Trace Adkins), "This is Country music" (Brad Paisley)
Arms	"Cupid's got a shotgun" (Carrrie Underwood), "Granddaddy's arm" (Blake Shelton), "Guns" (Justin Moore), "Time to get a gun" (Miranda Lambert)
Fame / Money	"Big star" (Kenny Chesney), "Celebrity" (Brad Paisley), "Everybody knows" (The Chicks), "Gold rush" (Gloriana), "Ka-ching!" (Shania Twain), "Last dollar" (Tim McGraw), "Rich and miserable" (Kenny Chesney), "Winning streak" (Ashley Monroe), "You're not my God" (Keith Urban)
Family	"Daughter of a workin' man" (Danielle Bradbery), "Family is family" (Kacey Musgraves), "From the ground up" (Dan+Shay), "Ghosts" (Jake Owen), "Grandpa" (Justin Moore), "Her life's a song" (Alan Jackson), "Home" (Dolly Parton), "House of 1,000 dreams" (Martina McBride), "Mama's song" (Carrie Underwood), "Meanwhile back at Mama's" (Tim McGraw and Faith Hill), "Sunken lands" (Rosanne Cash), "Teenage daughters" (Martina McBride), "Thank God for hometowns" (Carrie Underwood), "The letter to daddy" (Kelly Pickler), "There goes my life" (Kenny Chesney), "While he's still around" (Florida Georgia Line), "Welcome to Earth" (Sturgill Simpson)
Free time	"Boats" (Kenny Chesney), "Muckalee Creek water" (Luke Bryan), "Pontoon" (Little Big Town), "Redneck Yatch club" (Craig Morgan), "Sounds of summer" (Dierks Bentley), "Tennessee river run" (Darryl Worley)
Freedom	"All I wanted was a car" (Brad Paisley), "Beat this summer" (Brad Paisley), "Boy gets a truck" (Keith Urban), "Drive" (Alan Jackson), "Greyhound bound for nowhere" (Miranda Lambert), "Highway 20 ride" (Zac Brown Band), "Island boy" (Kenny Chesney), "Long hot summer" (Keith Urban), "Mud on the tires" (Brad Paisley), "My church" (Maren Morris), "My house" (Kacey Musgraves), "Sea stories" (Sturgill Simpson), "Take a little ride" (Jason Aldean), "The dashboard" (Chris Young)
Friendship / Feud	"Friends" (Blake Shelton), "I know a guy" (Chris Young), "My old friend" (Tim McGraw), "Only prettier" (Miranda Lambert)
Heartbreak	"Best of intentions" (Trace Adkins), "Dirty laundry" (Carrie Underwood), "Tin man" (Miranda Lambert), "Trouble" (Gloriana), "What hurts the most" (Rascal Flatts), "White liar" (Miranda Lambert), "You lie" (The Band Perry), "You'll think of me" (Keith Urban), "You were mine" (The Chicks)

Themes (n=24)	Songs (n = 216)
Illness	"Forever changed" (Carrie Underwood), "I'm gonna love you through it" (Martina McBride), "Live like you were dying" (Tim McGraw), "Raymond" (Brett Eldredge), "Silent house" (The Chicks), "Skin" (Rascal Flatts), "The locket" (Lauren Alaina), "Tough" (Craig Morgan)
Love	"Breathe" (Faith Hill), "Making memories of us" (Keith Urban), "Oh, love" (Brad Paisley and Carrie Underwood), "Tennessee" (Sugarland), "The lighthouse's tale" (Nickel Creek), "The way you love me" (Faith Hill), "Then" (Brad Paisley), "You're still the one" (Shania Twain)
Memories	"American honey" (Lady A), "Blood brothers" (Luke Bryan), "Free" (Little Big Town), "I go back" (Kenny Chesney), "Last time for everything" (Brad Paisley), "Laughed until we cried" (Jason Aldean), "Letter to me" (Brad Paisley), "Moments" (Emerson Drive), "The best day" (Taylor Swift), "The house that built me" (Miranda Lambert), "The road" (Emmylou Harris), "Trip around the sun" (Jimmy Buffett and Martina McBride), "Troubadour" (George Strait), "You're gonna miss this" (Trace Adkins)
Others	"Big black dog" (Emmilou Harris), "Blue smoke" (Dolly Parton), "Delilah" (Blake Shelton), "Long black train" (Josh Turner), "Little boy grows up" (Luke Bryan), "Night train" (Jason Aldeam), "Noise" (Kenny Chesney), "Nothin' better to do" (Leann Rimes), "Online" (Brad Paisley), "Robbin' trains" (Josh Turner), "Runaway train" (Little Big Town), "Selfie#theinternetisforever" (Brad Paisley), "Stripes" (Brandy Clark)
Patriotism	"Courtesy of the red, white and blue" (Toby Keith), "Only in America" (Brooks and Dunn), "Where were you?" (Alan Jackson)
Religion	"I saw God today" (George Strait), "Jesus take the wheel" (Carrie Underwood), "Salvation works" (Jennifer Nettles), "Temporary home" (Carrie Underwood), "That old King James" (Scotty McCreery), "Thy will" (Hillary Scott), "When I get where I'm going" (Brad Paisley and Dolly Parton)
Sexuality	"Ain't nothing 'bout you" (Brooks and Dunn), "Honey bee" (Blake Shelton)
Social criticism	"Accidental racist" (Brad Paisley), "California girls" (Gretchen Wilson), "Gone Green" (Brad Paisley), "Not ready to make nice" (The Chicks), "Soap opera" (Brandy Clark), "Somethin' more" (Sugarland)
Sports	"All-American girl" (Carrie Underwood), "Coach" (Kenny Chesney), "Indian Summer" (Brooks and Dunn), "Swing" (Trace Adkins), "The baseball song" (Corey Smith), "The boys of fall" (Kenny Chesney), "What I almost was" (Eric Church)
Values	"Happy ending" (Sugarland), "Hard to figure out (the airport song)" (Lee Brice), "Humble and Kind" (Tim McGraw), "I forgive you" (Kelly Prickler), "Speak to a girl" (Tim McGraw and Faith Hill), "Thank you" (Keith Urban)

Themes (n=24)	Songs (n = 216)
War	"8th of November" (Big and Rich), "American child" (Phil Vassar), "American Soldier" (Toby Keith), "Arlington" (Trace Adkins), "Come home soon" (SheDaisy), "I drive your truck" (Lee Brice), "I just came back from a war" (Darryl Worley), "If you're reading this" (Tim McGraw), "Just a dream" (Carrie Underwood), "Riding with private Malone" (David Ball), "Sleepin' with the telephone" (Reba McEntire and Faith Hill), "The bumper of my SUV" (Chely Wright), "Travelin' soldier" (The Chicks)
Women in society	"Girl in a Country song" (Maddie and Tae), "I'm a survivor" (Reba McEntire), "Juanita" (Shania Twain), "Pocahontas proud" (Gretchen Wilson), "She's not just a pretty face" (Shania Twain), "This one's for the girls" (Martina McBride), "When God-fearin' women get the blues" (Martina McBride)
Working class	"Amarillo sky" (Jason Aldean), "Blowin' smoke" (Kacey Musgraves), "Hard hat and a hammer" (Alan Jackson), "Shiftwork" (Kenny Chesney and George Strait), "The sacrifice" (Dolly Parton), "Working man's PhD" (Aaron Tippin)

"CRAVING TO BE FRIGHTENED": HENRY JAMES'S *THE TURN OF THE SCREW* AS A SINISTER PARODY OF JANE AUSTEN'S *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

"DESEANDO ASUSTARSE": LA NOVELLA DE HENRY JAMES, *THE TURN OF THE SCREW,* COMO PARODIA SINIESTRA DE LA NOVELA DE JANE AUSTEN, *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

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Abstract

This article seeks to argue that *The Turn of the Screw* is a sinister parody of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and of the female quixotic Bildungsroman. To sustain this claim, I will show that both Catherine and the governess are two burlesque and quixotic heroines who are deeply influenced by their extravagant fancies and their readings of romance. I will also explore their self-assumed role as heroic characters in search of cognitive certainty. And finally, I will argue that evil is intimately related to social and class conflicts in both narratives. Nevertheless, contrary to what happens in *Northanger Abbey,* in James's parodic reworking of Austen's novel, Gothic intrusions do not serve as a means of discipline for the governess's overworked imagination and her potential story of marriage and social ascent is consequently foiled. The narrative's refusal to educate the governess and its deviation from the female quixotic tradition links James's novella to modernity.

Keywords: *Northanger Abbey*, *The Turn of the Screw,* sinister parody, quixotic heroines, moral growth.

Resumen

Este artículo pretende argumentar que *The Turn of the Screw* es una siniestra parodia de la novela de Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*. Para sostener esta

afirmación, argumentaré que tanto Catherine como la institutriz son dos heroínas burlescas y quijotescas que están profundamente influenciadas por su imaginación extravagante y sus lecturas de romances. También exploraré su papel autoimpuesto de personajes heroicos en busca de certeza cognitiva. Y finalmente, mostraré que el mal está íntimamente relacionado con la transgresión social y de clase en ambas narraciones. Sin embargo, a diferencia de lo que ocurre en *Northanger Abbey,* en la reescritura paródica que hace James de la novela de Austen, las intrusiones góticas no sirven para disciplinar la sobrecargada imaginación de la institutriz y, en consecuencia, su potencial historia de matrimonio y ascenso social se ve frustrada. La negativa de la narración a educar a la institutriz y su desviación de la tradición femenina quijotesca vinculan la novela de James con la modernidad.

Palabras clave: *Northanger Abbey*, *The Turn of the Screw*, parodia siniestra, heroínas quijotescas, crecimiento moral.

1. Introduction

Much has been written about the connection between Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) with Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Henry Fielding's *Amelia* (1751) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), the three novels which are invoked by James's famous governess.[1] However, there is a novel which —although less explicitly and more obliquely— is also brought to mind by the narrative, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817). This is Austen's earliest narrative of female enlightenment and also her only mock-Gothic novel, since the burlesque of the eighteenth-century Gothic conventions is pervasive.[2] Henry James's remarks about Jane Austen are disseminated through his various critical essays, and canonical critics like F.R. Leavis (1950), Brian Lee (1978) and Tony Tanner (2007) have pointed out Austen's undeniable influence on Henry James. Tanner's words could not be more forceful:

> while we all agree that James could scarcely have written as he did without George Eliot and Balzac (not to mention Hawthorne) behind him, it seems to me quite as arguable that James learned as much from Jane Austen as Jane Austen did from Richardson. Which is to say a great deal. (2007: 9)

And yet, the Austen-James connection remains conspicuously unexamined, probably because it has often been taken for granted. James's relation with his literary forerunner is certainly ambiguous, to say the least. It oscillates between arrogant condescension, unfair criticism and admiration. It is arguably a clear example of what Harold Bloom called the anxiety of influence (1997: 25). In a letter to George Pellew, written in 1883, James jeers at Austen's heroines, who

"had undoubtedly small and second-rate minds and were perfect little she-Philistines" (James 1987: 189). That surely is an unfair accusation if we think of, say, Elinor Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet, Fanny Price or Anne Elliot, who are characterized, to a greater or lesser extent, by their reflectiveness, self-reliance and moral intelligence.

At first glance, there are no obvious intertextual similarities between *Northanger Abbey* and *The Turn of the Screw*. The first follows the thematic pattern of a female Bildungsroman, which involves a heroine on the difficult path to maturation, self-discovery, and the acquisition of experience in her social environment (Borham Puyal 2015: 105).[3] The second is a psychological thriller in which a young governess tries to exorcise two ghosts which, in her view, are perverting the minds of her protégés. Nevertheless, there is a subtextual connection which links Catherine Morland to the unnamed governess in *The Turn of the Screw*. Both are unexperienced and naïve young girls who are ridden by the power of their unruly and infatuated imagination. In *Northanger Abbey,* Catherine Morland learns through experience and hardships that her wild fantasy must be contained and disciplined, otherwise it may carry disastrous consequences for her social life. Austen is clearly issuing a warning about the dangers of assuming literary principles as a reference system for life (Borham Puyal 2015: 120). But, does James's governess go through the same learning process? Or is she more of a "little she-Philistine" than any of Austen's heroines?

The classical debate over *The Turn of the Screw* has long dominated its critical output. On the one hand, we find Edmund Wilson's argument that the story is "a neurotic case of sex repression" and that the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel are not real ghosts but "hallucinations of the governess" (1934: 102). On the other hand, we have Robert B. Heilman's counterclaim that the ghosts are not hallucinations and that Miles and Flora have really been corrupted (1947: 435-436). Subsequent critics have also taken sides in the Wilson/Heilman antinomy. My reading does not intend to take sides with either of these trends —although I acknowledge that it is closer to Wilson's analysis— but aims to offer a different view of the matter and to analyse the governess as an example of a female Quixote who cannot escape "the hallucinatory coils of the literary" (Castle 1998: xv). Thus, I will show that both Catherine and the governess are two burlesque heroines of the "female Quixote variety" who are deeply influenced by their extravagant fancies and their readings of romance (Butler 1989: 173). I will also explore their self-imposed role as heroic characters who have to fight imaginary evils and who want to obtain cognitive certainty about people's motives. And finally, I will argue that evil is deeply related to social conflicts in both narratives and that —unlike Catherine— the governess's reversal of fortune is foiled. Thus,

my main claim is that *The Turn of the Screw* can be read as a fascinating and sinister parody of *Northanger Abbey* in particular, and of the female quixotic Bildungsroman in general. Whereas in Austen's novel, Gothic motifs function as a means of moral instruction for Catherine, who is eventually rewarded with an advantageous marriage, in James's parodic reworking of Austen's novel, Gothic intrusions do not serve as a means of discipline for the governess's overworked imagination, and she is deprived of romance and social ascension. The narrative resists the governess's wish to become conscious and to solve the mystery, as the plot "provides no definite knowledge and no assurances to either protagonists and readers", a fact that links James's novella to modernity (Despotopoulou 2011: 88).[4]

2. Catherine and the Governess: Two Female Quixotes

Catherine Morland and the governess are two imaginative and fearful young girls in "active pursuit of Gothic illusions" (McKillop 1963: 60). Both heroines illustrate a female version of what Miriam Borham Puyal calls "literary quixotes" (2015: 16), since their quixotic madness comes from the assimilation of literary principles (13).[5] Enmeshed in their literary delusions, Catherine and the governess confound reality with fiction and they consequently "misread" the events and situations that surround them. The key difference between them is that, whereas Catherine is finally awakened from her literary delusions, no character can disabuse the governess of her Gothic expectations. Unlike Catherine, who has Henry Tilney as her mentor, the governess lacks corrective and conversational forces and is deprived of her quixotic epiphany. She is condemned to rely upon the tropes of Gothic and sentimental fiction. This ironic reversal allowed James to experiment "with the much celebrated subjectivity of vision and the style of indeterminacy" (Despotopoulou and Reed 2011: 5).

In *Northanger Abbey,* there is a progression in the Cervantine character of Austen's parody that culminates in Catherine's quixotism (Pardo García 2005: 360). According to Pardo García's ideas, in the first volume Austen parodies the romantic conventions that were present in Charlotte Lennox's novels and introduces an anti-romantic heroine in an anti-romantic reality.[6] Hence, Austen challenges romantic clichés and the literary expectations of her readers, and she presents an ordinary heroine (or antiheroine) whose father "was not in the least addicted to locking up his daughters" (Austen 1998: 1). Catherine's quixotism begins when she is invited to go to Bath by Mrs. Allen. There, her social circle expands and she will have to learn how to "read" people and the social panorama of Bath. However, Catherine's overwrought imagination is contaminated by her reading of Gothic and sentimental novels, especially Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and she tries

to "read" reality in a Gothic key. Thus, after meeting Mr. Tilney for the first time, and her unsuccessful pursuit of him in all the balls in Bath, the narrator humorously concludes that "[t]his sort of mysteriousness, which is always so becoming in a hero, threw a fresh grace in Catherine's imagination around his person and manners, and increased her anxiety to know more of him" (Austen 1998: 20). Thus, at first, it is more his alleged mysteriousness than his character that really appeals to Catherine.

In *The Turn of the Screw*, we also find an avid reader as heroine. Like Catherine, the governess is also swayed by naïve and foolish literary delusions. There is a hint of the governess's romanticism and sentimentality when Douglas, the first narrator of the story, recounts the governess's first meeting with her master in Harley Street: "This prospective patron proved a gentleman, a bachelor in the prime of life, such a figure as has never risen, save in a dream or an old novel before a fluttered anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage" (James 2008: 8). As can be observed, Douglas depicts the governess as a nervous and fearful girl who tends to romanticize everything. This is corroborated when he highlights that the governess fell in love with her master after seeing him only twice. The potential courtship plot is foiled from the beginning.

The governess and Catherine prove to have a book-fed imagination that distorts and deforms reality, and an easily excited sensibility. Hence, Catherine's literary perception of reality increases when she is invited to spend some days at Northanger Abbey. There, she must learn to distinguish between reality and fiction, since the abbey is a similar setting to that of her Gothic novels and, more importantly, she must learn to "read" the people around her (Borham Puyal 2015: 121). Catherine is elated by the fact that it is an abbey and not an ordinary house and, in her naivety, she imagines a Gothic scenario. Her literary expectations are in fact stimulated by Henry Tilney, who mockingly invents a Gothic romance with Catherine as protagonist. Although her first expectations about the abbey are increasingly frustrated, Catherine does not despair and goes so far as to think that General Tilney, a severe and authoritative father, could have assassinated his wife or imprisoned her alive, and she compares him with Montoni, the villain of Radcliffe's *Udolpho*. In *Northanger Abbey* —and in her juvenilia— Austen highlights the improbability and immorality of sentimental and Gothic fiction, and exposes the dangers of taking fictional formulas as absolute truth without taking into account differences of context (Borham Puyal 2015: 121). As John Wiltshire puts it, "[t]he reference points of her imagination become clichés of the Gothic novels she has read" (2014: 19).

Like Catherine's, the governess's imagination is also inflamed by naïve and foolish Gothic expectations. Her position as a governess in a "romanticised" space —an

isolated country house inhabited by a housekeeper and two little orphans—magnifies her literary expectations. However, unlike Catherine's, her imagination is not inflated by the playful inventiveness of a suitor. The governess's solitary position in the house and her lack of corrective forces serve only to stimulate her literary delusions. She envisions Bly as "a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite" (James 2008: 16). But for a story to be complete, "something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way" (Austen 1998: 5). In a clear (ironic) allusion to Charlotte Brontë's love story in *Jane Eyre,* the governess wishes that her master should be there to "smile and approve" her fulfilment of the mission entrusted to her (James 2008: 24). However, the figure of the master-suitor is absent. *The Turn of the Screw* raises Gothic and romantic possibilities only to deviate from them. James is surely parodying Austen's preoccupation with the disparity between fiction and real life, as well as the governess novel, popularized by the Brontës, since he deprives the governess of her well-deserved romance and her subsequent learning process. Unlike Catherine's, the governess's "visions of romance" are never overcome (Austen 1998: 159).

Again, it is observed how the literary realm pervades the governess's imagination when she explicitly evokes *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Jane Eyre:* "Was there a 'secret' at Bly —a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement?" (James 2008: 27). The allusions to *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Jane Eyre* "are not templates to map what the narrative is but quicksilver glints of what it fails to be" (Lustig 2010: 138). These desired events —the arrival of a handsome hero and the finding of a secret at Bly— would certainly mitigate the "grey prose" (James 2008: 29) of her office and the tedious life of a lonely governess in the middle of the English countryside. In fact, she contrasts the "grey prose" of the actual world with the beauty of romance and poetry: "so how could work not be charming that presented itself as daily beauty? It was all the romance of the nursery and the poetry of the schoolroom" (29). This interesting metaphor implies that even the governess's office at Bly is permeated by fiction.

When Catherine and the Tilneys engage in a discussion about history, she complains about its dullness and expresses her preference for the "flights of fancy" of novelists (Austen 1998: 84). In this meaningful conversation, Austen moves away from the parody of Gothic and sentimental clichés, and makes a eulogy of novel reading, which is much more than a self-deluding pastime, since "it promotes friendship, contributes to social distinction, [and] forms a common topic and pursuit for men and women" (Richardson 2005: 400). In fact, it is reading that distinguishes Catherine —and the Tilneys— from the hypocritical Thorpes. At the same time, by taking part in the tradition of the female quixotic Bildungsroman,

Austen also seeks to warn her implicit readers of the dangers of taking fictional formulas as a reference system for life. This is Marianne Dashwood's mistake in *Sense and Sensibility,* whose ideas about love have been shaped by her readings. Thus, Catherine's and the governess's quixotic imagination and their literary expectations serve both to illustrate and to refute and parody romantic foolishness (McKillop 1963: 57). They have been, in Austen's own words, "craving to be frightened" (Austen 1998: 160).

However, their "voluntary, self-created delusions" lead Catherine and the governess along different paths (Austen 1998: 60). Thus, Catherine's active chase of ghosts and terrors in Northanger Abbey is frustrated and culminates in Henry Tilney's admonition and her subsequent moral growth. Catherine's moral development turns the novel into a Bildungsroman in which Catherine gains experience of the world, as can be observed in: "The visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awakened" (159). This is, in Butler's words, "the typical moment of *éclaircissement*" so common in all of Austen's novels, "the moment when a key character abandons her error and humbly submits to objective reality" (1989: 176). A second moment of anagnorisis takes place when she understands Isabella's true character. This second disillusionment is another manifestation of the same problem of how to "read" people and reality appropriately, which is a frequent preoccupation in the tradition of the female quixotic Bildungsroman.

By contrast, the governess's romantic and Gothic fascination is never abandoned, and she becomes a neurotic woman who sees the ghosts of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel around the house and who is obsessed with the idea that the children have been perverted by the domestics' clandestine sexual intercourse. The endpoint of this paranoia is a kind of manic obsession, the perturbation of her mind under internal pressures. Unlike Catherine, the governess never questions how far her frantic imagination has carried her and she cannot be disabused of her own hallucinations. This is in fact Henry James's culmination of his sinister parody of *Northanger Abbey.* In Austen's novel, Henry's admonition elicits Catherine's disillusionment and suggests "a blow upon sentiment" (Austen 1998: 188), but James carries his satire further and the governess never goes through a learning process. Thus, in James's novella, the governess "loses the balance between sensibility and sense", which in the case of Catherine is jeopardised but ultimately maintained (Lustig 2010: 139).

In *Northanger Abbey,* Jane Austen shows that Catherine's "delicate sensibility" can carry disastrous consequences for her life (Austen 1998: 102). Therefore, she proves that the advocacy of sensibility as a female accomplishment can be self-defeating and problematic. James, on his part, makes a fascinating and sinister parody of this female "accomplishment" through the governess's frantic chase of

the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel. Jane Austen warns us readers of how an excessive sensibility can lead to a positive result, though reversible, desocialization, since Catherine is so naïve and impressionable that she is easily deceived (Tanner 2007: 78). Yet James makes an ironic reversal of the situation and portrays a neurotic and disturbed governess who distrusts everybody else but not her own conjectures and assumptions. The governess's easily excited sensibility, in this case, leads to a negative desocialization since she cannot take part in any sane relationship. And yet, whereas Austen overtly condemns Catherine's overwrought imagination, James —underscoring the collapse of all certainties and the impossibility of plain answers— leaves it to the readers to judge or condemn the governess of his tale.

3. Catherine and the Governess: Two Would-be Saviours in Search of Cognitive Certainty

The epistemological dimension of quixotism in both narratives is presented as a conflict between reality and its perception, showing the mind "as the principal source of terror" (Shelden 1974: 122). In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine makes up for her inexperience with the conventions of romance and imagines herself the heroine of a Gothic novel, whereas James's heroine assumes the role of moral redeemer and guardian of the social order in the house at Bly. The governess appropriates a religious discourse of salvation with Bly representing a kind of Eden inhabited by two innocent children and the governess as their would-be saviour or redeemer (Heilman 1948: 277). Although the religious overtone is absent in *Northanger Abbey,* Catherine also assumes the role of heroic saviour in a comic romance. In this sense, Catherine and the governess imagine themselves as heroic characters who have the self-imposed quest of overcoming concocted threats and who want to achieve cognitive certainty about other people's motives. However, in *Northanger Abbey* self-deception is followed by disillusionment and subsequent learning, whereas in *The Turn of the Screw* the governess's solipsism and self-absorption thwart her rite of passage. James is surely parodying the moment of enlightenment which characterizes the female quixotic Bildungsroman.

After having been disillusioned by two failed Gothic explorations of the Abbey, Catherine —inspired by her Gothic readings— comes to the conclusion that General Tilney has imprisoned his wife in some out-of-the-way room in the abbey and she considers it her mission to unveil this mystery. She even calls into question Mrs. Tilney's decease and her purported funeral since she "had read too much not to be perfectly aware of the ease with which a waxen figure might be introduced, and a supposititious funeral carried on" (Austen 1998: 153). Catherine imagines herself as the heroine of a Gothic novel who must unravel a secret mystery about

a languishing woman who has been shut up by a jealous and cruel husband. In no other passage is Catherine more similar to the hero of a mock-epic.

Likewise, James's governess also speaks a language of heroism but, in this case, her self-imposed mission is to save the children from moral corruption and to maintain the social order in the house. Since her romance script is foiled, the governess tries to establish imaginative links with Fielding's Amelia, a committed wife and mother who sacrifices herself for her children and for her negligent husband (Purton 1975: 1). The governess wants to see herself "at the heart of a highly charged emotional situation" (Punter 2013: 50), and she is soon assaulted by the "unformulated fear" that the children have been corrupted by their knowledge of sexual intercourse between Mr. Quint and Miss Jessel and by dangerous familiarity with them (Goddard 1957: 10).

Like Catherine, the governess imagines herself the heroine of a Gothic romance and she undertakes the mission of saving those helpless children and the ignorant housekeeper: "I should serve as an expiatory victim and guard the tranquillity of my companions" (James 2008: 40). James's parody of the discourse of salvation is evident here. The governess wants to emerge in the eyes of her master as the brave and admirable saviour of the corrupted children. She prides herself on being the chosen one to carry out this important mission. The irony lies in the fact that she has not been chosen by God but by a mortal, the children's uncle, with whom she is secretly in love. The children's uncle has bestowed complete authority on the governess, and she becomes "the Puritan certain that depravity inheres in everyone and that she alone is elected to fight it" (Lydenberg 1957: 47). Thus, despite her (subaltern) condition of governess, she acquires moral authority over Mrs. Grose and the children.

These two would-be saviours are obsessed with the cognitive process of seeing and knowing, which constitutes a key element for readers to understand the moment of awakening of the heroines (Borham Puyal 2015: 104). They want to achieve cognitive certainty about other people's motives and behaviours. Thus, when Henry Tilney reveals to Catherine that his brother is already aware of the fact that Isabella is engaged to James, she is puzzled by Captain Tilney's behaviour, anxious to understand the motives behind that conduct: "But what can your brother mean? If he knows her engagement, what can he mean by his behaviour?" (Austen 1998: 119). A further instance of Catherine's eagerness to attain truth about others takes place when she is rudely expelled from the abbey by the General. Catherine is so perplexed by this bewildering "breach of hospitality" that she anxiously ruminates about the unknown reasons behind his change of attitude (190). This cognitive process of vision and perception acquires special relevance at the moment of Catherine's anagnorisis, of the fall of the blindfold which covers

the female Quixote's vision (Borham Puyal 2015: 104): "She *saw* that the infatuation had been created, the mischief settled, long before her quitting Bath, and it *seemed* as if the whole might be traced to the influence of that sort of reading which she had there indulged" (Austen 1998: 160, emphasis added).

Like Catherine, the governess has an irrational obsession with the cognitive processes of seeing and knowing. However, in her case, her thirst for knowledge has nothing to do with domestic and courtship matters but with obscure psychological issues related to moral salvation and the preservation of the normative community. She wants to know what the children *can* see or know. Like little Maisie in *What Maisie Knew* and Nanda in *The Awkward Age,* Miles and Flora have been premature witnesses of sin and the result —from the governess's point of view— is that their innocence has been contaminated.[7] But the governess's obsessive zeal is not only for what she can see and perceive but for what is occult and remains hidden from her. Therefore, when Mrs. Grose asks her if she is afraid of seeing Miss Jessel again, she answers: "Oh, no; that's nothing —now! […] It's of *not* seeing her" (James 2008: 48, emphasis in original). The fact of not seeing and not knowing is what really perturbs the governess. She wants to penetrate the children's minds to discover the motives behind their association with both Quint and Jessel. Her fear is that the children "may keep it up […] without [her] knowing it" (48). She compulsively craves for absolute control and authority over her charges. Like Catherine, James's governess is "a presence seeking to penetrate the heart of the story where she is an intruder, an outsider forcing her way in, distorting the mystery, perhaps creating it, perhaps discovering it, but certainly breaking in, destroying it and only revealing the ambiguity which conceals it" (Blanchot 1982: 82).

Concealment and disguise are in fact pervasive in both narratives. In *Northanger Abbey,* Austen makes a metaphoric and humorous correlation between concealment in drawers and concealment of motives, intentions, knowledge and truth (Tanner 2007: 65). Catherine wants to discover some mysterious manuscript in the old-fashioned black cabinet in her apartment, but she is deeply disappointed when she finds a mundane inventory of linen and a banal washing-bill. Chests and drawers —like human beings— keep and hide secrets, they are indeed "veritable organs of the secret psychological life" (Bachelard 1994: 78). In the novel, they come to represent the intimate life of people, their secrets and enigmas. Thus, in the same manner that Catherine tries to unlock the chest and the cabinet in order "to satisfy herself at least as to its contents" (Austen 1998: 130), she also seeks to understand the General's behaviour. Catherine knows that chests and wardrobes are "evident witnesses of the need for secrecy" and she is not ignorant of the fact that someone who hides something in a chest or cabinet is also burying some inner secret (Bachelard 1994: 81). But the General is not the only one in the novel who

conceals his motives and intentions; characters like Isabella also mask their intentions and designs. In a significant authorial statement, Austen —through the voice of the narrator— makes an ironic critique of a society that encourages women to be ignorant and deceitful: "A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can" (Austen 1998: 86). Indeed, the concealment of knowledge by women is a pervasive theme in all of Austen's mature novels and in James's novels. Both authors portray contrived societies that are guided by "concealment, repression, obfuscation of knowledge" (Tanner 2007: 66).

In *The Turn of the Screw,* the governess is obsessed with what others might conceal from her. She wants to obtain knowledge, to penetrate secrets and motives to attain absolute truth. In this sense, the governess functions as an inquisitor since she tries to extract Mrs. Grose's and the children's confessions. She is always on her guard, suspecting everybody of concealing information from her. When Mrs. Grose asks her if little Flora confessed to her that she had seen the ghost of Miss Jessel, the governess denies it with these words: "Not a word, that's the horror. She kept it to herself!" (James 2008: 47). Therefore, the governess's greatest fear is that the children would keep her apart from their clandestine relationship with both Quint and Jessel. Hence, she becomes an agent of surveillance, performing a policing function in the house, spying on the children, and even eavesdropping on their private conversations. When Flora manages to escape her surveillance and takes the boat to cross the lake, the governess states: "Our not seeing it is the strongest of proofs. She has used it to go over, then has managed to hide it" (104). This sentence, insignificant as it seems, carries with it a lot of meaning. It shows the governess's neurotic obsession with that which escapes her senses, her fanatic belief that everybody tries to conceal the truth from her, and her anxiety that —unlike Catherine or Jane Eyre— she will not obtain her well-deserved anagnorisis. Her personal Bildungsroman is foiled. James takes from Austen his interest in human cognition and the obfuscation of knowledge, and in *The Turn of the Screw* he emphasises the inherent tension between what can be known and what must remain secret in human relations.[8]

4. Social Horrors and Fairy-tale Justice

In *Northanger Abbey* and *The Turn of the Screw*, evil is defined not only in terms of supernatural otherness or moral wickedness but also in terms of social and class otherness. In Jane Austen's novel, Catherine Morland attains moral growth and wisdom, social disruption is finally contained, and Catherine is thus rewarded with a prosperous marriage and a higher social status. Nevertheless, in James's novella,

the governess's imaginative romance is foiled from the beginning, the narrative refuses her wish to gain consciousness, and she is not granted such a reversal of fortune. This way, she does not obtain "fairy-tale justice" (Moretti 2000: 205).

In *Northanger Abbey*, it is when Henry goes to find Catherine after she has been expelled from Northanger Abbey by his father that she learns that the General has behaved like a true villain and that her only fault has been to be "less rich than he had supposed her to be" (Austen 1998: 199). Hence, what the General fears about Catherine is that she is socially inferior to his son, that she might be an unscrupulous social climber. When he discourteously expels Catherine from the Abbey, the General is really acting like a Montoni. This is indeed a truly mock-Gothic passage in the novel, since the Gothic heroine is not confined in the castle, but thrown out (Wheatley 2019: 64). Although Catherine has been disappointed in her quest to find ghosts, lost manuscripts or imprisoned wives in Northanger Abbey, she has indeed discovered a secret there: that the General is actually a snobbish and unsympathetic man who has put money and social advancement over respect, hospitality and sympathy (Tanner 2007: 46). Misled by Thorpe's malicious account of Catherine's poverty, the General is led to believe that Catherine's family is "a forward, bragging, scheming race" (Austen 1998: 201). His rudeness and inhospitality finally exceed Catherine's Gothic expectations. The danger of a potential mésalliance and patriarchal tyranny constitute the deep structure of the narrative, the core of its "mystery". The greatness of *Northanger Abbey* is that it "domesticates the gothic" and transfers its conventions and excesses into the parlours of English houses (Johnson 1998: 47).

In *The Turn of the Screw,* it is a secret class transgression in the Edenic world of Bly that perturbs the governess. According to Millicent Bell, James's novella "is about social classes and their relation to one another" (1993: 91). The governess is horrified by the idea that the children have witnessed the sexual and class transgression of their former governess and one of the servants, who was "dreadfully below" (James 2008: 50), and she compares Quint's social otherness with evil: "'But if he isn't a gentleman—' 'What *is* he? He's a horror'" (35, emphasis in original). She is outraged by "the open secret of trans-class sexuality" that this social transgression implies (Robbins 1993: 200). The governess's revulsion with class transgression "is almost equal to her disgust with the sexual immorality and corrupting influences of the former servants" (Orr 2009: 62). In the novella, servants are frequently likened to ghosts and the supernatural otherness of the ghosts is equated with "the class otherness of the servants" (Robbins 1993: 200). According to Robbins, the Freudian reading would be that the governess is extrapolating her repressed romantic-sexual desire for her master to the supernatural otherness of the ghosts. What she desires is nothing but "the erotic transgression

of class" (201). This repressed love for the master implies that at some future point she must duplicate the ghosts' social transgression and commit a mésalliance. There is a significant passage in the novella where Mrs. Grose reminds the governess —and the readers— that, like herself, the governess is also a subaltern in the house, and both exchange "a sound of the oddest amusement", which involves mutual understanding and complicity (James 2008: 56-57). It suggests that the governess is not so different from Mrs. Grose and the servant-ghosts, that they share their social otherness and that she is also part of the "evil" at Bly. The historical myth implied by the Gothic —regicidal revolutions, anarchy, despotism or rebellion— is translated onto the ground of domestic and private passions in both narratives (Duncan 2005: 25). Therefore, the Gothic horror takes the form of social anomalies. Austen and James expose the ideological substratum of the Gothic, putting to the fore the social conflict and setting aside traditional Gothic motifs, like ghosts, which are only present either as symptoms of a neurotic woman or as delusions of an imaginative girl, and which serve only "to displace the antagonisms and horrors evidenced within society to outside society itself" (Moretti 1983: 67).

Social advancement and personal ambition constitute, then, the real threats; they are ominous or immoral menaces that threaten the social hierarchy. In *Northanger Abbey,* the characters' desire to rise socially above their class is frequently punished. Hence, Isabella Thorpe, the true anti-heroine in the novel, is ambitious, selfish and pushy. Her unabashed attempts to seduce Captain Tilney —a wealthy young man and heir to the Northanger estate— while she is engaged to James Morland are severely punished, and she ends up completely deserted, without fiancé or friends. Through her devious schemes and her hypocritical assertions, she is presented as "a comic villainess" who functions as Catherine's foil (Levine 1975: 341). As opposed to Isabella, Catherine —who is probably an embryonic type for Fanny Price— does not actively pursue marriage above her station. Although she is infatuated with Henry Tilney, she patiently waits for his approach and uncomplainingly fulfils her social and moral obligations (341). It is in fact the unscrupulous John Thorpe who places Catherine —in General Tilney's eyes— in a higher social position, making the latter see her as a prospective daughter in law. Catherine's true enlightenment consists in learning to "discriminate between true friends and false" (Butler 1989: 173). Having learned this lesson, she is eventually rewarded with her beloved Henry Tilney, whose "considerable fortune" makes him "a match beyond the claims of [Catherine]" (Austen 1998: 203). Unlike the governess, Catherine does achieve fairy-tale justice.

The case of James's governess differs from that of Catherine. Unlike Austen's heroine —who has a safe social position as the daughter of a clergyman with

"considerable independence" (Austen 1998: 1)— the governess has an ambiguous social position in the house at Bly. In fact, her uncertain social status exemplifies nineteenth-century concerns about social and sexual limits (Robbins 1993: 149). The governess is thus "the liminal figure par excellence", since she occupies an ambiguous space in the house, excluded both from the world of the masters and that of the servants (Lustig 2010: 149). The ambivalent social status of governesses in the nineteenth century is precisely what makes them socially mobile. Nevertheless, the governess of *The Turn of the Screw* does not receive fairy-tale justice. Although she fantasizes with the idea that the master would arrive at Bly "to smile and approve" her difficult enterprise (James 2008: 24), her romantic delusions are not fulfilled, and she does not rise socially via the "recognition-inheritance pattern" so common in Dickens' novels and also present in *Jane Eyre* (Moretti 2000: 205). Therefore, what the governess disapproves of is the fact that the valet and the previous governess have challenged the power structures of the social order. When she encounters Quint for the first time, she meaningfully remarks that "there was a touch of the strange freedom […] in the sign of familiarity of his wearing no hat" (James 2008: 26). Later on, we learn from Mrs. Grose that Quint takes the liberty of wearing the master's clothes and that he was "much too free" in the house (40). It is his daring usurpation of the master's place in the house and his familiarity with little Miles that the governess truly condemns. According to the governess, Quint has taken liberties that are "rather monstrous" (29). A servant who usurps the place of his master is not only a horror, but also a monster. Tellingly, once Mrs. Grose has informed her of Quint's servant status, there is a rather significant change in the places where the governess subsequently encounters him. He is no longer at the top of the tower, but on the other side of the window where the governess can directly confront his gaze, provoking an interesting game of reflected images that suggests their shared liminality; and downstairs, below her, where she can "meet and measure him" as the interloper that he is (62). In this case, the governess clearly relates the ground floor with moral degradation and social (and sexual) transgression. These spectral moments in which an anxious observer meets a seductive and disturbing ghostly figure, often to wonder who —observer or ghostly figure— is more dreadful, are pervasive in James's fiction (Stevens 2008: 132).

Miss Jessel also shared the governess's ambiguous social status. Like James's heroine, Miss Jessel had a liminal position in the house and she also enjoyed a very intimate relationship with the children. The governess's resemblance to Miss Jessel in fact disturbs her since Miss Jessel has dared to trespass the (social) limits and to indulge in a forbidden relationship with the valet, a transgression that the Puritan governess considers sinful. This disturbance is especially opprobrious when the governess sees Miss Jessel in the schoolroom and remarks on her defiant and

accusatory look, a look impregnated with the blame of usurpation: "she had looked at me long enough to appear to say that her right to sit at my table was as good as mine to sit at hers" (James 2008: 90). The governess is perturbed by the fact that, like "her vile predecessor", she would also like to trespass the social rules and to marry a man of a different social status, in her case, a man who is socially above her (90). She condemns Miss Jessel's immorality but, unconsciously, she realizes that there is little difference between them.

The governess's disturbance and conflicted feelings increase if we consider that her potential Mr. Rochester is totally absent and that she needs a Jane Eyre-like resolution to fulfil her particular romance. The governess is hopelessly "marooned in a narrative which refuses to satisfy her imaginative demands" (Lustig 2010: 144). Hence, the ghosts are the product of her frustrated imaginative romance. In the governess's mind, both Quint and Miss Jessel serve as scapegoats for the perversion of the normative community and the traditional status quo. They have disturbed the equilibrium of the community at Bly and, consequently, they have to be sacrificed. Quint and Jessel have been selected as *pharmakoi,* ritual victims who must be exorcised so that the children can regain their lost innocence and the power structures of the social order can be completely re-established. In the end, the governess is reassured by her knowledge that she has preserved the social hierarchy (Punter 2013: 51).

In *Northanger Abbey* and in *The Turn of The Screw*, we see how evil is inherently related to class conflicts, which are probably more threatening than the ghosts, villains, haunted castles and like evils that these quixotic heroines can find in the Gothic novels that engage their imagination. And yet, there is an important difference which cannot be overlooked. Whereas Austen finally rewards her heroine's moral enlightenment with an advantageous marriage and her resulting social ascent, James emphasizes the ideological substratum of the Gothic and subverts the female quixotic Bildungsroman by perversely thwarting his heroine's romantic expectations and social ambitions and by condemning her to a perpetual liminal position as a governess.

5. Conclusion

James's reappropriation of the figure of the female Quixote in *The Turn of the Screw* allows us to read this novella as an ironic reworking of *Northanger Abbey* and a sinister parody of the female quixotic Bildungsroman. Thus, Austen's version of the female Quixote finds its ironic parallel in James's portrayal of an imaginative and sensitive young woman who is entrapped in her literary and hallucinatory delusions and who cannot distinguish fiction from reality. The key difference

between Catherine Morland and the governess is that the latter never goes through a learning process; she never awakens from her romantic illusions and finally sinks into her self-formulated fears. In this sense, the novel of education or 'coming-of-age' is aborted here, since the governess never attains consciousness. Its deviation from the female quixotic Bildungsroman and the fact that the plot provides no definite knowledge or assurances links James's novella to modernity.

In their delusions, both heroines appropriate a discourse of salvation and they envision themselves as heroic saviours whose main mission is to solve an intricate mystery and to rescue a helpless victim. They are also obsessed with the cognitive processes of seeing and knowing and, consequently, they are always in pursuit of cognitive certainty about other people's intentions. And yet, whereas Catherine's desire to attain cognitive certainty is finally granted, the governess's frantic pursuit of knowledge is constantly frustrated.

Finally, I have analysed how evil in both narratives is not only related to supernatural props or moral wickedness but also to social and class conflicts. In this sense, social advancement, personal ambition and potential mésalliances are the actual Gothic threats; threats which challenge the power structures of the social order in both narratives. Nonetheless, whereas in *Northanger Abbey* these disruptive energies are finally disciplined, and Catherine is rewarded with a wealthy husband and social ascent, the governess's social prospects are never satisfied, and she is perpetually condemned to an ambiguous social position.

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Notes

1. For an in-depth analysis of the intertextual similarities between *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of the Screw*, see Tintner (1976), Petry (1983) and Lustig (2010). Besides, Valerie Purton (1975) and May Ryburn (1979) have called attention to the intertextual similarities between *The Turn of the Screw* and Henry Fielding's *Amelia*. Lastly, the connection between *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Turn of the Screw* has been less explicitly and more obliquely established, and always in analyses of how James's novel both repeats and deviates

from Gothic patterns (see Lang 1964; Briggs 1977; Lustig 2010; and Bauer 2016).

2. Delfina Morganti Hernández (2017) and Juliet McMaster (2019) have analyzed the intertextual relation between *Northanger Abbey* and *Washington Square*, and Robyn R. Warhol (2007) has examined the strategies of narrative refusal in both *Northanger Abbey* and *The Spoils of Poynton* but, to my knowledge, no critic has paid attention to the many intertextual similarities between *Northanger Abbey* and *The Turn of the Screw*.

3. The roots of the female Bildungsroman are in Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen and George Eliot. To dig into this genre, see Susan Fraiman (1993) and Lorna Ellis (1999).

4. According to Ronald Schleifer, *The Turn of the Screw* is based on absence rather than presence, "on the fact that there is nothing, that nothing happens" (1980: 300). Hence, whereas the tradition of Gothic fiction is characterized by narrative closure and the explanation and rationalization of the mystery, in James's fiction the ghostly is never deciphered or explained. In this sense, James inaugurates "the modern tradition" (Schleifer 1980: 299).

5. In her book *Quijotes con enaguas* (2015), Borham Puyal identifies three concentric circles of quixotism: literary quixotism, which includes those literary parodies in which the quixotic madness comes from the assimilation of literary principles; ideological quixotism, which includes fiction with strong ideological overtones, such as the anti-Jacobin novels of the end of the eighteenth century; and displaced quixotism, in which the quixotic madness detaches itself from literature and becomes an illusion of youth or an innate idealism (16-17).

6. The female quixotic tradition in Britain predates the publication of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752). Some examples of the assimilation of the female quixote in Britain are Sir Thomas Overbury's *Characters* (1614), the English translation of Adrien Thomas Perdoux de Subligny's *Mock-Clelia, or Madam Quixote* (1678), Richard Steele's *The Tender Husband* (1705), or Jane Barker's *Galesia* trilogy. All these works would have an obvious impact on Lennox (see Borham Puyal 2015). On the other hand, Lennox's novel has, in fact, been considered a literary inspiration for Jane Austen, who had certainly read and enjoyed the novel, as her letters to her sister Cassandra demonstrate.

7. Interestingly, in presenting the children as corrupted and deceptive (at least through the governess's eyes) James is subverting here the tradition inaugurated by Mark Twain in which children's pure vision is presented as "the truest kind of vision" (Fiedler 1997: 339). This can of course be a remnant of his international theme, in which the two English children embody the values of the Old World —deceitfulness, guile and immorality. The neurotic governess of James's story is then like the American Novel itself, with its obsession with innocence and supernatural horrors, and its fear of sexuality.

8. The problem of knowledge in Jane Austen's mature novels has been amply discussed. For more recent criticism, see Weiss (2013), Davidson (2014) or Wiltshire (2014).

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STRIVING FOR ATTENTION: FURTHERING A COMPARATIVE READING OF ROBERT BROWNING AND EDGAR ALLAN POE

BUSCANDO ATENCIÓN: LECTURA COMPARADA DE ROBERT BROWNING Y EDGAR ALLAN POE

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Abstract

This article explores the possible influence between certain works by Robert Browning and Edgar Allan Poe, composed and published very close in time, which deal with similar themes and share literary strategies and techniques. Although the possibility that they might have been reading each other's work is supported by their respective correspondences with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the similarities between their works could also be attributed to literary experimentation as a means of standing out in a fiercely competitive literary market that had to pander to both popular and critical taste. This article compares the similarities in choice of tone and sensational event, as well as the use of voice in a short list of titles that coincide in both time of publication and topic, to raise the issue of influence in a controversial historical context when plagiarism and radical innovation were equally problematic.

Keywords: Robert Browning, Edgar Allan Poe, influence, short story, dramatic monologue.

Resumen

El presente artículo explora la posible influencia entre ciertas obras de Robert Browning y Edgar Allan Poe, que fueron compuestas y publicadas en fechas muy

cercanas en el tiempo, tratan temas similares y comparten estrategias y técnicas literarias. Aunque la posibilidad de que pudieran haber estado leyendo el trabajo del otro está respaldada por sus respectivas correspondencias con Elizabeth Barrett Browning, estas similitudes entre un cierto número de sus obras también podrían atribuirse a la experimentación literaria como medio para destacar en un mercado literario ferozmente competitivo que debía complacer tanto el gusto popular como el crítico. Este artículo compara las similitudes en la elección del tono y el evento sensacionalista, así como el uso de la voz, en una lista restringida de títulos que coinciden tanto en el tiempo de publicación como en el tema para plantear la cuestión de la influencia en un contexto histórico controvertido cuando el plagio y la innovación radical eran igualmente problemáticos.

Palabras clave: Robert Browning, Edgar Allan Poe, relato corto, monólogo dramático.

1. Introduction

Despite the undeniable quality of their literary work, the 1830s and 1840s were particularly difficult times for Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Browning as they sought the popularity they needed to make a living from their art. Overwhelmed by eternal debts and faint success in the United States, Poe fruitlessly tried to get Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's help to gain visibility in Britain, but the quality of his work would be acknowledged by the British Pre-Raphaelites only after his death. In Britain, similar circumstances framed the literary career of Robert Browning in the same period (1830s-1840s). Browning Jr., the brilliant son of a senior clerk in the Bank of England, managed to write neither the poetry that pleased Victorian critical taste, nor the drama that would have granted him full economic independence as a professional playwright. Thus, while Poe wrote short literary and critical pieces for diverse magazines, Browning self-published his poetic and dramatic work at his father's expense.

At the time, US poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson enjoyed the reflection of Harvard's glow while James Fenimore Cooper had already returned from England with a medal from the Royal Society of Literature. In Britain, Dickens published and edited compulsively, Barrett was widely read and admired, the Spasmodic poets enjoyed wide critical recognition for their imitation of Keats's poetry, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson pleased the Victorian readership with the type of dramatic monologue ("Ulysses", w.1833; p. 1842) they could rhythmically and morally accept. Browning's monologues, on the contrary, were distasteful, difficult to understand, and did not read like poetry at all. For his part, Poe refused to deal with the religious and political matters that

would have gained him critical favor in his country, where his poetry would not receive critical recognition until the publication of "The Raven" in 1845.

Their attempts at writing drama for literary success would not work either. When he began to write a play, Poe tried to adapt the sensationalist reports of "the Beauchamp-Sharp Tragedy" (also known as the "Kentucky Tragedy"), an 1825 real-life murder case that was followed in journals and magazines at national level and that found several ways into fiction. But the melodramatic morbidity that attracted the attention of the masses did not quite fit in the Jacobean format Poe designed for *Politian,* which was unsuccessfully published in instalments in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1835 and, therefore, never fully completed. Although it was also inspired by the then highly popular subgenre of melodrama (Erickson 1984: 41), Browning's abstract drama was too involuted for his Victorian audience, while the influence of popular melodrama only found a way into Browning's plays by systematically altering rhythm with no dramatic justification (Erickson 1984: 42). So they also failed with drama. Still, their failure was a happy one because, in their search for the artistic originality that would bring them popular recognition, Browning and Poe would develop the novel genres that would eventually make them known to the reading public over the centuries: the dramatic monologue and the short story.

The letters the Brownings exchanged between 1845 and 1846 show that Poe and Browning never met in person but were aware of each other's work thanks to the fertile publishing industry crossing the Atlantic Ocean at the time, as well as the mutual interest both authors had in making their work known beyond the limits of their own national readership. Although a much less obvious influence of Poe's "Metzergenstein" (1832) was acknowledged by Browning (Fisher 1999: 54) in "Childe Roland" (1852), there is no other documented evidence that they were reading each other's work before 1845 (Fisher 1999: 52). In that year, Poe would send copies of his recently published *Tales* and *The Raven and Other Poems* to Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, and would hold an 1846 copy of Browning's failed *Strafford* in his library (Hayes 2000: 83), although Elizabeth had only praised Robert's "Paracelsus" and "Bells and Pomegranates" in a letter to Poe in 1845.

In this period of their lives, Poe's and Browning's experiments with genre, as they aimed to please the popular and high-brow tastes of both literary critics and the literary market, led to the development of the short story and the dramatic monologue, respectively. The apparent divergence in their final results may certainly distract from a similarity in strategy, which might easily be explained as an early Victorian —understood in this article as a temporal and cultural, rather than geographical reference— tendency in stylistic innovation. In this article, I provide textual evidence pointing to specific similarities regarding their use of tone, theme,

sensational event, voice and closure in a series of titles whose composition and publication dates —between 1834 and 1843— make them intriguing in terms of a possible mutual influence in the creation of the short story and the dramatic monologue. A quick look at Table 1 below shows that works that were almost coincidental in time of composition or publication share similar thematic and technical features.

	1834	1835	1836	1838	1839	1842	1843
Poe	Berenice [C][7]	Berenice [P] *SLM* (Mar)		Ligeia [P] *AM* (Sep)	William Wilson [P] *TG* (Oct)	Oval Portrait [P] *GM* (Apr) The Pit and the Pendulum [C]	The Pit and the Pendulum [P] *TG*
Browning	Porphyria [C]		Porphyria [P] *MR*		Cloister [C]	Cloister, [P] *DL* My Last Duchess [P] *DL* (Nov)	

Table 1. Thematic and technical features common to Poe and Browning's work between1834 and 1843

Generally speaking, "Berenice" and "Porphyria" share a fetishistic component (teeth and hair, respectively) added to the murder of a female partner by a mentally unstable male who half confesses his crime homodiegetically. "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "Cloister" have the common ingredient of a Gothic treatment of Spanish Catholicism. Yet the voice in "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" is not the same voice as the one depicted in "The Pit and the Pendulum", and neither is its rhythm or effect. "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" is rather more similar in its use of voice, rhythm and effect to Poe's "William Wilson", whose representation of obsession with a male schoolmate bears a closer psychological resemblance to the portrait rendered by Browning's Spanish monk. Finally, "The Oval Portrait" and "My Last Duchess", both written and published during the same year, are based on the same motif of the deceased wife in a painted portrait that serves as evidence of her suggested murder. The sources behind these works have been traced back by previous research to disparate origins sharing the common nexus of

the periodical publications of the time (either tales published, or books reviewed in them), implying that both authors sought thematic inspiration in them.[1]

Still, it is my claim that the works of Poe and Browning might also have reached each other's eyes in the 1830s and 1840s, based on the many thematic and stylistic similarities that can be found between the works themselves. This article explores similarities between some of Poe's short stories and Browning's dramatic monologues that are particularly interesting if we consider that they were innovative at the time in terms of effect, voice and sensational theme and tone. Poe recommended a short length for literary compositions based on effect, while Browning preferred the dramatic monologue rather than full-length drama, which allowed him to keep tone intensity high enough to hold his reader's attention along the whole composition. Also, in both cases, the choice of subject and tone make a mixture of gothic sensationalism and melodramatic excess, with a subjective use of voice (homodiegetic in Poe and dramato-lyrical in Browning), that also aims at pleasing the popular taste and engaging their readers' subjectivity.

2. Common Recourse to Sensational Themes

The public's appetite for scandal in the UK and the US in the early decades of the nineteenth century made sensation a condition for popularity in both fiction and non-fiction, the news in the daily newspapers and even scientific discourse (Reynolds 1988; Sachsman and Bulla 2013). In clear contrast to a Victorian morality advocating the edifying mission of art, the contemporary public's demand for journalistic sensationalism, melodramatic theatre, supernatural fiction, sensation novels, and mesmerism was a powerful adversary of the almost spiritual character required by lyrical poetry. In order to attract their readers' attention to their own entertainment products, the blooming publishing and stage industries at the time entered into a fierce competition to supply them.[2] Yet, the sensational was disliked by literary critics, who considered it an easy way to raise interest and emotion in readers, and to build or solve plot development.

Compared with this popular demand for sensation, Browning's and Poe's ideas about lyric poetry were platonically romantic in essence, which doomed their lyric production to be ignored by the masses. Between the aesthetic need to be critically acknowledged and the economic motive of popular recognition, both authors seem to have needed a stylistic recipe that would meet the conflicting demands of their time. As Poe most accurately noticed in the same letter to Thomas W. White, where he apologizes for the excesses of "Berenice", "to be appreciated, you must be *read* and these things [sensation] are invariably sought after with avidity".[3] Although Browning would not acknowledge his surrender to popular sensationalism

so overtly, his turn to drama in the mid-thirties and his choice of subject and tone for his compositions speak for themselves. Popularity was an objective that both of them sought not only as the mere satisfaction of artistic recognition, but as the means to earn a living from their art. Browning defended the actions of men as a lyrical theme for the objective poet, the allegedly moral purpose of his literary production and his insistence on detaching himself from the characters and situations described in his monologues. These arguments might, however, disguise his artistic guilt in employing thematic and (stylistic) sensationalism in his poetry for the sake of popularity. Britta Martens argues that despite Browning's "resistance to the pressures of the literary market and readers' expectations […], [his] need to be acknowledged by both the general readership and the critics" conditioned the development of his poetic identity (1985: 11). In "The Philosophy of Composition", Poe would more sincerely express his aim to develop a single style that could satisfy "both the popular and critical taste" (1846: 163).

Blending the sensational thematic component required for popularity with the higher artistic standards established by the critics became, for both authors, a means to attain their purposes. The critical point of articulation is provided by the response Coleridge gave to Wordsworth's 1801-1802 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* in his *Biographia Literaria*. In 1817, an acknowledged critical authority such as Coleridge postulated that the suspension of disbelief in the supernatural (a recourse to the implausible for the sake of heightened effect) allowed for the expression of the dramatic truth of the emotions raised, as happened with his famous text "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798). With this, Coleridge justified the use of artistically "inferior" (although undoubtedly more popular) means by putting them at the service of higher poetic effects. A similar approach is taken by Poe and Browning in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) and "Essay on Shelley" (1851), respectively. While the former establishes a connection between sensationalism in topic (death) and the (most poetic) spiritual effect of elevating the soul of his readers through melancholy (1846: 164); for Browning, it is an adequate use of instrumentality (composition), and not thematic choice, that accounts for greatness in a work of art (1851: 1004). Therefore, the "objective poet, in his appeal to the aggregate human mind, chooses to deal with the doings of men […] the noisy, complex yet imperfect exhibitions of nature in the manifold experience of man around him" (Browning 1851: 1003).

The "rise of an urban, working class and the penny newspapers that served them" (Sachsman and Bulla 2013: xxi) displaced small-circulation party presses from the 1830s onwards. A change in readership also changed the topics and tone of the contents of weekly periodicals, which turned from party-press political and ethical ideas to penny-press "human interest and crime stories" (Sachsman and Bulla

2013: xx). In the nineteenth century, the wide diversity of sensational themes demanded by the working class was organized around two main interests of the Victorian middle class: morality and reason. In their introduction to sensational literature in the mid-1800s, Kimberly Harrison and Richard Fantina (2006) remark on the supremacy of subjects such as sexual deviation from patriarchal rule (including adultery, divorce, incest, and homosexuality), ethical deviation from civic behavior (crime in general, with a clear preference for murder), and intellectual deviation from positivism (supernatural events and mental imbalance).

Both Browning and Poe used all of these in their tales and dramatic monologues as sensational elements that would raise considerable interest in the periodical publications of the time, which were more conditioned by the demands of wide readership than by literary quality. There is illicit sex in "Porphyria", who escapes "to-night's gay feast" to meet "one so pale/ For love of her" (ll. 27-29) and suggested adultery in "My Last Duchess". There are references to a "scrofulous French novel" (l. 57) that would send Brother Lawrence directly to hell in "Spanish Cloister" in case his lecherous leering at Brown Dolores and Sanchicha (ll. 25, 27) were not enough. Poe would be more subtle in his inclusion of sexually deviant practices, but also more extreme. In "Berenice", he would suggest Berenice's adultery, her "unhappy malady" affecting mostly her "*moral* condition" (2002: 584, emphasis in original), which was reflected in her unrepentant, "smile of peculiar meaning" (584). In this tale, Poe also suggests mild incest (more obvious in "Morella") and necrophilia, which frames the whole piece in the opening epigraph and also appears at the end of the tale: "*Dicebant mihi sodales, si sepulchrum amicae visitarem, curas meas aliquar tulum fore levatas*".[4] In general, male deviant sexual behavior is represented in Poe's tales by the absence of sexual interest, which is explained within the context of some undecided mental imbalance, like in "The Oval Portrait", or same-sex desire, which is suggested in Poe's treatment of the Doppelgänger in "William Wilson".

In some cases, the mere presence of erotic elements adds up to the sensational load of the tale or monologue. Browning provides Porphyria's long, yellow hair and bare shoulder (ll. 17-18); Brown Dolores and Sanchicha washing their "Blue-black, lustrous [tresses], thick like horsehairs" (l. 29) in "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister"; and the duchess' seductive looks and smiles (ll. 24, 43, 45, 46) in "My Last Duchess". Berenice would cast her "smile of peculiar meaning" framed by "innumerable ringlets, now of a vivid yellow" (Poe 2002: 584). However, the "rarest beauty" of the lady in "The Oval Portrait" is described merely in terms of "[t]he arms, the bosom, and even the ends of the radiant hair" (248).

In Victorian times, sensationalized eroticism was often reinforced by the criminalization of sexual deviation, which was also represented in literary fiction in

correlation with other criminal behaviors such as murder, torture, or mutilation. Live burial and mutilation are present in "Berenice", the painter's young wife is buried alive in her oval portrait, and the narrator in "The Pit and the Pendulum" suffers torture by the Spanish inquisition while William Wilson is repeatedly stabbed to death. In the monologues, Porphyria is strangled with her own hair; the duchess is murdered by some servant; and it will not be long before Brother Lawrence is killed by the soliloquist's mere hate.

These forms of moral deviant behavior were also linked to several forms of madness (Foucault 1988: 247-248). Thus, the manifestations of madness as unrestrained, animal passion, gain sensational potential by themselves. In the social imaginary of the nineteenth century, the connection of the madman with physical and mental imprisonment makes madness a most apt instrument for the development of Gothic fiction as one more manifestation of sensational literature. The supernatural elements that characterized early Romantic Gothicism would intermingle with madness via the common element of irrationality in the Victorian period. The madman is not only responsible for the fear he causes in the sane. Because it might disturb the physical and social integrity of people around him, madness itself is a threat for the Victorian sane introspective subject seeking moral adequacy. On their part, Poe's homodiegetic madmen cause terror in fictional and nonfictional witnesses and victims of their imbalance, but they are themselves victims of a claustrophobic sort of madness they cannot possibly escape. Such also are the monomaniac cases of Browning's madhouse-cell monologuists: Porphyria's lover (obsessed with yellow hair, porphyria being itself an illness affecting the brain) and the Spanish monk who seeks his own damnation as he seeks Brother Lawrence's. The impossibility of having a version other than the Duke of Ferrara's monological report of the events in "My Last Duchess" leaves room for the possibility that the duchess's supposed adultery was the result of the Duke's monomaniac obsession with the honor of his family name rather than with his wife's actual adulterous behavior. Such also is the case of Egaeus's monomania in "Berenice" (teeth), the homodiegetic narrator in "William Wilson" (identity) and the painter in "The Oval Portrait" (art). Torture and imprisonment turn the narrator in "The Pit and the Pendulum" into "an imbecile —an idiot" as his torturers "nearly annihilated all […] [his] ordinary powers of mind" (Poe 2002: 243). In certain tales by Poe, such as "Ligeia" or "William Wilson", the sensational representation of madness is emphasized by the suggestion of the supernatural gothic. In a similar line, Browning's "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" reaches its climax with an invocation to Satan and a possible quotation from a medieval manual of magic formulae ascribed to Peter of Abano (Loucks 1974: 167).

Moreover, Gothic sensationalism is also present in the claustrophobic use of gloomy settings. As the interest in natural philosophy turned from the outer to the inner world, gothic settings became symbolic in the interior dialogue that madmen entertained themselves with as part of their treatment (Foucault 1988: 247). Browning's madhouse-cell compositions take place in a retired cottage during a stormy night ("Porphyria's Lover"), a Catholic cloister ("Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister"), and a private room in a castle ("My Last Duchess"). Ancient and often derelict mansions abound in Poe's tales, not only reflecting the unbalanced mental state of their homodiegetic dwellers, but even contributing to —when not directly causing— their madness. In the nineteenth-century social imaginary, the madhouse was seen as the means of containment of mental, moral, and physical disease, but also as the physical space where these diseases are born and from where they can spread to the rest of the population (Foucault 1988: 207). Fear and morbid interest in settings, characters and events that are hidden from the view of the reading public justify their use in sensational literary manifestations that are characterized by disclosure of what is hidden (John 2009: 3).

In this regard, the contemporary popularity of pseudo-scientific lectures in public theatres was also related to this sensational appeal of the disclosure of what was socially or intellectually hidden. These popular lectures often incorporated sensational topics such as mesmerism or phrenology, which were explained to the general public by (melo)dramatic means bordering on vaudeville/the circus as they were usually related to the supernatural in the figure of the medium or clairvoyant (Oppenheim 1988: 7). Mutual borrowing from the fictional and the (pseudo)scientific was liable to render the similar effects that were demanded by the early Victorian audience. Both Browning and Poe made an analogous sensational use of scientific discourse in their compositions, which they justified with the respectability of academic interest in such topics. Psychology was a most suitable discipline to justify the sensational representation of madness that was exploited in Poe's tales and Browning's monologues. Many of Poe's tales (both dark and humorous) typically include an introspective reflection on the biological or contextual reasons that explain their homodiegetic narrator's uncommon behavior and provide a scientific frame to the tale that justifies the reader's interest in its contents on a pretended logical (rather than sensational) basis. Furthermore, scientific interest was held as justification for the sensational elements accounting for the popularity of the travel narrative tradition, which often required the form of the personal journal as a device to guarantee the reliability of narration in the age of empiricism (Oppenheim 1988: 57). The use of exotic settings also contributed to raising interest in readers owing to the sensational ingredients that are inherent to their strangeness. The political, religious, and moral corruption of Continental Europe provided a suitable context for the sensational characters and

actions that appear in the tales and monologues. As in a trial, the homodiegetic narrative voice of travel journals (most evident in exploration journals) bore unmediated witness to sensational events with the same perceptual instruments as the scientific experimentalist (Oppenheim 1988: 200). Distant locations in time and place add exotic interest to "My Last Duchess", "William Wilson", "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister", "The Oval Portrait", and "The Pit and the Pendulum".

Such discursive traditions are relied on only to be subverted through the use of voice in Poe's and Browning's compositions, their main contribution being precisely their unreliability as they displace the reasoning/analytical function from the narrative/monological voice to the reader. In Poe's tales, this subversion is most complete when he conveys the mental imbalance of his homodiegetic narrators by exposing their reasoning powers as they try to explain their deviant experiences by rational means. Similarly, Brother Lawrence and the Duke of Ferrara build on religious and social discourses, respectively, to justify their behavior in rational terms. In the case of "Porphyria's Lover", the monologuist organizes his reasons to attack Porphyria around a logical pattern that has no logic. The supposed rationality of the argumentative presentation of action in both cases is subverted by the suggested unreliability of voice, which is revealed to be the main subject of the tales and monologues as they reach their thematic climax.

3. Use of Voice and its Impact on Closure

Although the literary forms created by Browning and Poe were finally divergent in terms of genre classification, the narrative and lyrical voices that gave their works concrete expression are discursively similar —when not identical. It could be argued that Browning's failure at writing for the stage was caused, ironically, by his excessive compromise with popularity, as he exclusively focused on monological climax, disregarding the circumstances that would build his plots into such climactic moments. He would preface his failed *Strafford* with the justification that his play was "one of Action in Character rather than Character in Action" by which "considerable curtailment will be necessary" in plot (Browning 1837: iii). Paradoxically, the same sensational features that made his drama unfit for the popular stage would perfectly match the expressive lyrical form that appealed to the critical mind. This was a happy coincidence that resulted in the production of the dramatic monologues. Although Poe would more consciously master the gradual development of plot into a climax and its following *dénouement* (as he explains in "The Philosophy of Composition"), the "supplying details" that Browning would disregard as "not required" (1837: iii) for the reader of *Strafford* are managed by Poe in their literal and symbolic dimensions as subservient to a

complex picture of his homodiegetic narrators. It is just as paradoxical that Poe's careful treatment of sensational "details" to construct characters is precisely what distinguishes his tales from contemporary *Blackwood* articles that used similar details without subservience to character.

It can be seen, therefore, that rather than dealing mainly with the sensational elements that appealed to the popular reading interest, the tales and monologues are dynamic self-portraits of the invisible, psychological, and moral dimensions of their homodiegetic narrators, which are built by the details provided as the action unfolds. It could be argued that the circumstances external to character work as props that help in character construction and totally depend on it. In the tales and monologues, plot is visibly subordinated to character development, which is proved by the fact that, in all cases, the climax of tales and monologues focus on character rather than the culmination of action.

The sensational murders of Porphyria and the duchess of Ferrara take place by mid monologue, off the focus of poetic climax, while Brother Lawrence's death or induction to eternal condemnation is projected into the future outside the monologue. Except for "The Oval Portrait", where the initial homodiegetic narrator reports the artist's —and not his own— final anagnorisis, all the tales analyzed in this article reach their climax in terms of the realization and portrayal of their true subjective nature. The climax in "William Wilson" and "Berenice" is not the moment of the murder or mutilation, but the final anagnorisis that reveals the monomania of their homodiegetic narrators as Doppelgänger and maimer, respectively. The final rescue of the narrator in "The Pit and the Pendulum" is a *denouement* of his climactic despair, as he realizes that the real purpose of his torture was always eternal condemnation by inducement to commit suicide.

The subjective approach in the tales and monologues was explained above by the combination of the high-brow lyrical expression of the poet's soul with a more sensational approach to psychological deviations, such as melodramatic climax or gothic madness, in order to appeal to the interests of the contemporary popular readership. Other possible sources such as pseudoscientific discourse and the travel journal tradition have also been suggested above, but the first-person approach might also rely on a long tradition of equally successful forms that helped develop subjective narrative focus in the early Victorian period. The eighteenth-century epistolary novel (*Pamela*, 1740) and its gothic, sensationalist revision (*Justine*, 1787), the personal journal or diary, or religious meditations and confessions were widely circulated in volumes enjoying high popularity since the seventeenth century. Therefore, the technique was already well tested and developed enough to be subverted into new artistic forms and adapted to the new ways of literary consumption that Poe and Browning would explore, as I describe below.

The vertical (character) and horizontal (plot) construction of Poe's tales and Browning's monologues responds to a rhetoric of revelation and occultation that is directly related to the subjective expression and narration of the speaker's subjectivity. This reflexive exercise (partially absent from "The Oval Portrait") moves in two opposite directions of pornographic (sensational) exposure and erotic (lyrical) suggestiveness that simultaneously attract the readers' attention by seemingly satisfying their morbid interest in exposure, and requires their engagement in completing the necessary partial account of subjective perspective.[5]

The sensational features described above raise interest and emotion by providing immediate satisfaction of readers' morbid interest in exposure of physical sex/gore and moral deviation. However, when the climactic moment of psychological exposure is revealed to be the origin and target of literary composition, readers are forced to face the representative limitations of subjectivity that leave the texts in need of closure. Rather than exposed, the promised end of the tales and monologues are deferred by means of suggestiveness to be dialogically completed by the reader. In doing so, the pictures presented by these compositions are also reflective of the reader's own, as both overlap at the climactic end.

Although Poe's homodiegetic narrators and Browning's monologists are built as individual characters that can be distinguished from authorial voice (as they are portrayed by their particular subjective identity), and set in a fictional context (since they address equally fictional interlocutors), their subjectivity is vague enough to leave room for ample interpretive possibilities. In the tales and monologues, the dramatic and narrative voice is in some cases genderless and often nameless or loosely located in time and space. Except for the clear cases in which these voices are explicitly made masculine (the Duke of Ferrara in "My Last Duchess", Egaeus in "Berenice", and the master of a valet in "The Oval Portrait"), their gender is determined by setting (William Wilson's school for boys and the Spanish Cloister), or the reader's expectations concerning social conventions (Porphyria's lover is masculine by heteronormative expectations). Finally, "The Pit and the Pendulum" provides no clue whatsoever for a possible readerly choice of its assumed masculinity. The Duke of Ferrara only has a title and a family name, but even that is explicitly denied to the reader by Egaeus in "Berenice". The rest of the voices analyzed in this article are nameless, with a special emphasis on the case of William Wilson, the uncertainty of whose identity is the thematic core of the tale.

The temporal frame is only precise in "The Pit and the Pendulum", with the French army entering Toledo in 1808. The action in "My Last Duchess" is only loosely set in the second half of the 16th century, but largely indefinite in the rest of the tales and monologues. More concrete spatial references are provided in

"The Pit and the Pendulum" (Toledo) and "My Last Duchess" (Ferrara), but they are restricted to country in the case of "William Wilson" (England), "The Oval Portrait" (Italy), and "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister". "Berenice" and "Porphyria's Lover" could be set anywhere. This uncertainty with respect to character and setting leaves plenty of room for reader identification, and despite the subjective, partial perspective, it conveys a certain universal projection (a mixture of dramatic pathos and lyrical universality).

The necessary (intrinsic) partiality of a subjective focus is thus reinforced in the tales and monologues by this vagueness in characterization on which plot (and character) reliability and internal coherence build. Partiality and vagueness make an unstable basis for readers to cling to as they complete textual decoding. Still, this subjective focalization is further weakened by the added unreliability of the isolated or combined effects of madness, intoxication, slumber, or torture. These deflect the otherwise straightforward, reasonable, reliable accounts of the narrative and monological voices of "William Wilson", "Berenice", "The Oval Portrait", "The Pit and the Pendulum", "Porphyria's Lover" and "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister". In the case of the Duke of Ferrara, his possible monomania about his family name as it is threatened by his wife's suggested adultery adds to the social pressure that forces him to order his wife's murder and hide his reasons at the same time. The otherness that is suggested as an absence in the subjective construction of character and plot of the tales and monologues is filled in by readers, who contribute to construct the absent text as they complete the gothic portrait of psychological terror.

Also, the climactic moments of narrative or lyrical revelation in the tales and monologues are presented to the reader as thematic questions —rather than in terms of textual (dis)closure. Readers are made to wonder about the reasons behind the violent assaults on Berenice and Porphyria. They only have themselves to ask how the soliloquist of the Spanish cloister would materialize his hatred against Brother Lawrence —if he would— or if the narrator between the pit and the pendulum would have condemned his soul by jumping into the abyss rather than be slaughtered by the pendulum. Finally, readers are left to guess whether the head in the oval portrait actually moved or the duchess of Ferrara was really adulterous.

Still, the erotic suggestiveness of these texts is more masterfully achieved by textual oddities implying meanings that are not immediately obvious. The abruptness of Browning's enjambments defers the syntactic closure of certain lines into the following lines, but syntactic deferral points outside the text as the expected modifiers of crucial lexical units are left to be supplied by readers. The duchess's smiles to her husband and everybody else lack a reason, while her husband's commands lack a purpose. Because of this, readers are forced to supply the quality

of her smiles and the content of his commands, which are nothing less than the thematic basis of the monologue. Even the duchess's climactic death is deflected by the comparative "*as if* she were alive" (l. 2, emphasis added) towards readers, who must provide the sensational details of her death by themselves. The vagueness of "*all*" (l. 29, emphasis added) that was in vain in "Porphyria's Lover" and the reason why its monologist should "debate[d] what to do" (l. 35), or what the syntactic connection might be between those considerations and the "thing" he found to do (ll. 37-38), equally require the reader's collaborative completion.

The very odd interjections that frame the "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" ("GR-R-R—") promise a sensational disclosure at the beginning of the poem that is continuously deferred along a series of juxtaposed thematic units loosely identified with stanzas the triviality of which does not fulfill the reader's expectations. When the soliloquy involutes upon itself by closing with the same interjection, the initial promise is deflected from text to the reader's own subjective contribution. A similar device is to be found in the construction of "William Wilson", where the expected conventional reading of the sentences beginning and ending the tale is finally revealed in their literal sense as they directly appeal to readers for completion. Only when readers reach the end of the tale does the dying William Wilson ambiguously reveal that "in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself" (Poe 2002: 567). The intentionally ambiguous use of personal pronouns does not only endlessly defer the identity of their referent between subject and object (murderer and victim), but also directly appeals to readers as the interlocutors of the homodiegetic narrative voice that reflects ("see by this image, which is thine own") their own identity. Moreover, readers are not only required to engage in the mirror game with the homodiegetic narrator. In the light of this last sentence, the sentence opening the tale ("Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson") gains literal meaning in the imperative "Let" by implying that the whole narrative occurs only by this readerly concession as they engage and are caught in the composition.

But most revealing of all is the sensational use of absence by which the morbid details and moral judgments are silenced and obscured in the tales and monologues.[6] The narrator in "The Oval Portrait" reacts to his hurried glance at the painting by paradoxically closing his eyes to make sure his "vision had not deceived […] [him]" (Poe 2002: 247), while the artist himself "turned his eyes from the canvas rarely" (249) so that "he *would* not see" (248-249, emphasis in original) the progressive effects of his portrait on the original as they occurred. In "The Pit and the Pendulum", darkness creates a visual void that prevents identification of the means of torture arranged for the homodiegetic narrator; and when he could finally see the object around him "[b]y a wild, sulphurous luster, the origin of what

I could not at first [nor at last] determine" (241), he "averted" (246) his eyes from the pit. The pit is not only thus obscured; it is also silenced from the text when the narrator, tottering upon the brink, replaces the prepositional phrase that would naturally follow (the brink *of the pit*) by a dash. The "mighty marvel" of transposing life from a human being into a canvas in "The Oval Portrait" is spoken of "in low words" (248) just as Berenice's plucked teeth are not directly mentioned at the tale's climax by Egaeus, who refers to them only riddlingly as "thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor" (586). The whole final climax of the tale is a dumb-show with a menial pointing to, rather than naming, the evidence: "He pointed to my garments; they were muddy and clotted with gore"; and then, "he took me gently by the hand: it was indented with the impress of human nails. He directed my attention to some object against the wall […] it was a spade" (586). The teeth reveal themselves as they fall to the floor while Egaeus either "spoke not" or produced "a shriek" (586) that must be filled with meaning by readers. Finally, God's silence (l. 60) at the end of "Porphyria's Lover" can be taken as an ingredient of sinful agnosticism that adds to the portrait of its monologist's sensational madness, but it can also indirectly appeal to the reader's engagement in producing the moral judgment that neither God nor the monologist would. Be it lyrical, monological or homodiegetic in nature, the subjective approach in the tales and monologues produces a communicative void that forces the reader's engagement in their composition following the cooperative principle in conversation.

The double rhetoric of occultation and exposure that is found in the tales and monologues included —or might have been caused by— a Victorian anxiety for the external (readerly) reception of subjective (artistic) expression. As professional literary writers, Poe and Browning show an unprecedented concern for the effect of their compositions on readers as they tried to improve their literary taste and sought for their recognition. But their innovation would not stop there. A most impressive coincidence between these two new literary forms occurring at the same time is the inclusion of this interest as a central compositional element. Tholoniat argues that what makes the dramatic monologue "dramatic" is that "it is uttered in a critical moment for the speaker" (2011: 435), and it is precisely the climax of an absent plot that remains vaguely untold that readers must reconstruct by themselves to give the text a universal projection. The same brevity required of the tales and monologues by publishing constrictions and the satisfaction of popular demand for sensation is used for (or the direct cause of) the development of the suggestiveness, symbolism and incompleteness that must be filled by readers as they contribute to the creation of the pieces, thus adding their own subjectiveness to them, which also undoubtedly contributes to increasing —by readerly engagement— their effect.

4. Coincidental Use of a Heightened Tone

In Poe's tales and Browning's monologues, the sensational traits that were obvious at the levels of theme and voice are intensified by sensational tone and degree. In their compositions, sensational detail is typically provided by "the appalling minutiae providing the *tone*; particularly modifiers, […] [and] rhetorical devices such as hyperbole and alliteration", which are intensified in degree by the use of "exclamation points" (Sachsman and Bulla 2013: xxi, emphasis in original). In Browning's monologues, the tone is not so much set by the use of modifiers as by the use of alliteration and hyperbole. The extreme weather conditions at the beginning of "Porphyria's Lover" emphasize the unjustifiably excessive feelings of the monologist as they appear *in media res*. The duchess's light behavior (smile) is exaggerated into the suggested adultery that causes her death, just like brother Lawrence's harmless features and distractions raise the disproportionate wrath of the soliloquist in the Spanish cloister as he perceives them hyperbolically: "—Can't I see his dead eye glow/ Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?/ (That is, if he'd let it show!)" (ll. 30-32). Poe used modifiers in a clearly sensational way when the "disfigured body" of Berenice is described by a menial to her husband, who happens to be "muddy and clotted with gore" (2002: 586). Also, the narrator of "The Oval Portrait" justifies his forcible entrance into the château where he finds the lady's portrait with his "desperately wounded condition" (247). In keeping with this, the homodiegetic narrator in "The Pit and the Pendulum" feels nothing less than "delirious horror" and "a most deadly nausea" (237), which can only be compared to William Wilson's "ungovernable passions" (556), "phantasmagoric pains" (557) and "brute ferocity" (567). The above-mentioned menial in "Berenice" makes a hyperbolic entrance looking "pale as the tenant of a tomb" (586), while the mere extinguishment of a few candles makes the narrator of "The Pit and the Pendulum" feel that "all sensations appeared swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades" (238). Finally, "[i]n an absolute frenzy of wrath", William Wilson "felt in […] [his] single arm the energy and power of a multitude" (567).

Although the use of alliteration in these tales and monologues can be attributed to their lyrical quality, a certain sensational function might also be sensed when Porphyria's cheek "*B*lushed *b*right *b*eneath my *b*urning kiss" (l.48, emphasis added). But once more, Browning's monologues are not as notoriously sensational in tone as Poe's tales, where alliteration often serves sensational rather than lyrical purposes. As the French army enters Toledo at the end of "The Pit and the Pendulum", there is "a harsh grating of a *thousand thunders*" (Poe 2002: 246, emphasis added); William Wilson's later years were of "*unsp*eakable misery, and *unp*ardonable crime" (555, emphasis added); the resemblance between the model

and the painting in the oval portrait is described as a "*m*ighty *m*arvel"; and "*M*isery is *m*anifold" (581, emphasis added) in "Berenice".

On his part, Poe uses exclamations for the intensification of sensational degree at the climactic moments of the tales, when the reader is to be most impressed by the tale's effect. But he also uses them to create suspense earlier in the plot by having exclamations anticipate an intensity or degree of emotion that will actually take place only at the end. Such is the case in the fifth paragraph of "Berenice", the second paragraph of "The Pit and the Pendulum", or at any moment in which an atmosphere of excess is required to build up emotion on an empty basis in "William Wilson". Finally, even though the employment of sensational tone might not be as excessive in Browning's monologues as it is in Poe's narrative, the monologues are obviously excessive in terms of sensational degree. Browning does not only use exclamations to signal the climax of the three monologues, he also uses rhetorical questions for the same sensational purpose in "My Last Duchess" and "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister", where swearwords and insults make up a considerable percentage of the monologue.

David Sachsman and David Bulla describe how, at the time, these "[r]hetorical devices often were critical to sensationalized content" in periodical publications. Curiously enough, they also notice that "[s]uch stories sometimes were written in a poetic manner, one in which the words almost bounced along as if written to some internal rhythm" (2013: xxiii). Thus, the repetitions that create a certain poetic rhythm in Poe's tales might in fact answer to a sensational and not a lyrical imperative. Or perhaps the pre-eminence of emotion in lyrical poetry is comparable in intensity and perspective —if not in taste and quality— to that of sensational literature, which would explain that these two seemingly distant genres share certain textual features that would have a similar function in different literary genres. Thus, the experimental blending of the dramatic and lyrical subjective in the tales and monologues suggested above might be completed by the sensational, penny-press narrative convention of heightened tone and degree.

5. Conclusion: Evidence in Coincidence

Although there is no documented evidence allowing us to ascertain that Poe and Browning actually read each other's work before Poe's approach to Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 1845 —other than Browning's acknowledgement that Poe's "Metzengerstein" (1832) had influenced his composition of "Childe Roland" (1855)— the fact that they published their works in countries sharing similar literary interests and markets at exactly the same time in history, together with the fact that they were acquainted with the same literary circles, suggests they might

have known each other's work. The detailed comparison of some of the works they published between 1834 and 1843 offered in this study shows evidence that Poe and Browning also shared similar literary devices, such as their concern for literary effect and dialogical engagement with readers, or the use of sensational details and a subjective approach, and so the possibility that they were acquainted with each other's work becomes plausible.

It might also be plausible that under similar personal circumstances and in the same historical context, pressed by similar critical demands and a similar publishing industry and market, both authors would have conducted literary experiments that simply achieved similar results. The need to attract the short-spanned attention of a reading public saturated with sensational excess in periodical format might have led Browning and Poe to reduce the length of their compositions from full drama to dramatic monologue and from novel to tale, employ popular sensational themes, draw on heightened tone, or have readers make the stories their own by subjectively engaging them in completing the texts' meaning.

But the absence of documented evidence relating their respective works during these years might also be totally intentional, since acknowledging the influence of still unsuccessful contemporaries, similarly despised by high-brow criticism at such an early stage in their respective careers, would have been quite unwise, not to say devastating for both literary egos. And yet the fact that all these coincidences should appear in texts with a similar thematic approach published or composed within the same year adds further evidence to the possibility that Poe and Browning might have known each other's work and been mutually influenced by their respective literary innovations.

Notes

1. "The Oval Portrait" seems to have been inspired by a painting by a friend (Mabbot 1978: xxi), while "My Last Duchess" was based on Richard Henry Wilde's *Conjectures and Researches Concerning the Love, Madness, and Imprisonment of Torquato Tasso* (1842) (Monteiro 1985: 194). The sources of "Porphyria", have been identified in John Wilson's "Extracts from Groschen's Diary" (Blackwood 1818) and Bryan Procter's "Marcian Colonna" (1820) (Maxwell 1993: 27-28). A long list of contemporary magazines count among the many sources inspiring "Berenice" in "taste", but the most widely acknowledged regarding subject matter are found in *The Baltimore Sunday Visiter* (1833) (Campbell in Forclaz 1968), and *The New York Mirror* (1833) (Forclaz 1968: 24-26). Llorente's 1817 *History of the Spanish Inquisition* (Alterton 1933: 349), and a paragraph in Dick's 1825 *Christian Philosopher* (Mabbot 1978: 680) are well documented sources of Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum", together with Charles Brocken's 1799 *Edgar Huntley*, and four other Blackwood's tales (Clark 1929: 351; Hirsch 1969: 35). The sources for "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister", however, have been found

in much more erudite works such as Abano's *Heptameron* (Loucks 1974: 167), the Beauvais *Orientis Partibus* (Pitts 1966: 339-340), and Hone's 1823 *Ancient Mysteries Described* (Aiken 1979: 380).

2. For an extensive review of the impact that a new kind of readership had in early nineteenth-century writing, see Newlyn (2000). For a summary of the recent historicist approach to the impact of attention on narrative strategies, see Bennet (2018: 13-15).

3. Letter to Thomas W. White of April 30, 1835 (LTR-042).

4. "My companions said to me that my troubles would in some measure be relieved if I would visit the tomb of my sweetheart" (Beard 1978: 611).

5. For a comprehensive description of the psychological model within reader-response criticism, see Mailloux (1982: 19-39).

6. Although unrelated to the use of voice, such is also the case of the duchess's portrait, conveniently covered by a cloth, and Porphyria's absent look as her lover "warily oped her lids" (l. 44).

7. [C] Composition; [P] Publication.

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A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG/ MATURE WOMAN IN *JUST KIDS, M TRAIN,* AND *YEAR OF THE MONKEY,* BY PATTI SMITH

RETRATO DE LA ARTISTA JOVEN Y MADURA EN *JUST KIDS, M TRAIN* Y *YEAR OF DE MONKEY* DE PATTI SMITH

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Abstract

Patti Smith and her 2010 National Book Award-winning *Just Kids* offers an autobiographical account of the artist's life with the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. Smith also shows her involvement in New York City's bohemian downtown scene in the 1960s and 70s. In 2015, Smith published a second memoir, *M Train*, and a third one, *Year of the Monkey*, followed in 2019. These two books are more experimental works where linear chronology is altered. The narrator mixes dream and reality in her recollection of her life after the death of her husband Fred "Sonic" Smith, and pays homage to those beloved persons (writers, artists, family members, friends) who have made an emotional and artistic impact on her. As a significant number of critical articles and book chapters have been devoted to analysing gender issues and narrative strategies of life-writing in Smith's memoirs, my aim in this essay eschews those topics and explores the search for the artistic self as well as Smith's ideas of art and performance in *Just Kids, M Train* and *Year of the Monkey.*

Keywords: artistic memoir, artistic self, performance, creative partnership.

Resumen

Patti Smith, en su libro *Just Kids* (2010), premiado con el *National Book Award*, ofrece un relato autobiográfico de su vida con el fotógrafo Robert Mapplethorpe.

Smith también nos muestra su participación en el mundo bohemio de Nueva York en los años 60 y 70. En 2015, Smith publicó otro libro de memorias, *M Train*, seguido de un tercero, *Year of the Monkey*, en 2019. Ambos libros son obras más experimentales cuya cronología se ve alterada en su linearidad. La narradora mezcla sueños y realidades en su evocación de su vida después de la muerte de su marido, Fred "Sonic" Smith, y rinde homenaje a los seres queridos (escritores, artistas, familiares, amigos) que han ejercido una decisiva influencia artística y emocional sobre ella. Puesto que un número significativo de artículos y capítulos de libro ya han analizado elementos de género y estrategias narrativas de escritura autobiográfica en dichas obras de Smith, mi objetivo en este ensayo es explorar la búsqueda que realiza Smith de su yo artístico y sus ideas sobre el arte y la representación en *Just Kids*, *M Train* y *Year of the Monkey*.

Palabras clave: memoria artística, yo artístico, representación, relación creadora.

1. Introduction: Life Writing Genres and Patti Smith's Legacy

On May 22, 1989, Robert Mapplethorpe's memorial service day, his mother told Patti Smith, "You're a writer, she whispered with some effort. Write me a line" (Smith 2012: 288). The lady died three days later, so she never received Smith's letter. Smith wrote a piece for Robert Mapplethorpe's book *Flowers*, as well as the collection of poetry *The Coral Sea*, and she even made drawings in remembrance of him. But she felt she still had a mission to complete: to write their common story. She waited for twenty-one years before publishing the memoir *Just Kids* (2010) in order to convey Robert Mapplethorpe's voice beyond the silence of the grave (Watson 2015: 136).

The genre of female rock memoir has attracted a great deal of attention in the past decade. Patti Smith's memoir *Just Kids* (2010) was no pioneer in life writing but had much to do with the emergence of this literary phenomenon. In 2015, Smith published another autobiographical work, *M Train*, followed by *Year of the Monkey* in 2019, which has consolidated her reputation as a memoirist. As a significant number of critical articles and book chapters have been devoted to exploring gender issues and narrative strategies of life writing in Smith's memoirs, my aim in this essay eschews those topics and focuses on the search for the artistic self as well as on her ideas of art and performance in *Just Kids, M Train* and *Year of the Monkey*. The sacralising function of art in these books alludes to the reverence and fascination that Patti Smith feels for creative activities, and for those who participate in this process. Art becomes a religion, which requires faith and sacrifices; in exchange, Patti Smith receives a mission she must fight to accomplish. The road to

art is narrated in *Just Kids*, whereas in *M Train* and *Year of the Monkey*, the mature Patti Smith, now a consolidated multidisciplinary artist, shares her anxiety at losing this gift. She tries to retain it by writing incessantly, reading and rereading her favourite authors, and travelling to places where her beloved creators lived, died or dreamt about.

In their guide for interpreting life narratives, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson distinguish between life writing, life narrative and autobiography. Life writing refers to writing of diverse kinds that take life as its subject (biographical, novelistic, historical, etc.). Life narrative would be a narrower term that includes many kinds of self-referential writing, including autobiography. Autobiography emerged in the Enlightenment and is the most widely used term for life narrative. However, this issue has also been questioned because it celebrates the autonomous individual and the universalising life story. A number of postmodern and postcolonial theorists state that this term is not adequate to illustrate the diversity of genres and practices of life narratives (Smith and Watson 2001: 3-4).

Among the autobiographical practices that Smith and Watson mention, we can also find 'memoir', 'autothanatography', 'autotopography', 'autoethnography', and *Künstlerroman*. The terms autobiography and memoir are often used interchangeably, but there are also differences. Lee Quinby considers that in autobiography, the "I" examines an assumed interiority whereas memoirs are constituted in the reports of the utterances and proceedings of others (1992: 299). Julia Watson adds that voice in memoir needs not be monologic, narrating personal and collective stories (2015: 131). Autothanatography has been applied to autobiographical texts that deal with illness and death (Smith and Watson 2001: 188; Hernández Hellín 2019: 196). Jennifer González has defined autotopography as the transformation of a person's personal objects into autobiographical ones in a way that "these personal objects can be seen to form a syntagmatic array of physical signs in a spatial representation of identity" (1995: 133). Autoethnography focuses on how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other in the contact zone of cultural encounter (Pratt 1992: 7). The autoethnographer would serve as an insider-outsider observer, a historian of the moment who offers a mosaic of a cultural moment. Finally, *Künstlerroman* refers to the autobiographical narrative of artistic growth, the artistic coming-of-age story (Watson 2015: 138, 143).

In spite of this different classification, for Irene Kacandes what all life writing genres have in common is their reference to the "real world" (2012: 396). Dorrit Cohn has also explored the connections between texts and the world outside them. She mentions that in non-fiction writing there exists a referential level that can be confirmed with documents, a kind of "data base" beyond the text (Cohn

1999: 112). Furthermore, Matthew Sutton asserts that in recent studies of autobiography and life writing, the paratext (elements of a book outside the narrative such as photographs, prefaces, epilogues, appendices) has emerged as a significant object of examination. In particular, he finds it quite relevant in popular musicians' life writing because such material usually reinforces the protagonists' professional achievements, their cultural significance and their claims to authenticity, thus offering a parallel discourse to the narrative (Sutton 2015: 208). In keeping with this, according to Stein and Butler, musical autobiographies show the presence of interfaces between written autobiographical narrative and different musical and visual modes of self-performance (2015: 117). Besides, writing a musical autobiography means telling a life that has already been told in interviews, biographies, and in the musician's public image as portrayed in record covers, posters, ads, video clips, podcasts, online promotion, and live performances. These critics also highlight the intermedial and relational nature of musical autobiographies because the narrated musician's life story is linked to a whole network of people and institutions that have supported and promoted the writer in his/her musical and literary efforts. The musician's music becomes a part of the autobiography, together with its different forms of delivery (sound recording, video clip, interviews, magazine coverage). Musical autobiographies tend to be grouped under the label of star/celebrity autobiographies, which suggests lack of literary value and the promotion of mass entertainment. In addition, the majority of musical autobiographies are the result of processes of collaboration that include an "as told to" format and cases of ghost-writing.

The Western notion that the self-determined subject present in an autobiographical text endows cultural legitimacy and respectability is something many musician-writers long for when they start writing their autobiographies. But, as many autobiographies are collaboratively written, this may complicate any account of personal autonomy and individual genius (Stein and Butler 2015: 116-118). In his review of three memoirs by women musicians, *M Train* (2015) by Patti Smith, *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl* (2015) by Carrie Brownstein, and *I'll Never Write My Memories* (2015) by Grace Jones, Barry Shank shares Stein and Butler's reflection on the voice of memoir not being the product of a single core self (2016: 382). Similarly, Julia Watson suggests that in *Just Kids* we appreciate the centrality of a performing self that emerges interactively from relationships with others and an authorial voice which is shared and that recreates two lives (2015: 135). In *M Train* and *Year of the Monkey*, Smith pays homage to those beloved persons, writers and artists who have made an emotional and artistic impact on her. In *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl*, Carrie Brownstein acknowledges the partnerships in her band as central to the emerging self. Grace Jones's memories, *I'll Never Write My Memories*, display an elusive self, neither individualised nor particularly strong.

Smith, Brownstein and Jones use these memoirs to make a claim about their artistic seriousness. They build their own selves through artistic creation in collaboration with others (Shank 2016: 382-383).

For Tomasz Sawczuk, female rock memoirs like the ones he discusses in his article (by Carrie Brownstein, Kim Gordon and Brix Smith Start) challenge the stereotypical image and place of women in the entertainment industry and show their way to empowerment and freedom through art (2016: 80). Also, the act of performing live contributes to these memoirists' independence and sense of value. Their vulnerability and anxiety become strengths (75-76). In this respect, critics Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron, in their book *Significant Others* (1993), question common generalisations about creativity being an extraordinary and usually male individual's solitary struggle for artistic self-expression. Both scholars delve into the complex elements that shape creative lives and present models of fluid, equitable and enriching partnerships. These artistic and personal portraits reveal stories of mutual respect and support which neither exclude conflict nor relegate the presence and influence of friends and lovers. Many of the couples depicted in the book transcend external and internal constraints and develop alternative creative and affective relationships that are not necessarily bound by the model of heterosexual union. Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe build one of these creative and personal partnerships, not free of conflict and estrangement, which threatens at times their personal link and their common artistic pursuit. However, *Just Kids* articulates an idea of creativity that transgresses the myths of artistic collaboration between men and women, defending exchange between partners as an unexpectedly strong and innovative experience.

A brief reflection on multimodal literature is relevant before discussing Patti Smith's works because of the paratextual material the three books comprise, mainly photographs. Alison Gibbons states that multimodal literature refers to a body of texts that may include a variety of semiotic modes in the communication and progression of their narratives (2012: 420-421). Some of their features are a varied typography, unusual layouts and page design, the inclusion of images and facsimiles of documents (420-421). Critics often consider such hybrid works as low cultural artefacts, but the fact that images and word-image combinations can now be produced cheaply and easily has boosted the publication of multimodal works, both fictional and non-fictional. Consequently, multimodal texts can be highly sophisticated art forms where the process of reading is foregrounded and the physical act of engaging with the book is emphasized (420-421). Fiona J. Doloughan argues that when we read an unfolding narrative, we proceed from page to page and from moment to moment (2011: 34). This sequential experience is interrupted by the inclusion of images, whether they be photographs, stills,

diagrams, other memorabilia or realia. The taking in of the image requires a pause in the verbal story, thus disrupting narrative time. The meaning of these images is relative to the surrounding text in which they are embedded and relative to their place in the storyline of which they form a part (Doloughan 2011: 34). In this sense, Smith and Watson mention that, although we tend to think of autobiography as an extended narration in written form, self-representation can be carried out through many media (reference). In particular, photos seem to memorialise identity so they often accompany life narratives. Both scholars agree with Doloughan when they say that visual and verbal media are defined by different conventions. Photos tell an alternative story to verbal texts so that when the two forms are combined, the photos can produce an alternative system of meaning. Therefore, Smith and Watson conclude that the stories in photographs may support or even contradict the contents of the verbal text (2001: 74-75).

As will be illustrated below, Patti Smith's three memoirs share a number of features with other musicians' autobiographies; for example, the presence of paratextual material with a documentary function and the dialogic and relational narrative voice. However, Patti Smith's books do not aim to show her career accomplishments, or backstage stories of concerts, fans or incidents in the life of a celebrity. She is a highly skilled poet who is very much concerned with literary form and who transgresses the boundaries between popular culture and high literature (Masschelein 2020: 3). Moreover, the titles of her memoirs do not echo her well-known original compositions. On the contrary, the title *Just Kids* derives from intimate recollections while *M Train* and *Year of the Monkey* refer to private information about the author. Patti Smith does not lure the potential reader either with the revelation of secrets or with a chronological list of albums and singles. Furthermore, her narratives are not co-authored, but told by herself.

2. *Just Kids*: The Long and Winding Road to Art

Unlike some of the previously mentioned female rock stars (Carrie Brownstein, Kim Gordon and Brix Smith Start), who reclaim their own artistic self in opposition to the projections of the male and the medial other (Sawczuk 2016: 71-72), young Patti "dreamed of meeting an artist to love and support and work with side by side" (2012: 12). In fact, this is the stereotypical role of the (male) artist and the (female) muse, the woman as enabler of male genius (Chadwick and de Courtivron 1993). Instead, Patti met someone who would also love, support and work with her. The path to becoming an artist is tough, but she shares this burden and this dream with another human being, Robert Mapplethorpe. This is what distinguishes Smith's text from other female memoirs. Several passages in the book confirm the

inseparability of the narrative of artistic growth from that of the relational story, "our work was our children" (2012: 274), "When I look at it [the cover picture of *Horses*, Smith's debut album] now, I never see me. I see us" (251); "The creed we developed as artist and model was simple. I trust you, I trust in myself" (189), "With you I can't miss" (192). By narrating a story that revolves around another character, Patti Smith creates an exceptional book in the sense that no other biographer can write their common story (Hernández Hellín 2019: 193-194).

The paratextual material comprises a "Foreword", photographs and "A Note to the Reader". The "Foreword" chronicles the night of 9 March 1989 when Smith is informed about Robert's death in New York. The photographs evoke and parallel the voices of the "kids" throughout the narrative because Smith wishes to tell their common story verbally and photographically. The section "Note to the Reader" works as a fragmentary archive of moments of Patti's and Robert's young lives together, including memorial poems, photographs of Patti and Robert (separate), letter fragments, drawings, photographs of significant places for them, such as the Chelsea Hotel and Coney Island, and a handwritten poem by Smith entitled "Just Kids".

To begin with the textual analysis, I will distinguish between "Patti" and "Robert", the protagonists of *Just Kids*, and "Smith", the author of this memoir. The first chapter opens with a mixture of verbal images and words associated with walks with her mother in Humboldt Park when Patti was a small girl. She is attracted towards the round shapes of a "circular band shell" (2012: 3), "an arched stone bridge" (3), "the narrows of the river" (3), and the "long curving neck" (3) of a big bird, named "swan" by her mother. However, the child Patti is not satisfied with this denomination and fights to find her own words to express her unique reaction to the swan's colour, its graceful movements and the beating of its wings (3). She is experiencing the gap between reality and the words that represent it, which do not satisfy her. The result of bridging this gap is art, but the creation of art requires a persistent inner search and a curious look at the world.

Patti's entrance into the world of words is marked by religion. The child Patti looks forward to the moment of reciting her prayers and is intrigued by the meaning of words like soul. Soon she asks her mother to create her own prayers and, in this way, Patti manages to escape from the monotony of traditional praying (2012: 5). Her imagination is heightened every time she falls ill, when she experiences "a new level of awareness" (5). The child artist perceives things in a way ordinary people do not, thus prefiguring ideas about the artist's exceptionality, her sensitivity and her isolation.

In addition to this, the child Patti wants to experience herself her mother's absorption when she reads a book. She wonders what it is in those objects that

captures her mother's attention so deeply (2012: 6). In the narration of this passage, the reader senses Patti's sensitivity towards objects. Not only does she long to read, but she indulges in books' textures: their paper, the tissues from their frontispieces. The next step is Patti learning to read, which opens new possibilities for her creative mind. She admits that "the urge to express myself was my strongest desire" (6). These childhood memories can be interpreted retrospectively as signs of artistic sensibility (Watson 2015: 139).

In her growing up as a young woman, Patti finds consolation in books and objects, which anticipate her future as a writer and visual artist (2012: 7). Books offer her an escape against the pressures of the female condition, although, curiously enough, she first imagines herself as an artist's mistress. Her first visit to a museum exerts a physical and mental impression on her. Patti identifies herself with the figures in many of the paintings by Modigliani, Picasso, Dalí… She is smitten with art and feels grateful for sharing the key to the brotherhood of art, "that to be an artist was to see what others could not" (11).

For her, being an artist evolves from a wish to a mission. Art is a religion, which demands faith, rituals, and sacrifices. Patti accepts them diligently and abandons family, jobs, education, even a child that she gives up for adoption, to pursue her dream. In the summer of 1967, she goes to New York and, as she says, "No one expected me: Everything awaited me" (2012: 25). Moreover, this chapter also includes the parallel story of Robert Mapplethorpe's birth and family background, very different from Patti's. Smith presents him as someone who was always an artist and had the determination and commitment to live for art alone, "He wasn't certain whether he was a good or bad person. [...]. But he was certain of one thing. He was an artist. And for that he would never apologize" (22). Patti did not think she was an artist, she dreamt of becoming one, whereas Robert was not associated with such a process, he already had the essence of artistry in him.

Smith's and Mapplethorpe's lives from 1967 to the early 1970s are presented as a shared artistic coming of age, a process of discovering their commitment to art as a vocation (Watson 2015: 139). Both will share and enter the brotherhood of art together. All the stereotypes about an artist's life are presented in Smith's narration. A young man and woman, who are poor, but persist in their dream of becoming artists. Despite their being in dire straits, they hold on to their mutual love and support and are ready to endure almost anything for the sake of art. Initially, Patti shows herself as less obsessive than Robert regarding the career of the artist and seems more ready to accept the economic difficulties of their lifestyle, "I had a more romantic view of the artist's life and sacrifices [...]. Robert fretted over not being able to provide for us. I told him not to worry, that committing to great art is its own reward" (2012: 57). But she also experiences moments of desperation in

which she wonders whether creating art really matters, and whether what she does really matters to anybody.

Robert's conflicts regarding his artistic career and his sexuality jeopardise their relationship. They separate and start living apart. This is something that became a necessity for Patti because she felt that her physical space as an artist was being occupied by Robert's creations, and this situation could be a prelude to her exclusion from her artistic mission, "There came a time when Robert's aesthetic became so consuming that I felt it was no longer our world, but his. I believed in him, but he had transformed our home into a theater of his own design" (2012: 71). But their time apart is not artistically productive, according to Smith (80). They find each other again and renew their vows to art, "Robert and I pledged to work hard while we were apart, I to write poems for him and he to make drawings for me" (81). Patti's trip to Paris is artistically and personally enriching. She visits museums, she draws, she watches movies, she writes poems and for the first time, Patti composes poems devoted to Brian Jones after his death at twenty. This is the first time she represents her love for rock and roll in her artistic work (83). Her reencounter with Robert is shocking and Patti weakens about their shared pursuit of art. However, the vision of both their portfolios against the wall of Robert's apartment becomes an artistic epiphany (Watson 2015: 139). These portfolios become totemic objects that restore Patti's faith in their artistic career, "But as I untied the ribbons and looked at our work, I felt we were on the right path. We just needed a little luck" (87). Patti and Robert move to the Chelsea Hotel where they share a room. This place was the home of numerous writers, musicians, artists and actors. Both Patti and Robert found the support and sense of community they were seeking in order to eventually make a living out of art, "I felt the strength of community in the sleeping hotel" (97). Smith's narration adopts then the tone of the autoethnographer who describes the artistic, musical and literary atmosphere of the late 1960s and early 70s in Manhattan as well as Patti's and Robert's close link to this cultural context. Smith resists the clichés of the celebrity memoir and never indulges in sensational stories about Robert's or about her own road to artistic achievement. On the contrary, Smith insists on the exceptionality associated to the true artist, founded on a privileged vision and hard work.

Robert is the most faithful believer in the religion of art, he does not lose either drive or focus, and he thinks about himself and Patti, honouring the vow of mutual support they made to each other, "We were both dreamers, but Robert was the one who got things done. [...]. He had plans for himself but for me as well" (2012: 127). Smith admires his passion, his skill to transform a common object into an artistic one. Robert really sees what others do not, "Robert infused objects, whether for art or life, with his creative impulse" (136). Smith narrates Robert's

evolution towards photography, praising his artistic gift and vision. For her, Robert could see the familiar in the unfamiliar, and vice versa. This is the old idea of the true artist as a visionary, as someone who perceives something that others cannot or do not see.

With regard to Patti, Gregory Corso will become her mentor and major influence as well as the person who introduces her to the St. Mark's Poetry Project (a poet's collective at this church on East Tenth Street), where Patti will deliver her first poetry reading. She was attracted to a place where poetry could be an art-form that existed most vibrantly not on the page but on the democratic, anarchic stage. After all, poetry was traditionally understood as music, as lyric (Kane 2010). Patti's initial poetry performance was on February 10, 1971, when she opened for Gerard Malanga at St. Mark's. In her memory of this early performance, we observe how she foregrounds the image of the poet as a privileged but dissident seer:

> The Poetry Project, shepherded by Anne Waldman, was a desirable forum for even the most accomplished poets. Everyone from Robert Creeley to Allen Ginsberg to Ted Berrigan had read there. If I was ever going to perform my poems, this was the place to do it. My goal was not simply to do well, or hold my own. It was to make a mark at St Mark's. I did it for Poetry. I did it for Rimbaud, and I did it for Gregory. I wanted to infuse the written word with the immediacy and frontal attack of rock and roll. (Smith 2012: 180)

This passage expresses Patti's desire to rise above community by metaphorically damaging the building that houses the "Project". Patti wants "to make a mark at St Mark's", that it to say, to shock the audience. She identifies with Arthur Rimbaud and Gregory Corso, who are famous both for their poetry and their extreme lifestyles (Kane 2012: 108), thus reinforcing her affiliation not with the group but with solitary outcasts. Patti considered rock and roll as a primary influence for the composition of poetry as well as a model for performance poetry. She wanted to play in large venues and give poetry the theatrics of the rock and roll stage show; that is, performance taking precedence over poetry (Kane 2012: 115).

In 1978, Robert and Patti had their first and only show together at the Robert Miller gallery. They presented a body of work that emphasized their bond and the fact that they were artist and muse for each other. They prepared a short film together as part of the exhibition and they called it *Still Moving*. In it, Patti articulates ideas about art and being an artist that she had often discussed with Robert. For her, the artist explores and dives into an incorporeal realm but he/she cannot stay there very long. He/She can only complete his/her artistic mission by returning to the real world with whatever treasure he/she has found in those immaterial places, "I choose Earth" (Smith 2012: 256).

In 1986, Robert Mapplethorpe is diagnosed with AIDS, precisely at the time when Smith is pregnant with her second child. They talk and meet again, and Robert takes the photographs for the cover of Smith's album *Dream of Life*. Robert had achieved what he wanted in life. He had succeeded as an artist, and had had the resources to carry out anything he envisioned (Smith 2012: 274). However, he is ill and Smith painfully regrets that neither her love for him nor his love for life are going to save him (275). He died on March 9, 1989. *Just Kids* is a homage to their friendship and an elegy for a man who, according to Smith, "shared with me the sacred mystery of what it is to be an artist" (276). In a letter she wrote after a visit to Robert in hospital, she painfully refers to the time they spent together as the most cherished source of her inspiration as a writer, singer and drawer. Before dying, Robert asked Patti to write their story. It took her twenty-one years, but she finally kept her vow, as all the others she and Robert made to each other.

3. *M Train*: Second Memoir

In *M Train* (2015), Patti Smith struggles to create her artist's voice through her rituals to honour those dead artists and writers who nurtured her and those beloved persons whose loss she mourns, such as her husband Fred, her brother Todd, and her parents. *M Train* is not *Just Kids II*, as many readers could expect. This is not a relational memoir in the style of *Just Kids*. *M Train* moves away from the conventions of memoir, being an experimental text which includes different autobiographical forms (journal, grief memoir, autotopography, travelogue, scrapbook) (Hernández Hellín 2019: 200-201). Self-construction in *M Train* is not related to backstage stories or domestic interiors, but to artistic creation in collaboration with others (Shank 2016: 383).

Hernández Hellín suggests that the concept of autotopography is essential in the understanding of *M Train* as a work of memory. In this volume, performance is closely linked to the creation of a museum of the self where Smith arranges photographs of personal objects, people and places which become inseparable from the stories they belong to (Hernández Hellín 2019: 203). Consequently, *M Train* becomes a kind of personal catalogue where Smith includes pictures, travel stories, invitations to conferences, dreams, intimate remembrances of her late husband and family, book and TV series reviews, reports on her daily goings-on. Words and images interact and work as paratexts, which blur the temporal and material boundaries between the living and the dead. In *Negotiating with the Dead*, Margaret Atwood says that "*all* writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and a fascination with mortality

—by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring back something or someone back from the dead" (2002: 156, emphasis in original). In *M Train*, Smith creates spaces to hear her beloved persons' and her favourite writers' voices beyond the grave.

Almost all the photographs of places and objects are connected to Smith's admiration for writers and artists. Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni and Jean Genet, Roberto Bolaño's chair, the Pasternak café in Berlin and Mikhail Bulgakov, the Dorotheenstadt Cemetery and Bertolt Brecht, Tolstoy's bear in Moscow, Frida Kahlo's bed, her crutches and dress in Casa Azul, Coyoacán (Mexico), Akutagawa's gravesite in Japan, Sylvia Plath's grave in England, Patti Smith and Paul Bowles in Tangier, Genet's grave in Larache, (Morocco), Hermann Hesse's typewriter in Montagnola, (Switzerland), Virginia Woolf's walking stick. Moreover, other pictures show her husband Fred Smith as a child, or cherished personal objects. A third group of photographs displays the interiors of cafés (Café 'Ino, New York; Café Collage, Venice Beach, California; Caffè Dante, Tangier, Morocco); in fact, *M Train*'s first picture reproduces an empty chair and table from the Café 'Ino. We know about Smith's addiction to coffee, but for her, cafés are sacred locations, the rooms of her own where she devotes herself to writing. Photographs testify to what is lost, so they are marked by absence but also by the presence of the observer-photographer (Masschelein 2020: 10).

M Train articulates Smith's anxieties about the writer's role and her constant personal search for consolation through art and writing. The book opens with the sentence "It's not so easy writing about nothing" (Smith 2016: 3). Smith has always wanted her work to be meaningful and has experienced what we can call a writer's creative crisis. This would justify her obsession with the artists and writers of her life, those she has actually met (William Burroughs, Sam Shepard, Allen Ginsberg, Paul Bowles), and those whose works have become addictive for her (Jean Genet, Mikhail Bulgakov, Bertolt Brecht, Sylvia Plath, W.G. Sebald, Haruki Murakami, Yukio Mishima, Frida Kahlo, etc.). Smith tries to fill that inner void by evoking her secular pilgrimages throughout the world in order to perform some rituals to honour writers, artists and beloved people. For her, these rituals are required by the religion of art, of which she is a devout practitioner. Smith feels the need to be where they have been, or would have liked to be, to step on the ground where they are buried. She wishes to have a glimpse into these writers' inner void, to touch their personal objects.

Her attraction towards derelict and abandoned places is evoked in the trip she and her husband Fred made to Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni in French Guiana. Smith longed to visit the remains of the French penal colony where dangerous criminals stayed before being transferred to Devil's Island. She chooses this neglected place

to pay homage to Jean Genet, who had fantasised about this prison and its inmates in his volume *The Thief's Journal* (1949). In his youth, because of a number of misdemeanours and petty thefts, Genet had been sentenced to prison, but before he could join the aristocracy of crime in Saint-Laurent, the prison was closed. Smith turns Genet's wish into a personal mission. She picks us some stones "that might have been pressed by the hard-calloused feet of the inmates or the soles of heavy boots worn by the guards" (2016: 17). Smith wraps them in a handkerchief and places them in a matchbox. This package would become sacred for her. Eventually, she will complete her homage to Genet when she buries the stones beside his grave at the Larache Christian Cemetery. Many years later, as a member of the Continental Drift Club, Smith is invited to a meeting in Berlin, where she delivers a lecture on the imagined lost/last moments of Alfred Wegener, who disappeared in a scientific expedition into Greenland in 1930. This confirms again her fascination for empty spaces and human beings confronting death, in this case in a wilderness that threatens to engulf them.

In her following trip, to Japan, Smith will visit the tombs of the Japanese writers Yukio Mishima, Ryunosuke Akutagawa and Osamu Dazai, all of whom took their own lives. Patti takes photographs of their tombs and the day before leaving Japan, she drinks sake to honour Akutagawa and Dazai, but she hears an internal voice that advises her to forget about them because "we are only bums" (2016: 193). This comic phrase is like a warning for Smith, maybe she is taking things too far and it is not necessary to keep on visiting writers' tombs. Probably they are not that important.

Nevertheless, her evocation of writers who committed suicide continues, "It occurred to me that I was on a run of suicides" (2016: 196), this time it is Sylvia Plath's turn. She misses the lost pictures she had taken of her grave in the past and mentions the impression that *Ariel* had on her when she was twenty. Smith admires Plath's courage to dissect herself. Some months later she comes back to England and visits Sylvia's tomb again. The desolation of the place in winter is difficult to bear and she experiences an intense gratitude for being alive. When she is about to leave the cemetery, she hears the words "Don't look back, don't look back" (200). But Smith insists and makes a third visit to Sylvia Plath's tomb, this time with her sister and in spring. She takes another picture of her tomb that resembles the ones she had lost, but it lacks something that was in the original. She concludes that "Nothing can be truly replicated. Not a love, not a jewel, not a single line" (202). Smith wonders whether these visits will enable her to absorb something of their favourite writers' talent, like when she sat in Roberto Bolaño's chair and asked herself whether sitting there would make her a better writer (35). It is a vain longing.

In her trip to Larache to visit Genet's grave and to bury there the small stones from St. Laurent-du-Maroni prison, kept in a matchbox for more than two decades, Smith has painful memories of her husband Fred and experiences an intense loneliness. After performing her ritual, a boy gives her the remnants of a rosebud, which she places inside the matchbox. This becomes an epiphany for Smith, as she concludes that beyond her pictures of Genet's grave, and the ritual words she pronounced in this visit to the cemetery, the faded rose she received from this unknown boy becomes a powerful symbol of life (2016: 228).

Overall, these ritual visits are serious and significant for Smith, but she manages to keep her distance from her heroes' attraction for extreme lifestyles and self-destruction (Masschelein 2020: 1). From the underworld, all of them tell her to look ahead and concentrate on the world of the living. This is a difficult task, and that is why Smith insists on the claim that "It's not so easy writing about nothing" (2016: 3). Fortunately, she chooses life.

4. *Year of the Monkey*: The Survivor

Year of the Monkey (2019) unfolds over the course of twelve months, starting on January 1, 2016, two days after Smith's 69th birthday. Smith has been playing with her band at the Fillmore in San Francisco, finishing with a New Year's Eve concert. Nevertheless, on that same day she is informed about Sandy Pearlman's cerebral haemorrhage. Sandy has been her friend for four decades and an early influence on her. If *M Train* opens with an image of void, nothingness, *Year of the Monkey* starts with Sandy's physical collapse, which prefigures his eventual departure. This initial episode anticipates the tone and topics of Patti Smith's third memoir: reflections on death, time, suffering, physical decay of friends, painful memories of dead beloved persons, casual conversations and encounters with strangers, dreams. This is a hybrid text, like *Just Kids* and *M Train*, with paratextual material, mainly polaroids taken by Smith of places, people and everyday objects which become symbolic and special for her throughout the narration. I would define *Year of the Monkey* as a fictional and factual journal, where Smith continues the life she describes in *M Train*, that of the mature female writer living a solitary existence.

The term autotopography (González 1995: 133; Hernández Hellín 2019: 203) is useful for approaching this memoir. Smith's "autotopographical performance" is based on a loose chronological and personal account of her life during 2016. Smith's personal catalogue, her museum of the self, displays shows in San Francisco at the end of 2015, her wanderings in New York, her trips around the United States and to Europe. Sandy Pearlman and Sam

Shepard, the latter a former partner and friend, become prominently present throughout the whole book. Smith also keeps casual conversations with strangers, which often lead to unexpected findings about literature and life, and offers information about her daily routines, which contributes to create a more accurate portrayal of who she is now (Sturges 2019: 27). The figures of those beloved ones she has lost remain close.

The paratextual material in this volume comprises photographs, all but two taken by Smith. As a multidisciplinary artist —musician, poet, photographer, visual artist—, the interaction of visual and verbal modes in the construction of her narrative comes naturally. Photographs texture the memoir's voice as its visual equivalent (Watson 2015: 142). The author's personal objects, such as her father's cup, her suitcase, her chair, her shoes, are traces of her ordinary existence. Other photographs attest to Smith's admiration for artists. This is the case of St. Jerome in his Study by Albrecht Dürer; the van Eyck Altarpiece in Ghent, Belgium; a detail of the Mystic Lamb by Hubert and Jan van Eyck. Additional pictures reproduce objects that belonged to writers (Roberto Bolaño's games; Sam Shepard's Stetson hat; Samuel Beckett's telephone). Smith's autotopography is completed by natural and urban landscapes from all over the world (Uluru, Ayers Rock, Australia; Kovilj Monastery, Serbia; Café A Brasileira, Lisbon; phone booth, Mexico City; Hie Shrine, Tokyo; WOW Café, OB Pier, California, etc.). Although she has not visited all these places, some of them appear in her dreams or work symbolically in the narration as empty spaces, evoking the absence of so many beloved figures (parents, husband, friends, artists, writers).

The persistence of dreams and conversations with inanimate objects discloses Smith's restlessness about the passing of time, about mortality and uncertainty. According to Fiona Sturges, *Year of the Monkey* moves constantly between reverie and memory (2019: 27), between fact and fiction. On the one hand, Smith registers what she does in a realistic way, providing us with vivid details about the real, material world that surrounds her. But at the same time, Smith often slides towards a condition of forgetfulness, of unconsciousness, as if her dreams could rescue her from the suffering of being alive, "I wish I could sleep until it was over, a Rip Van Winkle kind of sleep" (2020: 149).

The tone of this book is more nostalgic and sadder than her previous memoirs. Smith feels distressed by her impending 70th birthday, "Seventy. Merely a number but one indicating the passing of a significant percentage of the allotted sand in an egg timer, with oneself the darn egg", "I am no longer a fast runner and that my sense of time seems to be accelerating" (2020: 79), "a sense of time lost forever" (65), "*Once I was seven, soon I will be seventy*" (140 emphasis in original). Moreover, the prominence of Sandy Pearlman and Sam Shepard in this book intensifies Smith's

sense of loss, her awareness that the days of her youth are over, those days when she believed she could do anything. These two persons are closely linked to her development as an artist, Sandy as her mentor, long-term friend and the man who invited her to create her own rock and roll band, and Sam as her former partner and inspiration. Sandy dies later in 2016, and Sam is afflicted by ALS. Again, as so many times in her life, Smith revisits the guilty feeling of being a survivor. She has survived those who died young, Robert Mapplethorpe, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, Jimmy Hendrix. She has survived her husband, Fred, and her brother, Todd, who died prematurely. And now those who were her life mates, who aged with her, are dead (Sandy) or very close to death (Sam). Smith turns 70, a new year starts and 2017 becomes the Year of the Rat, defined as a cunning survivor.

The vast number of references to writers, artists, musicians, works of art and literary pieces (*Alice in Wonderland*, Roberto Bolaño, William Faulkner, Marcel Proust, Bruno Schultz, Allen Ginsberg, Joseph Beuys, Fernando Pessoa, Robert Mapplethorpe, Herman Broch, Frank Zappa, the van Eyck Brothers, the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, etc.) vindicate the essential role literature and art play in Smith's everyday life and her psychological survival. She evokes how much books meant to her as a child living in a rural community (2020: 131). When she visits Sam Shepard, she helps him with his last book. Sam is close to death but he longs to complete his "manuscript, destined to be his last, an unsentimental love letter to life" (147). Significantly, Smith becomes his amanuensis in order to convey her friend's mystery, as she also believes that the artistic drive makes a life worth living even in the direst circumstances, like Sam's.

Smith's last personal performance has to do with art and with Sam Shepard. On her way to California to visit Sam, she takes a book on the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* or Ghent Altarpiece with her. Some months later, in February 2017, she decides to admire this work of art in person. The book is not enough. Like in *M Train,* Smith wishes to be physically present in the land where those artists (the brothers Jan and Hubert van Eyck) lived and created this masterpiece. Smith had already been there a decade ago, with her sister Linda, and mentions "the strong connection I felt in that brief encounter was not a religious one, more a physical sense of the artist. I felt the aura of his concentration and the sharp gaze of his prismatic eyes" (2020: 192). This 2017 visit includes a private viewing of the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* at St. Bavo's church. This activity excludes passivity and resembles a musical performance where the artist moves around on stage. Smith experiences an epiphany while at St. Bavo, feeling a privileged participant of the mysteries of this artistic creation. Her beliefs in the power of art to create new meanings, and her admiration for the "turbulent spirits" (144) of the artists who make it possible, are confirmed.

5. Conclusion: The Mystery of Art

In these volumes, Patti Smith shares with the reader the sacralising function of art for her existence. As a girl, she always developed a particular aesthetic sensitivity towards her surroundings and was attracted to beautiful objects. She was an early reader and, as a young worker, she tried to escape her monotonous job in a factory through her obsessive reading of poetry, Rimbaud in particular. She arrives in New York with the idea of being a poet and of making a living out of art. The road to art is difficult, but she will travel that path in the company and friendship of Robert Mapplethorpe. The driving force in *Just Kid*s is to tell their common coming-of-age story as artists. Sometimes their paths run parallel, other times they diverge, but their commitment to art and to each other endows them with the strength to pursue their artistic dreams, despite depression, desperation, and dire straits. In her public performances, initially Patti will join poetry and music, then she will write songs and have a rock and roll band. She always kept her personal bond with Robert, and it took her 21 years to write their common story.

M Train insists on the sacralising function of art. With an introspective look, Smith reveals the writer's crises and her constant search for consolation in the works of the writers and artists that have inspired her throughout her life. Her performance is not linked to concerts or public shows, but to intimate rituals, totemic objects, photographs, which compose the so-called museum of the self, all of which Smith shares with the reader. Smith visits the land of the dead, where she finds her parents, her husband, the writers and artists of her life. But, as Atwood suggests, she enters it but she must leave, since she cannot live there. This journey is worthwhile because Smith brings back her findings into the land of the living, "How does one make one's work a living thing? How can a writer place a living thing in the hands of the reader? Lost for words I travel backwards" (2016: 275).

Year of the Monkey continues with the autotopographical performance Smith started in *M Train*. This is a personal yearbook written with a sense of immediacy which includes paratextual material such as polaroids of people, places and objects, as well as conversations with strangers, dreams, travel descriptions, memories of beloved ones and reports on her everyday wanderings in New York. More than ever, Smith is aware that art cannot stop time, illness or death. That was a lesson learnt a long time ago and revisited in this memoir. The vicarious worlds of art and literature offer a temporary refuge against the tedium and void of life, but that shelter never becomes a permanent dwelling, "The act of writing in real time in order to deflect, escape or slow it down is obviously futile yet not entirely fruitless" (2020: 201). Art does not give answers, but as it lives on people's longing to learn and express themselves, its sources never become exhausted. Artistic creation resembles a stream of water. It may be interrupted by a mountain or may evaporate,

but it flows again. Smith is moderately optimistic because writing promises her a connection with those who left. She holds on to writing to resist the death drive, the voices from the underworld, the siren songs that call and call, urging her to stay there forever. In her visits to the underworld, Smith always comes back with a meaningful story, "I am compelled to write, with or without true destination, lacing fact, fiction, and dream with fervent hopes", "being dogged by the incessant urge to write, whether it got anywhere or not" (201).

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GUILT, SHAME AND NARRATION IN JOHN BOYNE'S *THE HEART'S INVISIBLE FURIES*

CULPA, VERGÜENZA Y NARRACIÓN EN *THE HEART'S INVISIBLE FURIES,* DE JOHN BOYNE

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Abstract

This article deals with the psychological affects of guilt and shame in John Boyne's novel *The Heart's Invisible Furies* and with how these influence the way in which the narrator, Cyril Avery, chooses to present his life narrative. Being both the narrator and the main character/focalizer of the events told, the question of his (un)reliability proves extremely relevant for the analysis. The guilt and shame Cyril feels in the first part of the novel —which is also the first part of his life— on account of his being a gay man is forced upon him by the Irish society of the time. Hence, it is only when he leaves his homeland that he can start to find the peace he so much longs for and which, eventually, allows him to tell his story.

Keywords: guilt, shame, (un)reliability, Ireland, homosexuality, John Boyne.

Resumen

Este artículo trata sobre las emociones psicológicas de la culpa y la vergüenza en la novela *The Heart's Invisible Furies* de John Boyne, y de cómo estas influyen en la forma en que el narrador, Cyril Avery, elige contar la historia de su vida. Al ser a la vez narrador y protagonista/focalizador de los hechos relatados, la cuestión de su

(no) fiabilidad resulta extremadamente relevante para el análisis. La culpa y la vergüenza que siente Cyril en la primera parte de la novela —que es también la primera parte de su vida— por causa de su homosexualidad son impuestas por la sociedad irlandesa de la época. Por lo tanto, solo tras abandonar su país natal puede empezar a encontrar la paz que tanto anhela y que, finalmente, le permite narrar su historia.

Palabras clave: culpa, vergüenza, (no) fiabilidad, Irlanda, homosexualidad, John Boyne.

1. Introduction

After *A History of Loneliness* (2014), his first novel with an Irish setting, John Boyne published *The Heart's Invisible Furies* (2017). This novel can be described as a precise portrayal of a deeply religious 20th-century Irish society, which restricts the freedom of the characters to be who they really are and live shamelessly. The novel depicts the protagonist's long but necessary quest for identity against the oppressive Irish culture of the second half of the twentieth century.

Boyne is just one of the prominent Irish voices who condemn the crimes of the Irish Catholic Church in the twentieth century in their writing.[1] The works of Colm Tóibín, Patrick McCabe or Jennifer Johnston, among others, "made visible in the twentieth century what had been silent and initiated conversations that Irish society had avoided", such as "the systemic neglect and abuse of children, the suffocating nature of Irish domesticity, and the crippling familial and social silences that perpetuated and tacitly condoned such abuses" (Costello-Sullivan 2018: 12). In this case, John Boyne continues with these conversations in the twenty-first century, adding his own experience and perspective to the sexual issues introduced by previous authors.[2]

In *The Heart's Invisible Furies*, Boyne portrays the life of an elderly man, Cyril Avery, narrating his life and miseries as a homosexual growing up in Ireland during the second half of the twentieth century, up to the year 2015 when same-sex marriage was legalized by popular vote —making Ireland the first country to do so. The novel begins in 1945 with Cyril's mother, Catherine Goggin, being expelled from her community, for she is to have a child out of wedlock. She consequently goes to Dublin and ends up giving her child in adoption when he is born. Cyril, Catherine's son, is then raised by Charles and Maude Avery. They are an unusual couple who constantly remind Cyril that he is not a real Avery and they show no signs of fondness towards him. At a quite early stage in his life, Cyril

realizes that what he feels for his best friend Julian is not just mere affection but rather a romantic obsession. Years later, and driven by the highly religious Irish society he lives in, Cyril ends up getting married to Alice, Julian's sister. The end of Part One, however, sees Cyril leaving Alice alone at their wedding reception, since he escapes from Ireland after revealing to Julian his feelings for him. Seven years later, Cyril finds himself living in Amsterdam with Bastiaan, his first boyfriend and true love. Thus, Boyne juxtaposes the Irish and Dutch societies by presenting Cyril's life in Amsterdam, as well as the couple's later life in New York City in 1987. It is here that he reencounters his friend Julian, who is dying of AIDS and refuses to let his family know for fear of their thinking he is a homosexual. After Julian's and Bastiaan's deaths, Cyril, who has just learned from Julian that he, Cyril, had fathered a son from his first and only sexual encounter with Alice before they were married, moves back to Dublin and tries to reunite with his family, attempting to atone and have a relationship with his son Liam. The novel ends in 2015, when Ireland accepts same-sex marriage, and Cyril finally experiences the outcome of his country's evolution, after decades of loneliness, exile, guilt, shame, and rejection.

This article deals first with the psychological affects of guilt and shame in the novel,[3] and with how these influence both the way Cyril perceives and understands the things that happen to him and to others in his life from a very early age. It also deals with how these affects influence the way in which Cyril —being the only narrator— chooses to present his life narrative in retrospect. It is my contention that the notion of (un)reliability is a key feature of the novel and, as such, it needs to be thoroughly discussed alongside guilt and shame, mainly to see how these have an impact on (un)reliability, and vice versa. Wayne C. Booth coined the terms 'reliable' and 'unreliable' narrators in his seminal work *The Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1961 (1991: 158-159). However, decades of research after Booth have made clear that there is much more to this narratological figure than meets the eye, mainly the importance of the reader and the different classifications for (un)reliability.[4] Consequently, terminology such as fallible or untrustworthy narrators, coined by Greta Olson, or the five factors for reliability introduced by Terence Murphy prove equally relevant for the analysis. The aim of this article is to apply these terms and characteristics to the analysis of the narrator and protagonist of *The Heart's Invisible Furies* in order to decide on his (un)reliability and on how this relates to guilt and shame. Cyril, but also other characters in the novel, like his mother Catherine, are victims of their sociocultural context. Their guilt and shame manifest themselves especially in the silences that are imposed on them.

2. "It's what I haven't said": Guilt and Shame in *The Heart's Invisible Furies*

The psychological affects of guilt and shame prove extremely relevant when discussing Cyril's (un)reliability as a narrator and character/focalizer. First, guilt is mainly assumed as a feeling of the individual. According to Roy F. Baumeister et al., guilt can be described as "an individual's unpleasant emotional state associated with possible objections to his or her actions, inaction, circumstances, or intentions" (in O'Keefe 2000: 68). To this, it can be added that those "possible objections" can be aroused by oneself or by an external individual, the former conveying a much stronger feeling than the latter. Indeed, many scholars in the field of psychology agree on the individual and solitary implications of the term guilt, in the sense that it is a much more self-centred feeling than shame or embarrassment can be (O'Keefe 2000; Hacker 2017).

Guilt is also deeply rooted in religion, especially within the Catholic Church.[5] The Irish society of the twentieth century was highly religious, to the extent that the Catholic Church ruled in the most important areas, such as education, morality, health, economy, or politics (Inglis 1998: 245; Andersen 2010: 17; Smyth 2012). This is present in the novel, since religion restricts Cyril's identity to the extent that he feels repressed enough to hide who he is instead of celebrating and embracing his identity. In fact, shame, guilt, and other psychological affects are intimately related to the notion of belonging.[6] Kaufman argues that "[t]o live with shame is to feel alienated and defeated, never quite good enough to belong" (1996: 24). Since early infancy, Cyril is constantly being reminded of the fact that he does not belong, not even in his own family, let alone in twentieth-century Ireland. This makes him live with shame, as highlighted in the title of the first part of the novel, and thus drives him to feelings of alienation and worthlessness. Indeed, "[t]he need to […] feel identified with something larger than oneself, can shape the course of one's life" (Kaufman 1996: 92) —and this is what Cyril tries to do his whole life. For him, shame is inevitably linked to the notion of belonging and identity, for it is precisely his feeling of unacceptance that makes him feel ashamed throughout the greatest part of his life.

The concept of 'shame', therefore, is not as inward-looking as the concept of 'guilt', since shame is something felt against a background —against a community, in most cases. Shame is related to the terms 'humiliation' and 'foolishness', since shame implies someone —"a disapproving audience" (Tangney et al. 1996: 1256)— reproaching someone else's foolishness or stupidity and, therefore, alluding to the latter's sense of pride, among other things. Compared to guilt, shame requires at least two individuals —one will criticize the behaviour of the

other. In other words, "shame is a more public emotion, whereas guilt is a more private affair" (Tangney et al. 1996: 1256).

Furthermore, most critics in the field of psychology seem to have reached agreement regarding the difference between shame and guilt in their perception that shame implies that the whole self is bad (*I* did something wrong), whilst guilt refers rather to a wrongdoing of the self (I *did something wrong*) which could be amended (Barrett 1995: 44; Ferguson and Stegge 1995: 176; Mascolo and Fischer 1995: 68; Tangney 1995: 117; Kaufman 1996: 6; Arel 2016: 8, 36; Hacker 2017: 219). In that sense, "shame is associated with withdrawal from social contact. Guilt, on the other hand, is associated with outward movement, aimed at reparation for a wrongdoing" (Barrett 1995: 25-26). Due to this withdrawal, shame has been linked to "the internal experience of the self as undesirable, unattractive, defective, worthless and powerless", and associated to "being defective or inadequate in some way […], an experience of the self related to how we think we exist in the minds of others" (Pinto-Gouveia and Matos 2011: 281). Unlike guilt, in which one must deal with a guilty conscience almost on one's own, in the experience of shame our actions derive from an external perception of ourselves —the importance lies in how others view us, rather than how we view ourselves.

In *The Heart's Invisible Furies,* guilt and shame are very much related to identity and, consequently, homosexuality.[7] Drawing on Gershen Kaufman and Lev Raphael's arguments regarding homosexuality (1996), Jac Brown and Robert Trevethan claim that "[s]elf-acceptance may be influenced if judgmental parents, friends, and the broader heterosexual society provide repeated experiences of disapproval, which could lead to shame becoming internalized" (2010: 268). Veronica Johnson and Mark Yarhouse exemplify this with the conflict of those homosexuals who possess a strong religious identity, and who "admit to conflict between their religion and their attractions and, consequently, feel shame and guilt" (2013: 86). Needless to say, guilt and shame are very much related to the construction of identity, mainly due to the aforementioned feeling of worthlessness. Both affects influence how an individual sees oneself, and also how others view him/her. In this regard, Kaufman describes the feeling of shame as "an inner torment. It is the most poignant experience of the self by the self […]. Shame is a wound made from the inside, dividing us from both ourselves and others" (1996: 16). Indeed, Cyril is deeply influenced by shame and guilt. These mould his identity to the extent that the Cyril we encounter at the beginning of the novel, marked by the rejection he finds in his homeland, is juxtaposed against his older self, once he has come to terms with who he is and has been able to let go of the shame and guilt that were sinking him.

A distinction between internal and external shame can be made here. In this regard, "[e]xternal shame relates to the experience of one's social presentation", whereas "[i]nternal shame […] relates to experiences of the self as devalued in one's own eyes in a way that is damaging to the self-identity" (Lee et al. 2001: 452). Taking this into account, it can be argued that Cyril suffers from both internal and external shame. Related to the former, this feeling softens as the novel progresses and he is eventually able to embrace his sexuality —for instance, he is able to admit to being gay without worrying about its consequences when living in NYC (Boyne 2017: 434). As for external shame, he is conscious of the repulsion others feel towards him when judging his sexuality —a doctor describes Cyril's impulses as "disgusting" (Boyne 2017: 253). In this sense, Deborah Lee et al. argue that "[i]t is possible for an individual to recognize he carries traits that are associated with stigma and devaluation from others […], but the individual himself feels no personal shame about such traits" (2001: 452). This would be true of Cyril at the end of the novel but not at the beginning, since it is only when he leaves Ireland that he manages to accept his identity, despite still being aware of others' rejection of him. Indeed, there is a clear change from "[y]ears of regret and shame began to overwhelm me" (Boyne 2017: 351), when he has not come out nor left Ireland yet, to "I realized that I was finally happy" (701), which marks the very end of the novel.

Expanding on this, Asier Altuna-García de Salazar argues that there are several types of shame in the first part of the story, namely "individual shame, community shame, institutional shame and national shame" (2020: 21), all of them condensed in several characters. Indeed, not only Cyril but also Catherine, Julian and Alice are victims of shame due to the influence of the doctrines of the Catholic Church in their lives. Julian is a very prominent character during the first part of the novel but becomes estranged until Cyril encounters him again in New York in a completely different situation. Julian's shame is both individual and national and has the same cause. He feels shame for his condition as an HIV carrier, to the extent of preferring to die alone instead of telling the truth to his family, given that AIDS is something that he and the majority of Irish people at the time attributed to homosexuality. According to Kaufman, "Cultural disgust and shame about homosexuality are being transferred to AIDS and people with AIDS —who are equally repudiated whether or not they are homosexual" (1996: 49).

On the subject of national shame, the novel begins with a powerful and gripping moment when Catherine Goggin is expelled from her hometown, and hence from her own family, because she is expecting a child. The local priest denounces Catherine for her condition in front of the whole parish, beats her, and tells her not to come back again. This relates to Peter Hacker's analysis of shame: "One is made

an object of contempt and ridicule […] exposed to the taunts and insults of others […] subjected to a life of abject misery from which, *in extremis*, the only escape may be suicide or becoming an outcast" (2017: 206, emphasis in original). All these ideas are present in Catherine's experience, for she is ridiculed and insulted before her community, and she is ultimately expelled and treated as a pariah.

Catherine's family made this decision of exposing her in order to avoid the shame her condition implied, since "[s]hame is linked to loss of honor, which may be due to one's own behavior or to the behavior of someone who is bound to one by familial, marital, or tribal links" (Hacker 2017: 206). At that moment, Catherine claims that every head turned her direction, "except for those of my [Cyril's] grandfather and six uncles, who stared resolutely forward, and my grandmother, who lowered hers now just as my mother raised her own in a see-saw of shame" (Boyne 2017: 7). Studies show that one of the physical signs of shame is blushing and the lowering of the head and eyes (Kaufman 1996: 11, 17; Lee et al. 2001: 453). Therefore, it is quite significant that it is Catherine's mother the one showing more shame, since for Catherine herself it was a relief to let go of that toxic family and small-town community that restricted her capacities. In fact, she refers to her exile as her "independence" (Boyne 2017: 14). Besides, "her whole face was not scarlet […] but pale" (7), hence showing Catherine's lack of a deep sense of shame but rather repulsion towards her world. For Catherine, therefore, this is a moment of community shame rather than individual shame.

Alice is another character who suffers shame due to the impositions of the Catholic Church. Alice and Catherine show some similar traits in the sense that they are both too rebellious for their time. Alice, like Catherine, is in control of her body and does not obey the church in her sexual behaviour. The first instance of shame she suffers from is being stood up at the altar by her first fiancé Fergus —something that she tries to overcome for many years. Then, she is stood up a second time by Cyril. Alice is once again a shamed woman, for she is now "a married woman with a child and a missing husband" (Boyne 2017: 555) who is unable to remarry —at least in the Ireland of the 1970s and 1980s. Her shame is national and institutional rather than individual, precisely because she is not the stereotypical Irish girl and does not feel she has done anything wrong, but she is made to feel guilty and ashamed by the society around her. Indeed, in all these cases, characters feel ashamed for how they may look to the rest of their community, rather than because they feel they have done something wrong.

Alice's shame links with Cyril's sense of guilt for marrying and then abandoning her at their wedding reception. Even if he claims to be ashamed, it could be argued that Cyril feels more guilt than shame, the former being a fault of the whole self and the latter a fault for a particular event. He claims to be "extremely

ashamed of what I did to you [Alice]" (Boyne 2017: 549), and says "I certainly blame myself for the pain I had caused her" (402), but, taking into account the abovementioned theories on shame and guilt, Cyril's behaviour and attitude bear more resemblance to those suffering from guilt rather than shame. This implies that he feels he has done something wrong which should be amended, as indeed Cyril attempts to do almost at the end of his life. In this way, the whole novel could also be read as Cyril's confession of his wrongdoings, as an explanation for his actions and an attempt to relieve his guilty subconscious, even if he is not able to identify it as such.[8]

The same goes for his silence towards Julian. Even if Julian is Cyril's best friend, he is not able to confess his true feelings for him until it is too late. His guilt is born out of his silence, then, since "it's what I haven't done. What I haven't said" (Boyne 2017: 332). In this regard, Altuna-García de Salazar argues that Cyril "grows out of what cannot be said —as it reflects an oppressive outside reality— and has to address the notion of unsayability" (2020: 18). It is at the end of the novel, when his community eventually allows him to be true to himself, that Cyril comes up with an explanation for his wrongdoing:

> I can't excuse my actions […] and nor can I atone for what I did to you, but *I am able to look back now, all these years later, and see how my life was always going to reach a moment where I would have to face up to who I was. Who I am.* […] But on the other hand, my life is my life. And *I am who I am because of what I went through back then.* I couldn't have behaved any differently, even if I'd wanted to. (Boyne 2017: 549, emphasis added)

This quotation shows the link between identity, guilt, shame and narrative in the novel. Having looked back at his past, Cyril is now able to understand who he is and why his life has taken these twists and turns. His identity is shaped by his actions and silences, by what he does and does not do, hence the narrative of his life story, told in the retrospect, helps him understand who he is and how he has reached the present moment. In order to succeed, his (un)reliability needs to come to the forefront to allow readers to discern whether he is being truthful and evaluate the impact of guilt and shame in his narrative.

3. "She Would Tell me Years Later": Narration in *The Heart's Invisible Furies*

As a narrator, Cyril Avery recounts his story in a chronological manner in timespans of seven years, starting some years before he was even born. The contents of his story, then, are presented chronologically (from his pregnant mother to his old age) but it should be borne in mind that the narrator recounts the events from a

present/future perspective. Consequently, what he narrates in the first chapters is probably what he last learns about himself, almost at the end of his life. Thus, a distinction must be made here between *narrator-Cyril*, the experienced self, and *character-Cyril*, the experiencing self. This distinction refers to the two different narrative perspectives we find in the text: the moment when Cyril is more predominantly the narrator at the end of his life, and the instances when Cyril is first and foremost a character in, and focalizer of, his own story, holding only the knowledge he possessed at those moments. This allows Cyril to explore the events of his past from the perspective and knowledge of his old age that, as shall be analysed throughout this section, influence his narrative.

The issue of Cyril's reliability as a narrator is relevant to our analysis since it allows us to understand the presence of the aforementioned affects of guilt and shame in the novel. Before dwelling deeper in this aspect, it should be mentioned that, as James Phelan clarifies, "[r]eliable and unreliable narration are neither binary opposites nor single phenomena but rather broad terms and concepts that each cover a wide range of author-narrator-audience relationships in narrative" (2017: 94). Total reliability (let alone total unreliability), therefore, is impossible to achieve —especially for a first-person narrator. In keeping with this, William F. Riggan notes that a "[f]irst-person narrator is, then, always at least potentially unreliable, in that the narrator, with these human limitations of perception and memory and assessment, may easily have missed, forgotten, or misconstrued certain incidents, words, or motives" (in Murphy 2012: 6). Thus, although some first-person narrators may be close to reaching the 'reliable' end of the spectrum, it is quite impossible for them to achieve full reliability, as is the case of Cyril.

In order to discuss Cyril's reliability as a narrator, his narrative needs to be analysed against the five factors Terence Murphy has described as a pattern of reliability (2012). When examining F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Murphy distinguishes the following marks of Nick's reliability as a narrator:[9]

> Nick's secure speaking location "back home"; his use of the middle or elegant English style; his observer-narrator status; his ethical maturity, which has been secured before the novel commences; and his retrospective re-evaluation of Jay Gatsby as the Aristotelian anagnorisis of a marked order narrative. (2012: 13-14)

First, Murphy deals with a narrator speaking 'from home', mainly alluding to a "place that signals his stance of achieved personal freedom, mental stability and ethical rightness" (2012: 14). This may be said to be the case of Cyril Avery, since it is at the end of the novel, when attending his mother's wedding, that he acknowledges being "finally happy" (Boyne 2017: 701). Both his personal life and post-referendum Ireland allow for his deserved happiness and freedom after decades of miseries. As mentioned above, the shame Cyril felt at the beginning of

his life has dimmed by its end, and this is present in the honesty of his narrative. Consequently, narrator-Cyril and character-Cyril merge at this point, from a safe place they can call home.

Second, Murphy discusses the narrator's prose, claiming that "the unmarked style of reliable narration is the elegant or middle style" (2012: 14), and alluding also to "the difficulty of conversing in completely fluent, adequately formed sentences for pages at a time" (14). In Cyril's narrative there are barely any indicators of inaccuracy. His narration is linear and clear, and his prose, following Murphy's distinction, reinforces his reliability. This links to the previous idea of Cyril speaking from home: his narrative allows for truthfulness and clarity because he no longer feels ashamed nor guilty.

The third factor discussed by Murphy, however, cannot be applied to Cyril. In *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway is not the protagonist of the narrative; he is not recounting his own life but the lives of the people around him. Murphy claims in this regard that "the first-person narrator's role in the plot is strictly limited" (2012: 15). This not so in *The Heart's Invisible Furies,* since Cyril is both the narrator and the main focalizer of his story. However, it could be argued that this is not a sign of lack of reliability, since it is precisely his retrospective re-evaluation (as shall be discussed in Murphy's fifth factor) which allows him to comprehend and analyse his involvement in the narrative. His perspective of speaking 'from home' enables him to evaluate his narrative almost as if he were an external character.

Fourthly, critics such as Murphy (2012: 15) or Booth (1991: 176) agree that, in *The Great Gatsby*, Nick could not have been reliable unless confronted with an experience such as that of the First World War. At the moment of his recounting the story, Nick has matured and succeeded in "a significant moral trial" (Murphy 2012: 16), which has meant a transformation "necessary in order for Nick to be in a position to be able to re-evaluate the character of Jay Gatsby" (16). This same reasoning could be applied to Cyril as narrator. Although it would be uncalled-for to compare the First World War to the experience of being a homosexual in Ireland during the second half of the twentieth century, it can be argued that Cyril's life from his childhood onwards has been a constant challenge, resulting in a reinforcement and quickening of his process of maturation. From this perspective, it is easy to trust Cyril in his assertions, for the reader knows that his struggle strengthens his reliability.

Finally, Murphy's fifth factor alludes to Nick's "retrospective re-evaluation of Jay Gatsby at the novel's climax" (2012: 15); in other words, to Nick's capacity to go back to his first impression and portrayal of Gatsby and to mend its faults or insufficiencies. In *The Heart's Invisible Furies*, Cyril also re-evaluates his own

behaviour. It is at the end of the novel that narrator-Cyril admits the mistakes that character-Cyril has made throughout his life, namely the silence he has kept regarding his true self. Cyril understands the difference in perspective between the moment in which he speaks and the moment in which he narrates, that is to say, the difference between character-Cyril's and narrator-Cyril's perspectives. At the end of the novel, he claims: "I look back at my life and I don't understand very much of it. It seems like it would have been so simple now to have been honest with everyone, especially Julian. But it didn't feel like that at the time. Everything was different then, of course" (Boyne 2017: 601). Like Nick, Cyril is able to evaluate his life in retrospect, understanding things he could not understand before and trying to make amends for the mistakes of his past. Drawing on Murphy's study, the mere fact that Cyril is able to re-evaluate his actions is an indicator of his reliability as a narrator.

Thus, Cyril complies with most of the features Murphy's study reveals to be defining of a narrator's reliability —his story is linear, he admits there are certain episodes he did not witness first-hand, and he does not give any reason for the reader to hold him suspect. Yet, as Murphy himself points out, being a first-person narrator prevents him from being fully reliable. For instance, there is a recurring anecdote about the first time Julian and Cyril met which neither of them is completely sure of how it actually happened: Cyril claims that it was Julian who asked him if he wanted to see his penis (Boyne 2017: 74), whereas Julian is constantly declaring that it was the other way round (141, 172). The anecdote is never clarified by the narrator and, as a result, the reader does not get to know who is ultimately telling the truth.

Apart from this, another important aspect to be taken into account is Cyril's narrative of the things he has not witnessed but has been told, namely by his mother. In the novel, there are constant allusions, especially in the first part, that point towards the role Cyril has as mere external narrator of the events that Catherine focalizes: "The Mass began in the typical fashion, *she told me*" (Boyne 2017: 5, emphasis added); "Her face was not scarlet, *she would tell me years later*, but pale" (7, emphasis added). These extracts reinforce Cyril's reliability precisely because he is emphasizing his recounting something someone else has told him —hence, what might be assessed instead would be Catherine's memory and her reliability as an old woman.

Furthermore, there are some other comments in the novel that allude to the retrospective nature of the narrative and also point out the innocence of character-Cyril and the narrator's choice of not clarifying certain events. For example, retrospection is clear in instances such as the following: "Had I been a little older I would have realized that she was flirting with him and he was flirting right back.

Which, of course, is a little disturbing *in retrospect* considering the fact that he was just a child and she was thirty-four by then" (Boyne 2017: 80, emphasis added). These comments that narrator-Cyril makes from the present/future make clear the perspective of maturity and experience he is writing from, compared to the innocence which is characteristic of his childhood: "'Bless your pure heart', he [Julian] said, looking at me as if I was an innocent child" (135).

As suggested by the examples chosen, narrator-Cyril is also selective of the facts and events that he chooses to clarify for the reader and the moments when he leaves the reader alone to do his/her own work in understanding the novel. For instance, Cyril reports his mother's appreciation of the living situation she found herself in with Jack and Seán thus: "It was no wonder, she told herself, that she heard the most peculiar sounds emerging from there during the nights. The poor boys must have had a terrible time trying to sleep" (Boyne 2017: 35). Since the narrative is told in retrospect, both Catherine and Cyril know that Jack and Seán are a couple, but Cyril as narrator chooses to reproduce Catherine's impressions as a focalizer and not to clarify things at this point, showing Catherine's naiveté and maintaining the suspense for some readers.

It is also remarkable that the first part of the novel abounds in historical inaccuracies and anachronisms. Among other examples, Fidel Castro sends Charles cigars in 1952 (when he was not PM until 1959), Charles reads *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in 1952 (although the book was not published until 1962), and the "former French President George Pompidou" (Boyne 2017: 129) is mentioned in 1959, even though he was not President until 1969. Mistakes of ten years are just too intrusive to be casual.[10] Although these could be inaccuracies introduced by the characters themselves —as a result of Charles's or Julian's bent for showing off (which would be consistent with these characters' behaviour)— they can also be considered mistakes Cyril makes when remembering those parts of his past (which is also plausible since he is an aged man when he starts narrating his life).

Although there are almost no episodes in the novel in which Cyril denies the accuracy of his memories, it is significant that at the end of the novel he admits to the weakness of his recollections when he says: "The memories, which had always been such a part of my being, had dimmed slightly over the last twelve months. It saddened me that no strong emotions came back to me now" (Boyne 2017: 683). This admission paradoxically emphasizes Cyril's reliability as a narrator and relates him with what Greta Olson refers to as the narrator's "fallibility" (2003). For Olson, fallible narrators "make individual mistakes or leave open informational gaps that need to be filled in" (104). These are gullible or innocent narrators, as opposed to untrustworthy narrators, whose "accounts have to be altered in order to make sense of their discrepancies" (104). Seen in this light, Cyril's knowledge

of his poor memory would make his narrative fallible. It is not Cyril's intention to be inaccurate and deceive the reader, but his mistakes are, at several moments in his life, unavoidable. Hence, Cyril would be as reliable a narrator as he can possibly be, considering his involvement in the narrative and his dimmed memories.

Therefore, taking into account the analysis carried out hitherto, one could argue that Cyril's reliability suggests that he is now able to be truthful, not only to others but mainly to himself. He no longer needs to hide behind something he is not, but is rather capable of admitting the truth about himself. This shows that, at the moment he is narrating his story, he feels neither guilty nor ashamed anymore, as his chronological and reliable narrative demonstrates. All in all, Cyril's narrative allows him to expose the guilt and shame he felt throughout most of his life as an Irish homosexual man in a truthful way, avoiding misrepresentation or unreliability. In order to discern whether he has truly healed from his shame and guilt, an analysis of his narrative has proven necessary, since it can enlighten readers on the truthfulness of his story.

4. Conclusion

Cyril sees himself as different from the rest of the boys around him and learns from an early age that what he is, a gay man, is wrong according to Irish Catholic standards. Nonetheless, he eventually understands that that is who he is and, therefore, he does not feel guilty once he has managed to accept himself. During his youth, Cyril is forced to find comfort in the arms of strangers in dark alleys, until he flees Ireland and reaches a society that does not judge him. The shame he feels in the first part of the novel (and of his life) is forced upon him by the Irish society of the time, and it is only when he leaves his homeland that he can find the peace he so much longs for. By the end of the novel, however, both Cyril and Ireland have evolved and their perspectives towards sexuality (and homosexuality in particular) blur a lifetime of guilt and shame, resulting in the narrator's capacity for reliability and in the nation's path towards progress. The fact that the narrator can be mostly reliable suggests that he has fought the guilt and shame that were slowing him down and has emerged victorious. It is my contention that, were he still haunted by these affects, he would fall inevitably into unreliability in his narrative, mainly by disguising some events from his past in order to ease his conscience.[11]

Moreover, the narratological analysis carried out hitherto has shown that (un) reliability in *The Heart's Invisible Furies* is as much a matter of focalization as of narration. The distinction made between *character-Cyril* and *narrator-Cyril* has proved essential when dealing with the analysis of (un)reliability in the novel, since the main struggle comes from the disparity between Cyril as narrator and Cyril as

character/focalizer. He makes constant references to the present moment when he is speaking, thus emphasizing the retrospective nature of his accounts and delaying the revelation of some information he has in the present but did not have in the past. Nevertheless, it can be stated that, as a narrator, he is mainly reliable. His intention is not to deceive because, at the moment from which he is speaking, he has nothing to hide and nothing to be ashamed of. His inaccuracies are mere mistakes due to his fallible memory. Hence, it can be concluded that, as a narrator, Cyril is closer to the reliability end of the spectrum. Yet, he is also an innocent unreliable focalizer, since he is characterized by his misunderstanding of things around him due to his childlike naiveté. His upbringing plays an important role here, since Irish society at the time tabooed everything to do with sexuality, bringing shame and guilt to the forefront. His faults and misunderstandings, therefore, are understandable when seen against his censoring socio-cultural background.

Furthermore, the link between narration and the affects of guilt and shame is to be found in Cyril's need to tell his story in order to heal from or overcome past issues. The narrator of *The Heart's Invisible Furies* uses his narrative as a confession, as a coming to terms with himself, as something necessary to relieve the demons of his past. The development of Cyril's attitude towards guilt and shame is what facilitates the evolution from his unreliability as a character/focalizer to his reliability as a narrator. By the end of the novel —and hence by the time he is writing— he has come to terms with his past and is able to confront it almost without shame, having accepted his guilt. He no longer tries to hide from the reader the most shameful aspects of his past, precisely because his past mistakes were born out of his own lies and silences —and it would not be wise to continue hiding things from the reader. Throughout his life, he has learnt that he needs to be true to himself and others, and so he is forced into reliability, into showing what really happened without leaving anything out. His path towards self-acceptance is the path towards reliability, acknowledging his guilt and shame but leaving them behind.

Notes

1. Boyne's *A History of Loneliness* also deals with the cover-up of the abuses of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

2. See Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightshi*p (1999), for instance.

3. Scholars working on Affect Theory struggle to find a single definition for the term 'affect', for it varies depending on disciplines and fields (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 1-2; Figlerowicz 2012: 3). Hence, in this article, 'affect' is treated synonymously with 'emotion' or 'feeling', following other scholars in the field of psychology, such as Gershen Kaufman (1996).

4. For more information on this aspect, see A. Nünning (1997, 2005, 2008), Phelan and Martin (1999), Olson (2003), Hansen (2005), Heyd (2006), Phelan (2007), and V. Nünning (2015).

5. Narratives of religious guilt (mainly of the relief and unburdening arriving with time and maturity) are more and more common. They mainly emphasise the atmosphere of fear and guilt rooted in Catholic or Christian upbringings. For more on this, see Brown (2017).

6. Some scholars such as Yuval-Davis (2006) or Baumeister and Leary (1995) have linked belonging with "emotional attachment", with feelings of security and with being "at home" (Yuval-Davis 2006: 197). Further, it has been proposed that "a need to belong is a fundamental human motivation" (Baumeister and Leary 1995: 497), which explains Cyril's longing for acceptance.

7. Hacker even mentions sexual shame in homosexuality (2017: 216).

8. The aim of the following narratological analysis is to show how reliability allows him to do this.

9. This notwithstanding, there are other critics who analyze Nick's unreliability in *The Great Gatsby* (see Boyle 1969).

10. In this context, some critics have long condemned Boyne for his lack of research —his "offensive" last novel was almost boycotted (Lonergan 2019), and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is quite often considered historically inaccurate (Randall 2019)— but on this occasion the mistakes are far too easily verifiable to be mere slips.

11. For instance, this is the case of the narrator in Boyne's *A History of Loneliness.*

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TRANSLATING ANGER INTO CARE: AN EXAMINATION OF BLACK FEMALE IDENTITY AND BONDING IN ZADIE SMITH'S *SWING TIME* (2016)

TRANSFORMANDO LA IRA EN CUIDADO: ANÁLISIS DE LA IDENTIDAD Y LA RELACIONALIDAD DE LA MUJER NEGRA EN LA OBRA DE ZADIE SMITH *SWING TIME* (2016)

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Abstract

This article attempts to explore the political possibilities of anger as a potential source of Black female identity construction and solidarity in Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016). I will argue that Audre Lorde's insights into anger in *Sister Outsider* (1984) are particularly suited to understanding how anger functions in Smith's fictional work, where this emotion is presented as a powerful "energy" (Lorde 2019: 120) that has the potential to move the subject towards a more empowered selfhood. Nevertheless, I also explore, through the discourses of Lorde (2019) and bell hooks (1995, 2012), the social boundaries and potentially damaging effects attached to this emotion. More specifically, I consider how anger, by itself, is not enough to ensure a stable sense of self because it does not directly motivate the development of female solidarity. Instead, Smith demonstrates how anger may be effectively complemented through the paradigm of care, which does encourage the protagonists to move towards each other, and towards the liberating potential of a more outward view of the world.

Keywords: anger, care, affect theory, female identity, female bonding.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo la exploración del potencial político que posee la ira en la construcción de identidad y el desarrollo de la solidaridad femenina de la

mujer negra en la obra *Swing Time* (2016), de Zadie Smith. Sostengo que los argumentos expuestos por Audre Lorde en *Sister Outsider* (1984) son especialmente adecuados para entender cómo funciona la ira en esta obra, donde dicha emoción se presenta como una poderosa fuente de energía que tiene la capacidad de mover al sujeto femenino hacia una identidad más liberadora (Lorde 2019: 120). También exploro, a través de los discursos de Lorde (2019) y bell hooks (1995, 2012), los límites sociales y los efectos potencialmente dañinos vinculados a esta emoción. Concretamente, considero cómo la ira en sí no es suficiente para garantizar una identidad estable porque no motiva de manera intrínseca el desarrollo de la solidaridad femenina. Por el contrario, Smith demuestra cómo la ira puede complementarse eficazmente a través del paradigma del cuidado, que sí anima a las protagonistas a conectar entre ellas, y expone el potencial liberador de una visión más colectiva del mundo.

Palabras clave: ira, cuidado, teoría de los afectos, identidad femenina, relaciones femeninas.

1. Introduction

In what is probably her most female-focused novel to date, Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016) traces the identity search of three Black female protagonists and their relationships to each other. Despite the fact that the novel is a first-person account that mainly focalises on the maturation process of the unnamed narrator through the past memories of her childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, the protagonist also provides a close look at the trajectory of the two most significant women in her life: her mother (also unnamed) and her childhood best friend, Tracey. This conforms to the feminist narrative trend identified by Marianne Hirsch, which establishes women's bonding and identity as interrelated processes (1989: 133). By drawing on Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic theory of female identity, which maintains that the constitution of the woman's psyche is rooted in the pre-oedipal connection with the mother (1978: 166), Hirsch claims that many narratives from the 1970s onward tend to depict female relationality as a determinant factor in the construction of women's ego boundaries (1989: 133). This is also the case in Smith's fiction. As Lourdes López-Ropero maintains, *On Beauty* (2005) is the first novel where the author touches on this issue (2016: 129). Despite the growing animosity between their husbands, the female characters Kiki and Carlene manage to establish a significant yet "short-lived" (129) relationship that allows them to see beyond their opposite ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Similarly, *NW* (2012) presents a portrait of friendship that emphasises difference as an important conduit for female bonding. Aside from the fact that

Leah and Natalie belong to different racial ethnicities (Leah is white-Irish and Natalie is a second-generation Black Jamaican), Smith presents the characters' individual personality traits and goals as elements that not only add value to their mutual relationship but also motivate the characters towards personal growth and self-betterment (Taylor 2016: 457). Smith is, therefore, clearly interested in depicting female relations among women who are different from each other but who nevertheless find ways to support each other and achieve further individual growth. In the case of *Swing Time* (2016), the mother-daughter bond and the female friendship relation that are at the centre of Smith's novel constitute an extremely influential and ultimately necessary element for the narrator's self-development. As this article will demonstrate, even though these dynamics are imbued with a series of interpersonal conflicts and social differences that must be resolved, the end of the novel suggests a hopeful turn towards female solidarity and the construction of an autonomous and self-fulfilling Black womanhood.

This article thus offers a discussion on Smith's *Swing Time* from the perspective of affect theory, with a particular focus on the articulation of anger in the text, which is an unexamined aspect of this novel. In order to do this, it combines the theoretical insights of Sara Ahmed (2004) with those of Black critics such as Audre Lorde (2019) or bell hooks (1995, 2012), whose valuable contribution to affect theory needs to be addressed. In fact, it is these latter studies that have extensively delved into the useful effects of anger as well as the boundaries underpinning this emotion. By drawing on all these theories, among others, this study explores three main aspects of the novel: the potential and limits of anger as a source of identity construction and personal and political empowerment —that is, the gaining of self-recognition and social status; the issues derived from the collective expression of anger; and the possibility of combining anger with the paradigm of care. It is my contention that the affect discourses employed in this paper and Smith's novel mutually illuminate each other. While the theories put forward by Ahmed (2004), Lorde (2019) and hooks (1995, 2012) help shed light on certain aspects of the novel, Smith's work simultaneously contributes to these discourses by pointing out the limitations of anger as a facilitator of female agency and solidarity. More specifically, I argue that, although it is through anger that the characters of *Swing Time* manage to find the strength to challenge social norms and move towards more politically-assertive identities, this emotion alone is not enough to ensure the permanence of this change. One of the reasons for this is that the adequate expression of anger in Smith's novel is shaped by the subject's intersectional oppression, a premise that is not sufficiently emphasised in most critical affect discourses outside the sphere of Black feminist theory. Furthermore, *Swing Time* demonstrates that the energy with which the subject is endowed through anger does not directly motivate female bonding —especially across social boundaries—

which is crucial for the process of female self-construction. Instead, I maintain that the novel endorses the paradigm of care as a necessary complement to anger, as this is what ultimately encourages female connection and, subsequently, a more balanced sense of selfhood. While some affect theorists establish that the angered feminist subject should move towards other affective states like wonder or hope (Ahmed 2004: 178, 183), Smith concurs with those Black theorists who present care as the necessary destination of female anger (hooks 1995, 2012; Lorde 2019).

2. The Potential of Anger as a Source of Black Female Identity Construction

It is worth noting that, although the concept of emotion has been traditionally stigmatised as the absence of rational thought (Ahmed 2004), anger, in particular, has long been legitimised by reason of its masculinisation. According to Philip Fisher (2003), the theorisation of anger as a positive emotion is rooted in Aristotelian theory, where it is rendered as a valid response to injustice. Although Aristotle relies on the rational political system to take care of the more serious crimes, he endorses the expression of anger and the subsequent act of revenge —these two are inextricably linked— in those cases where one's "self-worth" or that of their loved ones has been "transgressed" (Fisher 2003: 120). In fact, failing to express anger when the subject has been purposefully diminished or insulted is considered a shameful act, as this presupposes a lack of agency (118-119). Although the act of revenge has lost the legitimation it used to possess (122), the expression of anger in contemporary society continues to be of a gendered nature. One only need to look at the negative images and stereotypes that exist in exclusive connection to femininity, such as the angry Black woman, which is particularly relevant to the discussion expounded in this article. Rooted in 19th-century minstrel shows, the caricature of the hostile Black woman has been predominant in American popular culture and has endured in our present time as a racist stigma that censures Black women's emotional expression (Kent 2021: 357). As Jacinta Kent maintains, "if a woman of colour is angry, raises her voice, or demonstrates open hostility, she is likely to receive the label of 'aggressor', 'intimidating', and/or 'overly sensitive'" (2021: 357). Therefore, when a Black woman expresses anger, her discourse is usually "dismissed" (Ahmed 2004: 177), because her tone is perceived as intimidating, which may also be automatically associated with a lack of rational thought. This closely relates to Ahmed's conceptualisation of the "feminist killjoy" (2017: 37), someone —usually a woman— who is viewed by others in a negative light for disrupting the atmosphere of a conversation by drawing attention to the racist and sexist attitudes being displayed. As Ahmed

maintains, "When you expose a problem you pose a problem" (2017: 37). Feminist killjoys are thus usually categorised as troublemakers, their anger becomes the origin of the problem rather than the consequence of it.

Despite the challenge that these popular images entail, feminist discourses have attempted to re-evaluate the notion and use of anger as an adequate response to patriarchal oppression and as a powerful expression of female agency. Here, it is relevant to underline the definition elaborated by Lorde (2019), whose discussion on anger is much more detailed than those of the rest of the authors mentioned in this article. In her landmark work *Sister Outsider* (1984), Lorde connects anger to racism, particularly to the way Black women may connect with their everyday reality:

> My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, ignoring it, feeding upon it, learning to use it before it laid my visions to waste […]. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change […]. [A]nger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences […]. Anger is loaded with information and energy. (2019: 117-121)

As can be seen, Lorde's notion of anger is quite multifaceted. First, she draws on her own personal experience to depict anger as an inner *energy* that lives repressed within the individual, and which endows the subject, through that emotional state, with a new consciousness that motivates positive and radical change. This focus on the individual as the origin of anger contrasts with other contemporary theories like the one developed by Sara Ahmed, which emphasises emotion as an external social element, one that arises as a result of the contact between different bodies (2004: 6). While Lorde also ponders on the communication and interpersonal transference of anger (2019: 157), as this is a natural capacity that is shared by all emotions (Brennan 2004), her focus on the individual may serve to outline how each person's anger is unique at its core. At the same time, she reveals the possibility that specific groups of women may share a similar kind of anger, such as the one Black women usually feel in response to racism (Lorde 2019: 117). As one may observe in the fragment above, Lorde is particularly concerned with how Black women may utilise that anger not only to express their agency and pain, but also to give them the strength they need to search for a more liberating self-construction, one that resists patriarchal rule. This means that anger is considered a dynamic emotional state, as it simultaneously responds to the past while moving the subject towards the future or, as Ahmed claims, towards "new ways of being" (2004: 175). It also means that this metamorphic process requires the use of rational and political thought. Aside from the fact that anger is "loaded with information" one

must carefully examine, the energy that the body is left with should also be correctly projected for the change that is yet to come. Anger, according to Lorde's description, cannot rely on simple impulsivity, otherwise such energy will probably be futile. Here we find a similarity with Aristotelian theory, as Lorde also claims that anger must be necessarily followed by concrete actions. However, her understanding of what those actions should be are notably different, as will be further explained. Finally, the connection that this critic makes between the use of anger and the connection with the other, two actions that she believes to be compatible, should be emphasised. Anger, for Lorde, forces us to confront other people's individual painful experiences, which will be necessarily *different* from our own. Her conception of difference specifically refers to the social particularities that define each subject's position in society, and which inevitably shape individual experience. This is what Kimberle Crenshaw has coined "intersectionality" (1991: 1244), which will be key to the discussion of this paper, especially when the issues related to anger in the process of female bonding are explained.

Swing Time (2016) depicts two of the main characters as being filled with anger: the narrator's best friend Tracey —who is, like the protagonist, a second-generation mixed-race British girl— and the unnamed narrator's mother (a Black Jamaican woman). Ironically, it is through the eyes of the narrator, an extremely passive character, that the reader bears witness to how these characters express their anger. Unsurprisingly, the novel draws many similarities between Tracey and the mother, such as the fact that they are both burdened by a violent childhood (Baillie 2019: 298), and that they have a will "made of iron" (Smith 2016: 54) through which they attempt to assert themselves within an oppressive system. Contrary to the narrator, these characters are *energised* from the beginning, which drives them to construct themselves in whichever way they can, thereby exemplifying Lorde's premise that action must always follow anger (2019: 122). Nevertheless, one should note how these characters' respective attempts at self-construction are sharply dissimilar, a difference which must be understood in the context of intersectionality (Kürpick 2018).

According to Crenshaw (1991), the subject's experience is inextricably connected to the multiple and *intersecting* systems of oppression that structure society, such as race, gender, or social class. Bearing this in mind, one must consider how the socioeconomic and class disparity that underlies Tracey's and the narrator's mother's trajectories has a significant impact on their projection of anger. On the one hand, the mother seems to channel her energy most effectively, according to Lorde's description. After all, by dedicating her entire life to her own education and upward-class aspirations, the protagonist is finally able to achieve her goal of becoming a Member of Parliament. Of course, while the mother is depicted as a

highly intelligent and perseverant woman, one cannot deny that her and her daughter's access to education is also made possible through her white husband's financial resources (Kürpick 2018: 334). Also important is the fact that, while the mother tends to rationalise every situation as a result of her self-assigned role as an intellectual, her inner anger will occasionally seep through the daily lectures she gives to her husband and daughter, normally on the history of slavery. For the mother, the remembering of the past is a painful endeavour that is paramount to encourage the search for Black individuality (Pérez-Zapata 2021). Tracey's anger, on the other hand, is activated on account of her precarious social condition, as she is unable to escape, unlike the other protagonists, from the "cycle of poverty" (Smith 2016: 167). This is where I would contend that Smith makes a slight contribution to Lorde's theory of anger. While the critic explains that anger will be uniquely felt by each individual on account of their particular social reality (Lorde 2019: 121), she fails to consider how intersectional difference will also necessarily curtail the capacity of such individual to find effective and precise conduits of anger. In the case of Tracey, her working-class position inevitably forces her to assert herself, though unsuccessfully, in quite subversive and hostile ways, as these are the only possible means of empowerment that are made available to her. As a student, Tracey constantly defies the school teachers, an emblem of authority, and is openly cruel towards many of her white classmates, who evoke the image of the oppressor. Yet these attempts at empowerment only serve to place her as a social outcast in the eyes of everyone at school. It is only when Tracey begins her dancing career that she finds more productive expressions of anger, even if these remain subversive and ethically questionable. When she begins a secret affair with one of her older male colleagues, a relationship which interrogates the racial and gender "hierarchies" prevalent in the world of theatre (Kürpick 2018: 336), Tracey feels empowered as she degrades and manipulates a person who has more social value than her. That said, one should bear in mind that underlying Tracey's and the narrator's mother's respective trajectories lies the emergence of a political consciousness that constantly drives them forward.

Meanwhile, the narrator's lack of anger can be attributed to an absent political mindset, which essentially subsumes the protagonist in a static passivity that renders her unable to constitute herself for most of the novel. As the narrator herself claims in the prologue, all throughout her life she has been a "shadow" self, someone who has survived by "attach[ing]" herself to others rather than seeking her own self-construction (Smith 2016: 4). This is probably because the narrator, unlike her mother and Tracey, is unable to translate her inner pain into anger. As Ahmed maintains, "responding" to pain, which is a prerequisite for the emergence of anger, demands a correct identification of the former (2004: 174).

This includes recognising both the psychological or physical imprint that this emotion leaves on a particular subject and the way it is structurally transmitted to others (174). Although the narrator is, thanks to her mother's stories, intellectually aware of the historical roots of Black oppression, she is unable to reconcile this information with her self-perception as a Black woman. On the contrary, she is completely overwhelmed by the pain her mother constantly associates with the Black community (Pérez-Zapata 2021). Everyday conversations with her mother usually transform into aggressive sermons that the narrator is unable to process: "I drew back as she [the mother] ranted […]. I didn't know what to do with all the sadness" (Smith 2016: 244). The narrator's inability to emotionally digest this inherited pain should be understood as partly the result of her mother's neglect (Quabeck 2018: 473). Aside from the fact that the mother fails to endow her daughter with positive images of Blackness that may counterbalance the tragic roots of Black identity, she simultaneously falls short in her role as a nurturing maternal figure due to her own goal of self-construction, which takes up most of her energy. In fact, according to Franziska Quabeck, the narrator's passivity may be read as a conscious act of "rebellion" against the mother (2018: 466), one that culminates with her job as a personal assistant to a white world-famous celebrity, Aimee.

In line with Malou Kürpick's study (2018), the narrator's embodiment of a shadow self for Aimee clearly demonstrates how social status and economic resources do not automatically enable an autonomous Black selfhood, in the same way that a political consciousness like the one Tracey develops remains insufficient if the subject lacks financial power. Although the narrator's job as a celebrity assistant provides her with significant social privileges —mainly in the form of extensive travel and luxurious commodities— it simultaneously demands that the protagonist submit her personal agency, which directly contradicts the mother's emphasis on Black female independence. For almost a decade of her adult life, until she is fired, the narrator's whole existence is shaped around Aimee: "I lived on Aimee, ate with Aimee, went out with Aimee" (Smith 2016: 431). Not only does her job demand a complete physical dedication to Aimee, it also furthers the erasure of political thinking. For instance, in a scene where the characters are discussing the issue of motherhood, Aimee firmly tells the narrator that the only requisite to become a mother is that "you've just got to *want* it enough" (111, emphasis in original). Because of the power imbalance between the women and Aimee's rigid-minded personality, the narrator decides to agree with her boss rather than assert her own opinion about the problematics of balancing work and motherhood within working-class contexts. The repetitive nature of this dynamic, along with the narrator's seclusion from the rest of the world —which further curtails her connection to her childhood neighbourhood and her personal relationships with

others— will have a significant impact on the protagonist's view of the world, and contribute to her adoption of an individualistic ethos.

However, in line with the narrative structure of the *Bildungsroman*, the narrator does by the end of the novel move towards a more assertive and political self-construction, a shift that is rooted, as in the case of the other characters, in the emergence of anger. This happens after she is fired by Aimee for sleeping with Lamin, the latter's Senegalese lover. Upon reading the non-disclosure contract that the narrator was forced to sign prior to becoming Aimee's assistant, the narrator is confronted, for the very first time, with the enforced and legitimised particularities of her *shadow* self: "Within its [the contract's] inflexible terms the things that came out of my mouth did not belong to me any longer, not my ideas or opinions or feelings, not even my memories. They were all hers [Aimee's]" (Smith 2016: 434). This creates an immediate affective response in the narrator: "Rage rose up in me instantaneously: I wanted to burn her house down" (434). The narrator's sudden feeling of anger can be read according to Clare Hemmings' notion of "affective dissonance" (2012: 154). This term may be equated to the *knowledge* or political consciousness that Lorde claims is embedded in this emotion, but Hemmings' description of this particular event is far more comprehensive and, therefore, preferable. Hemmings explains that affective dissonance occurs when the subject experiences an inner discordance between the perception they have of themselves and the social "possibilities" that such personal imaginary has in society (2012: 154). In other words, one experiences affective dissonance when they come into conflict with the structural mandates that dictate how the self should or should not be constituted. Hemmings believes this will usually lead to one of two situations: either the subject represses that feeling of dislocation, or they let it "flood" their being, the second of which may potentially bring change (2012: 157). After the narrator learns of the physical extent of her victimisation, she is finally able to translate her pain into anger. Her previous consideration that Aimee may provide a more positive and unencumbered model of selfhood —in contrast to the pain and the knowledge of structural oppression that the narrator exclusively relates to Black identities (Quabeck 2018: 464)— is disrupted only after she realises that she actually lacks the agency that her boss has so incessantly promoted. This creates a significant dissonance between her self-perception and her lived reality, which motivates the emergence of a political consciousness and compels her towards the construction of a new identity.

3. The Social Boundaries of Anger

Having established the potentiality of anger as an energy that motivates the subject towards a desire for an autonomous identity formation, and the way one's expression

of anger is influenced by their socioeconomic power, I would focus now on the complex relationship that may be drawn between anger and female bonding, which is also inevitably connected to the complexities of intersectional difference. The reality is that, while much has been said on the transformative possibilities of anger for the individual female subject (Ahmed 2004; Hemmings 2012), there are but a few discourses focused on how this particular emotion may or may not contribute to the enhancing of female connection, which is deemed crucial for Black self-definition. Lorde, for instance, maintains how cultivating healthy female relations is paramount for the construction of Black women, as these enable the healing of psychic wounds that the Black self has inherited from racist society (2019: 160). After all, Black women are the only ones who really understand the inner pain and strength that they all carry within them as a result of their historical otherness (155). Patricia Hill Collins also conforms to this premise, stating that Black female bonding usually operates on the basis of a mutual "shared recognition" of the past (2000: 103). Thus, for these critics, female self-definition and empowerment are necessarily related to a specific political consciousness that evokes solidarity with the Black community and the racial cause. Lorde also emphasises how the cultivation of anger and female bonding need not be incompatible processes if handled accordingly. It has already been shown that she views anger as an emotion that cannot be simply contained within the individual, something that would serve no therapeutic or political purpose. At the same time, the critic is careful to consider how, if one's particular social reality is unlikely to fully correspond with that of another person's, their expression of anger will also probably differ (Lorde 2019: 121). Although trying to connect with someone else's anger may appear a difficult task, Lorde believes this is where the self is motivated to grow (121). For her, it is not only one's personal anger that provides them with the knowledge they need in order to position themselves in society, but rather the learning of someone else's anger, which is *loaded* with a whole new set of ideas and challenges that may complement the self's perception of reality and infuse them with more energy.

Nevertheless, this may not be initially the case in Smith's novel, where the anger is actually unable to transcend social boundaries. According to bell hooks's study *Killing Rage* (1995), this emotion is class-bound by nature, which means that one's social class will be what mainly determines the object and direction of their anger: "The rage of the oppressed is never the same as the rage of the privileged. One group can change their lot only by changing the system; the other hopes to be rewarded within the system" (hooks 1995: 30). Although hooks's distinction is also inherently racialized —she speaks about the rage of the working-class minorities of colour and the rage of the white middle-class— this pattern may be useful for understanding the antagonistic relation that develops between Tracey and the narrator's mother. If, as Ahmed maintains, women must share a "directionality" of

anger in order to bond (2004: 176), we can understand how the social disparity that separates the two characters already constitutes a significant communicative barrier. Rather than empathise with Tracey's anger and see this as a response to her social vulnerability —her mother is unemployed and her father is regularly in and out of prison— the narrator's mother deems the former's rebellious actions and her poor academic performance as a result of a lack of ambition and parental discipline. Furthermore, one cannot deny that the mother's dismissal of Tracey is founded on her own selfish desire for upward mobility. According to hooks, those with social aspirations tend to reject bonding with the "underclass", as this may curtail their capacity for integration (1995: 166). It is no secret that the narrator's mother is highly discouraging of her daughter's friendship with Tracey, whom she sees as a bad influence. Although she never forcibly separates the two girls, she constantly communicates to the narrator her prejudiced evaluation of Tracey. She tells her, for instance, that Tracey's choice of a dancing career is "silly", while she is "clever" for wanting to go to university (Smith 2016: 31), a distinction that not only perpetuates the stigmatisation of the body as inferior to the mind, but also denies Tracey her agency, as it is through dancing that the protagonist is able to achieve some sort of social power, as seen earlier through her secret liaison with a male dancing colleague. Ultimately, the mother's prejudiced evaluation of Tracey will come to eventually determine the narrator's perception of her friend, thus conforming to the premise originated in Chodorow's (1978) study that the mother-bond influences the daughter's formation of adult relationships.

Social discrimination is also at the heart of Tracey's unproductive use of anger, which subsequently risks psychological consequences for both her and the narrator. It has been mentioned earlier that, in order to be effective, anger must be correctly managed and focused. However, because of the level of intensity that anger may reach, its expression may not necessarily result in a "coherent response" (Ahmed 2004: 176). Even if the subject is able to correctly distinguish the reasons underpinning this emotion, which is not always the case, there is always the possibility that the subject will remain "stuck" in a cycle of anger, unable to move towards a positive conduit of change (175). Furthermore, as mentioned in section 2, Smith considers something that many affect theorists seem to have overlooked, which is the way in which intersectional discrimination may also contribute to the ineffective managing of anger. This is the case for Tracey, who is entrapped not only by her social precarity but also by her exposure to violence and sexual abuse as a child (Baillie 2019: 298). This leads her to find ways in which she can release that anger and feel temporarily empowered, often at the expense of other people, like the narrator. One evening, after their teacher Mr Sherman seizes a valued possession of Tracey's in retaliation for her refusing to sit down, an action which the narrator claims is a "point of principle" (Smith 2016: 54), Tracey projects her

frustration towards the protagonist. When the narrator fails to think of an activity they might do together that evening, Tracey replies to her in a hostile tone: "Well, what's the point of coming round if you don't fucking know?" (55), to which the other begins to cry. Tracey's insensitive reaction to the narrator's unresponsiveness may be viewed as especially dangerous due to the narrator's fragile ego boundaries, but it also reveals how anger may easily constitute a potentially destructive force for all personal relationships: "Our anger, when generali[s]ed against the injustice of the world, can become directed toward those who happen to be nearest, often those who are dearest" (Ahmed 2017: 172). Because Tracey feels as though she has lost her battle to the oppressor, in this case Mr Sherman, she unconsciously turns to depriving her friend of power, to the detriment of the other's wellbeing. At the same time, because the narrator is unable to defend herself on account of her lack of autonomy, she lets herself be driven by others, sometimes to the point of self-destruction.

If Tracey's damaging use of anger prevents the cultivation of female solidarity, so does the narrator's response to this emotion. At one point during their adult years, when the friends have long been estranged on account of their separate life paths, the narrator confronts Tracey about a series of abusive emails she has been sending her mother. These emails aggressively accuse the narrator's mother, now a local representative of Tracey's housing estate, of neglecting the interests of her working-class community, although some of them also become distorted into a sort of "personal vendetta" against the other woman, for having discriminated against Tracey in childhood (Smith 2016: 399). Despite the fact that the narrator considers many of Tracey's arguments to be potentially valid, she ultimately "frames" her ex-friend's political commentary as "harassment" against her mother on account of its aggressive tone (Kürpick 2018: 342). Similarly, when Tracey turns to accuse the narrator of being complicit in the class-system oppression, the narrator classifies such comments as the opinion of a "delusional" woman (Smith 2016: 406). She even reassures her mother that Tracey is "not stable" as a sufficient justification for not reaching out to her former friend or consulting the veracity of her claims (391). Although it is quite possible that Tracey's violent demeanour may be the result of unresolved trauma (hooks 1995: 137), the way the narrator employs this predicament to dismiss her friend's political commentary is highly problematic, as it merely serves to consolidate the stereotypying of the Black woman as being chronically angry. Furthermore, censoring anger not only does nothing to solve the issue at hand, but it can further aggravate it by making the angry person feel even "angrier" (Ahmed 2017: 38). In an attempt to change this dynamic, feminist discourses have attempted to change the focus on the receiving end of anger. In line with Lorde's study (2019), Ahmed emphasises the need to "hear the anger of others" and remain open to criticism (2004: 178). *Swing Time*

suggests that the narrator's refusal to hear Tracey's anger is rooted in two main reasons: the narrator's lingering resentment towards Tracey for the times she has felt disempowered as a child, and the prejudiced evaluation of her friend, which the protagonist has inherited from her own mother and consolidated through her learnt individualistic mindset. Even while covertly agreeing with some of Tracey's claims, the narrator focuses all her attention on the other's hostile tone, which essentially allows her to dismiss any sense of guilt or responsibility she may have towards her old friend. The fact that Tracey is reminding the narrator of the intersectional differences between them constitutes a burden that she wants to ignore at all costs, as this would force her to interrogate her own view of the world, in which Tracey's precarious condition is primarily a result of her own doing.

As has been seen through the dynamics established between the protagonists, anger presents many obstacles for the cultivation of female bonding. On the one hand, the class-bound nature of anger prevents the narrator and the narrator's mother from accurately reading Tracey's anger. They either stigmatise her as a failed subject who chooses to further victimise herself or as a mentally-unstable angry woman who cannot help but abuse others. This is due to the characters' failure to look beyond Tracey's angry tone as well as their inability to identify the intersectional nuances underlying their respective life experiences, a result of their adopted individualistic ethos. Meanwhile, Tracey does not realise how her abrasive demeanour may have a psychological impact on others. She is too subsumed in her own self-preservation and her desire for revenge that she lets herself be driven by impulsivity, which simultaneously renders her unable to find more positive conduits for her anger. This does not mean, however, that social boundaries are impenetrable in the novel, but rather that the energy provided by anger is not, at least by itself, adequate for overcoming the conflicts that derive from such barriers. Although Lorde believes women can find ways to effectively communicate through their anger, she also considers the possibility that it may drive them apart, especially "when there is a great deal of connectedness that is problematic or threatening or unacknowledged" (2019: 164). Lorde's view on anger, then, seems to be more politically promising for the bonding between women who do not have unresolved interpersonal conflicts, as is the case in Smith's novel. As we have seen throughout this section, underlying the characters' inability to communicate across their anger is a latent animosity towards each other. Firstly, because the narrator's mother sees Tracey as an obstacle in her upward-mobility schema, she treats her in a derogatory manner that ultimately creates a psychic wound in the latter. As a result, Tracey comes to deeply resent both the mother and her former friend, for inheriting the mother's prejudiced evaluation of her. Finally, the narrator seems to covertly hold a grudge against her mother and her old friend, for the pain they have each caused her in the past. Within this entangled web of relational hostilities, the expression

of anger cannot function as a source of female bonding. On the contrary, it only serves to further entrap the protagonists within their self-absorbed views of the world. In addition, given the underlying connection between female self-construction and women's bonding, the characters' mutual disaffection ultimately prevents them from achieving a more fulfilled sense of self. They all seem to be isolated, one way or another. Even the narrator's mother, who is the only one to successfully achieve her desired ambitions by the end of the novel, eventually comes to realise that she is regrettably alone and in need of human connection.

4. Moving beyond Anger: Establishing Ethical Caring Relations

Despite seemingly offering a bleak portrait of female bonding that exposes the limits of anger as a collective feminist affect, Smith's novel manages to end on a hopeful note that ultimately does suggest the possibility of solidarity, a change that is necessarily connected to the introduction of a new affective paradigm, the paradigm of care. After the protagonist loses her job as Aimee's assistant, she returns home to visit her mother, who is now dying of cancer. The feeling of betrayal —which we have seen motivates the development of a political consciousness— and the imminence of death are factors that compel the protagonist to reflect on her past actions and her relationships to others, primarily Tracey. During her last interactions with her mother, and following the latter's death, we see a crucial change in the narrator's mindset, something which is clearly demonstrated through her decision to reconcile with Tracey. The novel ends with a scene at Tracey's house where the narrator sees her old friend dancing with her children, a significant action that brings the novel full circle, as it is through dancing that the characters were able to connect at the beginning of the story. Before delving into the particularities of the narrator's ethical turn, it should be mentioned that, for most affect theorists —such as those mentioned in this article— anger is an emotion which, while potentially empowering, should not shape the extent of the subject's emotional state. As Ahmed maintains, "[f]eminism cannot be reduced to that which it is against […]. Feminism is also 'for' something other, a 'for-ness' that does not simply take the shape of what it is against" (2004: 178). For Ahmed, then, anger is a form of opposition that must be necessarily oriented towards something else, specifically towards other affective states that are not constructed on opposition. This relates to the dynamic nature of anger that was highlighted in section 2, through Lorde's definition. Anger, as Lorde maintains, does not simply react to racism, but moves towards possible changes, and therefore new affective states,

while also retaining the energy that is left from the initial surge of anger (2019: 117). While Ahmed endorses wonder or hope as possible destinations of female anger (2004: 178, 183), Black feminist critics like Lorde (2019) or hooks (1995, 2012) endorse the subject's movement towards the establishment of ethical caring relations. As will be argued in this section, this is also depicted in Smith's novel, where the transformation of anger into care promises not only to motivate female connection, but also to enable vulnerable subjects like Tracey to move beyond their damaging permanent angered state.

As Carol Gilligan maintains, the foundation for any sort of ethical relationship based on care, whether between family members, friends or strangers, lies in the notion of interdependence (2018: 36). Because care considers the self to be inextricably "connected to others", the attempt to wilfully detach oneself from society is viewed as "morally problematic" (36), since this would mean a failure to attend to someone else's needs for self-construction, as well as one's own. Relationships that are based on the paradigm of care interrogate the individualistic discourse that prevails in capitalist society, which deems individuals as self-contained beings who are free from external influence (43). Care, on the other hand, considers how one's self-definition is affected by their intersectional particularities, which may make the individual more or less vulnerable than others (Jaggar 2018: 194). In *Swing Time*, the narrator's attempt to reconcile with Tracey necessarily goes through the process of accepting the latter's class oppression, as well as admitting an ethical responsibility towards the friend: "I was her [Tracey's] only witness, the only person who knows all that she has in her, all that's been ignored and wasted, and yet I still left her back there, in the ranks of the unwitnessed, where you have to scream to get heard" (Smith 2016: 448). This inner monologue, which develops as the narrator approaches Tracey's house in a scene towards the end of the novel, demonstrates a shift in consciousness that moves the narrator towards a more ethical position that may allow her to *care* for her friend from her acknowledged position of economic and social privilege.

If Smith's novel displays the narrator's emergent political consciousness as a necessary ingredient for the development of an ethically-oriented identity, it also suggests that the only way to transform one's anger into the practice of care is through the act of compassion and forgiveness. According to hooks, showing compassion for others is an active way of escaping the role of victim that is inherent in the event of revenge (2012: 198). This is because, unlike revenge, caring for others demands that we identify "our own essential worth and value" (198), as well as that of others. hooks also believes that practising compassion and forgiveness is also especially necessary when bonding across social boundaries, as conflicts are an inevitable part of the communicative process (150-151). After acknowledging

the obstacles her mother must have had to overcome when balancing her own self-construction and the task of raising a child, the narrator decides to forgive the former for her past lack of maternal availability and finally accepts that her mother has always made her best effort to care for her. By forgiving her, the narrator is effectively renouncing her previous rebellion against her mother, and accepting the latter's encouragement towards a more politically-conscious selfhood. This action also inevitably reverberates in the narrator's compassion for Tracey, thereby reiterating once again the connection between the mother-bond and female friendship. This can be observed in the closing scene of the novel, when, following her mother's death, the narrator decides to approach Tracey once again, this time to aid her friend: "there might be something else I could offer, something simpler, more honest, between my mother's idea of salvation and nothing at all" (Smith 2016: 453). By reflecting on the things she might "offer" her friend, the narrator reveals her desire to reconnect with Tracey in a more ethical manner. Not only is the protagonist implying that she is no longer resentful but, more importantly, that she is considering taking an active part in the betterment of her friend's life, essentially disrupting her previous passive role. Furthermore, the fact that the narrator does not reach a pre-established conclusion on what she should actually do to help Tracey, which also includes rejecting her mother's radical idea of adopting Tracey's children, is an important sign that points to the narrator's growth as an autonomous ethical subject. According to hooks (2012: 148) and Lorde (2019: 121), it is only by actively communicating and listening to the other that the subject will be able to transgress social boundaries and learn from the other's individual differences. The narrator knows that she cannot decide for herself what her future actions will be, Tracey must also be a part of such a decision. And while Smith does not reveal the contents of that conversation, she does hint at the possibility of a successful communication by bringing back the element that first united the characters when they were children: dance. By closing the novel with the image of Tracey happily dancing with her children at home, Smith is suggesting that the characters may be able to find a way back to each other, and towards an improved relationship based on an emotional and practical care that may allow Tracey to move beyond her anger.

5. Conclusion

Through these characters' interconnected journeys towards selfhood, I have attempted to bring to light certain affect theories on the potential benefits but also the limits of anger as a source of Black female self-construction and solidarity, which can illuminate the discussion on female identity in Smith's fiction.

Although the author presents anger as a crucial energy that motivates the narrator to assert herself against a society that continues to oppress her, this is simultaneously deemed as insufficient for the shaping of the Black female self, thus revealing a view of anger that is not largely explored in many discourses. In accordance with the works of Lorde (1995) and hooks (1995, 2012), which do underline the social boundaries and limits of this emotion, Smith presents the inefficiency of this emotional state when the individual is confronted with financial precarity. The novel suggests that, without a supportive network —like the one the narrator's mother has through her husband— the subject's anger can only move towards destruction, as is made evident through Tracey's life trajectory.

Furthermore, Smith demonstrates how anger need not necessarily motivate female connection, especially in social contexts where there are unresolved issues. It has been argued that the narrator's animosity towards Tracey and her own mother and the mutual resentment developed between the latter two characters create a significative communicative barrier that prevents the protagonists from connecting with each other across social boundaries. It is only by introducing the complement of care that the narrator, specifically, is able to revitalise her strained female relations and approach a new selfhood that promises to be more personally fulfilling and politically-significant. After the narrator becomes energised on account of her anger, it is the love and compassion she develops for her mother and her friend that finally encourages her to abandon her previous individualistic values and instead adopt a more outward view of the world. The narrator's forgiving attitude towards her mother and her final encounter with Tracey suggest not only an emotional reconnection between the women, but the protagonist's abandonment of her previous shadow self. Finally, this shift from shadow to political agent also seems to suggest a hopeful future for Tracey. Although this is only mentioned in passing, the protagonist's desire to help her friend and the latter's final dancing scene point to a positive change that may enable Tracey to escape her cyclical angered state and maybe even mitigate her social vulnerability. Therefore, the reconciliation between the women is directly equated to the possibility of mutual empowerment.

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UNDERMINING THE CONCEPT OF PARADISE: INTERTEXTUALITY AND STORYTELLING IN ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S PARADISE

SOCAVANDO EL CONCEPTO DEL PARAÍSO: INTERTEXTUALIDAD Y NARRACIÓN EN ABDULRAZAK GURNAH PARADISE

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Abstract

Storytelling and intertextuality feature frequently in Abdulrazak Gurnah's literary works. This paper investigates the role intertextuality and storytelling play in his novel *Paradise*, published in 1994, and shows how they ultimately undermine the very concept of paradise itself. The first section of the paper analyses two intertextual references to Milton that cast doubt on the idea of East Africa as a paradise through their contradictory nature. The second part focuses on the theme of storytelling in the novel at large and, more specifically, in the main character's life, demonstrating that both clashes and correspondences between life and storytelling eventually undercut the main character's idea of paradise.

Keywords: intertextuality, storytelling, Abdulrazak Gurnah, paradise, Milton.

Resumen

Tanto la narración como la intertextualidad aparecen con frecuencia en las obras literarias de Abdulrazak Gurnah. Este articulo investiga el papel que juegan la intertextualidad y la narración en su novela *Paradise*, publicada en 1994, y muestra cómo en última instancia socavan el concepto mismo del paraíso. La primera sección del artículo analiza dos referencias intertextuales con referencia a Milton

que ponen en duda la idea de África Oriental como un paraíso a través de su naturaleza contradictoria. La segunda parte se centra en el tema de narrativa de la novela tanto en general como más específicamente en la vida del personaje principal, demostrando que los choques y las correspondencias entre la vida y la narración eventualmente comprometen la principal idea del paraíso que tiene el personaje.

Palabras clave: intertextualidad, narración, Abdulrazak Gurnah, paraíso, Milton.

1. Introduction

Intertextuality and the theme of storytelling are interesting features of Abdulrazak Gurnah's literary production. Born in Zanzibar and awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2021, Gurnah has written several novels; some of the most renowned are *Paradise, Desertion* and *By the Sea*. For example, *By the Sea* (2001) hinges on the story of two characters and how they sort through past events in order to be finally able to make sense of their present and future. At the beginning of the novel, Saleh Omar, one of the main characters, reveals to the reader the story of how he came into possession of a casket of *ud al qamari*, an expensive perfume: "This is the story of the trader I obtained the ud from. I'll tell it this way, because I no longer know who may be listening" (Gurnah 2022: 16). Aside from characters, stories are also embedded within objects. The casket of *ud* has been justly termed a "*narrative object*", since it "*contains* the stories that issue from it" (Newns 2020: 127, emphasis in original). In addition, in *By the Sea*, there are references to *One Thousand and One Nights* and Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener", which frame the narrative (Steiner 2014: 121). Therefore, storytelling and intertextuality are connected and not only influence the characters' lives by being ways of perceiving the world, but also influence how those lives are recounted.

However, in *Paradise*, published in 1994, intertextuality and storytelling are more intertwined and also more problematic than in other works by this author. Indeed, I claim that both intertextuality and storytelling contribute to questioning the concept of paradise in the novel. To be more precise, intertextuality affects the portrayal of East Africa as a paradise —such as the "colonial fair land/black coast dichotomy" (Deckard 2009: 2794)— whereas storytelling undercuts the main character's paradise —represented by Aziz's house, freedom and love for Amina. Fittingly, storytelling also plays an important role in the ending of the novel.

In the first section of this paper, I will analyse an interesting intertextual reference in *Paradise* by drawing on Jessica Mason's terms and concepts to define intertextuality as outlined in her work *Intertextuality in Practice* (2019).

Intertextuality can be defined as an "(allusive) relationship" between literary texts; it involves reading a text on the basis of its allusions to and differences from the content and structure of other texts (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Aside from ways to determine whether potential intertextual references were wilfully inserted by authors in their works or are merely imagined by readers, Mason presents four kinds of intertextual references: generic unmarked, generic marked, specific unmarked and specific marked (2019: 80). The intertextual reference that will be examined in the first section of this paper is a specific unmarked reference, whose meaning will be explained later. The second part will revolve around storytelling and the ways in which it shapes and sways not only the main character's conception of paradise, but also the denouement of the novel. After briefly underlining the main roles of storytelling in Gurnah's novel, the presence of stories and story-like elements will be brought to the foreground, together with the implications of stories for the main character and his decisions.

2. Contradictory Intertextuality and the Questionable Representation of East Africa as Paradise

The theme of intertextuality in *Paradise* has already been hinted at by Sharae Deckard. Discussing the chapter titles of Gurnah's novel, Deckard states that they evoke the tropes of "*Arabian Nights* and the travel narratives of Burton, Stanley, and Speke" (2009: 2884). In addition, she stresses the fact that in the novel the author interweaves together several intertextual allusions to the *Arabian Nights*, the Alexander Romances, European imperialist travel narratives, Swahili oral chronicles and Islamic marvels literature (Deckard 2009: 2806-2811). However, it is my contention that one of the most striking intertextual references that the author embeds within the plot refers to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In book IV of this famous poem, the description of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden focuses on their physical appearance: "Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,/ Godlike erect, with native honour clad/ In naked majesty seemed lords of all" (Milton 2000: 81). Then, the description zooms in on their differences, which are not merely anatomical, but most importantly moral: "Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;/ For *contemplation* he and *valour* formed,/ For *softness* she and sweet attractive grace" (Milton 2000: 81, my emphasis). What Eve lacks in contemplation, she makes up for in beauty. On the other hand, Adam seems stronger and more skilful at withstanding temptation than she is.

Let us now consider a passage from *Paradise*. Interestingly and maybe not coincidentally, the following excerpt can be found at the very beginning of the novel and is the first image with which readers are presented; hence its importance.

The main character —a young boy called Yusuf— observes two Europeans at the station:

> The man was large, so tall that he had to lower his head to avoid touching the canvas under which he sheltered from the sun. The woman stood further back in the shade, her glistening face partly obscured by two hats. […] She was tall and large too, but differently. (Gurnah 2021: 1)

After the description of their outward appearance and garments —which in *Paradise Lost* are understandably lacking and replaced by 'naked majesty'— the young boy goes on to explain the substantial differences he spots between them, exactly as occurs in Milton's poem: "Where she looked lumpy and malleable, as if capable of taking another shape, he appeared carved out of a single piece of wood" (Gurnah 2021: 1). The similarity between the portrayals is not limited to the fact that both descriptions —from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Gurnah's *Paradise*— begin with the accounts of external traits and then zoom in on the peculiar differences between the man and the woman. In a reversal from the description in *Paradise Lost*, Yusuf outlines their differences by starting from the European 'Eve'. In Milton's account, Eve's depiction is characterised by 'softness', which seems to be echoed both by Yusuf's adjective 'malleable' and the woman's seeming ability to take another shape. On the other hand, Yusuf identifies the man as possibly more unyielding, as suggested by the fact that he seems cut out of a single piece of wood. Similarly, Adam's description conveys a sense of stability and strength in the face of temptation.

One of the trickiest conundrums of intertextuality is concerned with the extent to which intertextual references are imagined by readers or purposefully disseminated by writers. Knowing for certain whether or not an author had a specific intertextual reference in mind can be a daunting task, as Mason maintains:

> Sometimes it is impossible to know definitively whether an intertextual reference is truly present in a Base [namely the text under scrutiny, in this case Gurnah's], or whether a reader has simply perceived something to be a reference to another text which was never intended (by the author) to be so. (2019: 43)

In her work on intertextuality entitled *Intertextuality in Practice*, Jessica Mason identifies four kinds of intertextual references that manifest in practice, namely generic unmarked, generic marked, specific unmarked and specific marked (2019: 80). While generic unmarked intertextual references clearly refer to other narratives without specifying an established group or genre of texts, generic marked intertextual references indicate a generic group of narratives that is an established genre or category of texts (80, 81). In contrast, specific marked intertextual references refer to one narrative in particular and use an established title (85). Adopting Mason's terminology, I would contend that the intertextual reference

linking together *Paradise* and *Paradise Lost* is a specific unmarked reference — markedness being the attachment of a title or a genre label to the intertextual reference (79). Indeed, specific unmarked references "indicate one narrative in particular, however, it is not marked by title and must therefore be recognised as an intertextual reference" (82-83). Although the description of the two Europeans seems to hint at Milton's *Paradise Lost*, no specific title or genre label of the hypotext features in the Base. Of course, it could certainly be that Gurnah had in mind the biblical episode rather than Milton's poem. In that case, the hypotext would be the Bible itself or, to be more precise, the Book of Genesis. Nevertheless, I am more inclined to think that the reference dovetails with Milton's poem for a series of reasons which will be presented below.

As Mason acknowledges, it is extremely difficult to discern intertextual references for which it is possible that the author has a narrative schema (2019: 120) — namely "a reader's version of a narrative" stored in the so-called "*mental archive*" (69, 72, emphasis in original). The knowledge of an author can be enlightening when determining hypothetical intertextual references in his or her works (124). The fact that Abdulrazak Gurnah is aware of the existence of *Paradise Lost* can be said to be certain, not only because it is a cornerstone of English literature, but also because the writer was Professor of English and Postcolonial Literatures at the University of Kent ("Nobel Literature Prize 2021"). In order to try to ascertain whether an intertextual reference is purposefully woven in by the author or merely made by the reader, Mason puts forward two solutions. One consists of identifying a high or specific level of points of contact between the features in the Base —in this case *Paradise*— and those in the potential hypotext (Mason 2019: 121), which has been outlined above. Similarity of features and structure of description bring together the two Europeans and Milton's characters. Not to mention the fact that, being the first image with which readers are presented, the depictions of the Europeans are brought to the foreground and emphasised, thus strengthening the hypothesis of an important intertextual reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost* purposefully embedded within them.

Furthermore, it ought to be pointed out that there is evidence underlining the author's appreciation of intertextuality and, therefore, the likelihood of an intertextual reference further takes shape. Indeed, in an interview, Gurnah admitted his fondness for intertextuality: "That recognition of intertextualities to some extent reintroduces us to each other as readers. We are reading the same thing, and this gives a sense of a shared textuality, and I think that's pleasing, just in itself" (in Steiner 2013: 166). This supports the idea that intertextual references can be expected to punctuate, or at least to be present in, his novels.

Another solution recommended by Mason to ascertain the purposefulness of an intertextual reference "is historiographical exploration: is there any evidence in the author's other textual traces that confirm the presence of the reference?" (2019: 120). In Gurnah's novel there are indeed other interesting references which are likely to hark back to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. According to Deckard, the very title of the novel echoes "Milton's epic of loss and expulsion" (2009: 2797). While this is certainly true, an important passage could be quoted in order to provide further supporting evidence for this claim. Whilst some merchants are talking about Europeans, one of them makes a striking observation: "One of the traders swore that he had seen a European fall down dead once and another one come and breathe life back into him. He had seen *snakes* do that too" (Gurnah 2021: 72, emphasis added). Unlike the previous intertextual reference to Adam and Eve's description, in this case the reference is first alluded to in this excerpt and then clearly made more explicit by another character who wonders: "What was he trying to say? That Europeans are really snakes in disguise?" (Gurnah 2021: 73). The connection between *Paradise Lost* and snakes seems far too obvious and further buttresses the presence of a connection between the description of the Europeans and the portrayal of Adam and Eve. Yet, it may appear puzzling that the Europeans are simultaneously depicted as Adam and Eve and as snakes. One might say that this is a matter of perspective: young Yusuf's experience of Europeans is understandably different from that of a trader who hears about their arrival and the mysterious stories connected to them.

Nevertheless, I would argue that the two representations of the Europeans are conflicting for a reason. Abdulrazak Gurnah stated that, "Because there is this shared textuality, it means you can gesture towards another text and it enriches this one, but also, I think, enriches the reader's understanding of what's going on there" (in Steiner 2013: 166). Intertextuality enriches the Base but can also open up powerful reflections that are centred around the connection between the two texts. As a result, the contradictory representations of Europeans connected to *Paradise Lost* could have a meaning exceeding mere intertextuality. Deckard has highlighted that the novel employs the theme of paradise so as to disrupt East Africa's function as a "gold-land" in both European and Swahili imaginaries (2009: 2794). Yet, I claim that the undermining of that conception is especially brought about by the two above-mentioned intertextual references to *Paradise Lost* and their contradiction.

In his ground-breaking work *Intertextuality*, Graham Allen discusses Harold Bloom and his interest in Romantic poems and their imitation of Milton:

> To be 'strong poets', to employ Bloom's combative terminology, new poets must do two things: they must rewrite the precursor's poems, and in that very act they must

> defend themselves against the knowledge that they are merely involved in the process of rewriting, or what Bloom calls misreading. (2006: 135)

Using intertextuality in a new way in order to highlight contradictions or voice the perceptions and conditions of previously voiceless characters has been an extremely eye-opening tenet of postcolonial literature. Works such as *Jack Maggs* by Peter Carey, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys and *Foe* by J.M. Coetzee are perfect examples of how intertextuality can be used to creatively express new themes, points of view and radically alter the perspective of the original text. In a similar vein, *Paradise* problematises the canonical idea of paradise imbued in East Africa. In Gurnah's novel, paradise is both directly and indirectly evoked. Direct mentions of it are made by Aziz, who muses that the lands they are travelling through have paradise-like traits. This assumption is quickly undermined by the tragic and hostile events befalling the caravan while venturing into the tropical interior, which turns the paradisiac landscape into an "infernalized" one (Deckard 2009: 2865).

In terms of indirect references, it can be observed that many characters have left behind an idyllic condition that they regret and keep nostalgically cultivating in their minds. Commenting on the Omani plantation economy, the Arab mercantile empire and colonial capitalism, Deckard insightfully states that the different visions of paradise sought by characters are revealed as "destructive" and "mystifying the violence of exploitative commerce" (2009: 2874). Added to these examples, there are other disrupted paradises linked to characters that are brought to the foreground throughout the development of the plot. A good example thereof is the story of Mohammed, a beggar who tells Yusuf about his past:

> He had once been well off, he said, with watered land and some animals, and a mother who loved him. During the day he worked his sweet land to the utmost of his strength and endurance, and in the evening he sat with his mother while she sang God's praises and told him fabulous stories of the great world. (Gurnah 2021: 10)

However, such a blissful life was destroyed by Mohammed's pursuit of the weed. Other stories similar to this soon abound. Yusuf's father had married his first wife for love and eventually eloped with her despite her family's fierce objection to the marriage. After eight years, the woman decided to leave with her children for her birthplace with the aim of visiting her family and reconciling with them: "The dhow they travelled in was called *Jicho*, the Eye. It was never seen again after it left Bagamoyo […] He [Yusuf] knew that the memories caused his father pain and stirred him into great rages" (Gurnah 2021: 14-15, emphasis in original). To this list of marred or regretted paradises we could add Hamid's wife and her love for her birthplace, Lamu —"little short of perfection in her eyes" (Gurnah 2021: 63)— and the merchant Hussein's love for his country of origin, Zanzibar. Before getting married to Aziz, even Amina had been happy in her childhood. Despite the

harrowing fact that she was kidnapped from her parents, the young girl was rescued by Khalil's father. She found a caring foster family and an attentive adoptive brother in Khalil. Yet, this bliss was brought to a halt by the arrival of Mohammed Abdalla, who took the two siblings away from their family as *rehani* (indentured slave) for Aziz.

Presented with this series of collapsed paradises, readers quickly dismiss the simplistic conception of East Africa as an idyllic paradise. As Deckard states, contemporary uses of paradise and anti-paradise motifs by postcolonial African writers have been mainly "ironic, melancholy, or calumniatory" (2009: 2758). In this case, the very use of the paradise theme undermines it. The two clashing Miltonian references —Europeans simultaneously as Adam and Eve and as the snake— further show the insubstantiality and meaninglessness of such superficial representation. Rather than buttressing and one-sidedly embracing the idea of European colonisers as inherently evil —like corrupting snakes in a wonderful garden— Gurnah problematises the relationship between locals and Europeans. When Aziz and his caravan are unjustly deprived of their goods by the sultan Chatu, the intervention of a group of *askaris* and their European officer proves decisive for their release and the return of their goods. However, in so doing, the European actively interferes and "suppresses the negotiations between the traders and chief" (Deckard 2009: 2931); hence the perception of the officer as an "uninvited outsider" (Hodapp 2015: 97). At the same time, though, the arrival of a group of *askaris* will prove paramount for the ending of the novel and liberating for Yusuf's life.

In conclusion, Europeans are neither Adam and Eve nor snakes, exactly like East Africa is neither paradise nor hell in Gurnah's novel. The clashing intertextual references to Milton's *Paradise Lost* dispel simplistic and idyllic visions of East Africa. Having analysed the questioning of the idea of East Africa as a paradise in the locals' and colonisers' view, the second section of this paper will attempt to outline the undermining of Yusuf's idea of paradise.

3. Storytelling, Stories and Yusuf's Paradise

Paradise has been shown to have ties with the genre of the Bildungsroman (Deckard 2009: 2806; Berman 2023: 52), just as happens to a certain extent in Gurnah's novel *Gravel Heart* (Woods 2021). When Yusuf starts a new life because Aziz takes him away from his family as *rehani* (indentured slave), an image of birth is described, which is connected to his new life and changed condition, since "he dreamt that he saw his cowardice glimmering in moonlight, covered in the slime of its afterbirth. He knew it was his cowardice because someone standing in the

shadows told him so, and he himself saw it breathing" (Gurnah 2021: 19). Rather than a promising beginning foreshadowing his moral formation and improvement, Yusuf's changed condition as *rehani* throws forth references to cowardice which also feature at the very ending of the novel, thus creating circularity. Possibly introduced by the image of his newly-born cowardice, Yusuf's idea of paradise — intended not only as Aziz's house with its verdant garden, but also future happiness with Amina and the chance of living a free life— is undermined by his tendency to rely on storytelling to understand the surrounding world and his own life.

In Deckard's words, *Paradise* is infused with "the polyphonous literary forms of the pre-colonial Swahili coast" (2009: 2806) and storytelling certainly plays a crucial role in the novel. As a matter of fact, references to proverbs, the choice of a narrator who coincides with the narrating voice and the presence of magic within reality characterise African literature in English, in that it is influenced by the oral tradition (Bertinetti 2010: 314). Further ties between oral narratives and African literature are present, as Tanure Ojaide's words suggest: "Traditionally, African literature is an informal evening fire-side school in which elders and parents teach the young ones ethics, morality, and the culture of the community" (1992: 44). As such, it is dotted with folktales, myths and legends which enrich it with motifs and themes (Ojaide 1992: 50). As far as the presence of storytelling is concerned, *Paradise* is no exception; what is extraordinary, though, is how storytelling and stories are used in the novel. Deckard maintains that: "Fantasy becomes the medium through which the characters attempt to assimilate the unknown, with disastrous consequences for the protagonist" (2009: 2820). While this is true, I believe that stories undermine Yusuf's idea of paradise specifically by showing the marked contrast between narrative and stark reality. However, as will be shown, even when stories can be connected to life, they are of no avail for the main character, but rather worsen the perception of his condition.

Before analysing how storytelling questions the idea of paradise for the main character, it is necessary to briefly outline the main functions of storytelling in the novel. While discussing Celati and storytelling, Patrick Ryan points out that the storyteller must be rooted in a socio-cultural physical reality, rather than transported into a reality especially built for storytelling (2008: 68). This is the kind of storytelling taking place between the porters of Aziz's caravan and the traders who gather at Hamid's house, who all share the same situation and are not distinct from the reality they experience while performing storytelling. Interestingly, many of their stories revolve around Europeans and their unbelievable characteristics: they are said to have poisonous spit, wear metal clothes, apparently they can be killed only by being stabbed under their left armpits and can go without sleep or water for days. This use of storytelling is a means by which people can reach an

understanding of changes —in this case the arrival of the Europeans— or at least approach what they do not know or what scares them. As a matter of fact, according to Ryan, storytelling affects how people think of and experience physical, cultural and social environments (2008: 66). An Indian friend of Hamid's criticises these representations of Europeans grounded in impressionistic stories: "Learn who they are, then. What do you know about them apart from these stories about snakes and men eating metal? Do you know their language, their stories? So then how can you learn to cope with them?" (Gurnah 2021: 87). His words might foreshadow an important episode in the novel where it is precisely the hyperbolic stories about the Europeans that spur Chatu to obey the European officer and return the goods he has stolen from Aziz: "Chatu looked round the encampment, undecided what to do. Suddenly the European stood up and stretched. 'Can he eat metal?' Chatu asked" (Gurnah 2021: 171).

Forging and cementing communities is another meaningful role of storytelling. As a matter of fact, stories are entwined with values and customs that can be transmitted to future generations. In line with this, Jack Zipes states: "As a group of people survives in a particular region, they continually cultivate their own relevant customs through different modes of storytelling to stabilize their lives and to transmit their values to the young so the belief system will continue" (2005: 7). Hinging upon Zanzibar and its beauty, Hussein's use of storytelling cannot be said to forge communities, but it certainly cements afresh the sense of belonging and connection to his birthplace. As Ryan points out, storytelling also arises from the emotional needs of participants and their contexts (2008: 69). In tune with this, Hussein's stories about Zanzibar are defined as a need: "When he had relieved himself of his need, they talked business" (Gurnah 2021: 82).

The very beginning of the novel is intriguing if observed from a storytelling perspective. Indeed, it opens with the words "The boy first" (Gurnah 2021: 1). This opening expression seems a peculiar way of beginning a novel and it undoubtedly puts the emphasis on 'the boy'. These words may be used to evoke the beginning of a story, as if Gurnah were relating the story of Yusuf and his life to the readers as a storyteller. Such interpretation gains more support if one considers that the author's name figures in the plot. Abdulrazak is indeed a traveller who recounted and praised the beauty of Herat and its stunning gardens. James Hodapp put forward the idea that, in *Paradise*, Gurnah pursues the project of "reimaging and redeploying Swahili texts […] by adding the dimension of interiority" (2015: 98). Given the attention paid to Yusuf's thoughts and development in the novel —emphasised through the use of a third-person omniscient narrator (Berman 2023: 53)— this perspective is extremely interesting and can be applied to the representation of the main character. Indeed, it is as if

Gurnah were recounting the boy's story by adding the introspection lacking in more canonical tales. It can be said, then, that Yusuf's life becomes 'storytold'.

However, it is not only the beginning of the novel that hints at a possible 'storytold' reading of Yusuf's life. As a matter of fact, references to fairy tale motifs and myths pepper the plot and contribute to embellishing the life of the character by magnificent or ironic comparison. Upon leaving with Aziz for a journey, Yusuf is told by Khalil: "You're part of that savage country up there. What are you afraid of? You'll enjoy yourself. Just tell them you're one of their princes coming home to find a wife" (Gurnah 2021: 52). Interestingly, the reference to princes is again brought up by Hamid, who wonders about the life Khalil and Yusuf have been leading until then in the merchant's house: "You and Khalil must have been like young princes, spoiled like anything" (70). After returning in possession of their stolen goods through the intervention of the officer of a group of *askaris*, Aziz's men "made up a song about Chatu the python which had been swallowed by a European jinn with hair growing out of his ears" (172). In keeping with stories and their characteristics, references to princesses are not wanting: Khalil mockingly tells Yusuf that it is highly unlikely that he will ever marry a princess and that therefore he should put up with the women he meets at the shop: "Perhaps one day a slim and beautiful princess from Persia will come to the shop and invite you to her palace" (32).

Most importantly, it is Yusuf himself who longs to hear stories and encase the reality he experiences within them. To him, stories may seem to provide a blueprint for numerous situations and he therefore draws on them to understand the surrounding world. In this regard, his reaction upon hearing from Khalil about the Mistress's madness is particularly illuminating:

> The crazy old woman in the house did not surprise him at all. It was exactly as it would have been in the stories his mother used to tell him. In those stories the craziness would have been because of love gone wrong, or bewitchment in order to steal an inheritance, or unfulfilled revenge. Nothing could be done about the craziness until matters had been put right, until the curse had been lifted. He wanted to say that to Khalil. Don't worry about it so much, it will all be put right before the story ends. (Gurnah 2021: 38)

Not only does Yusuf associate reality with stories, he even intermingles and switches them, so that life becomes a story and has a fully-fledged denouement. Before the ending, things will necessarily fall into place and the madness will be healed. Although Yusuf keeps to himself his thoughts on the fairy-tale-like traits of the story of the mad Mistress, Khalil —who may be seen as Yusuf's foil— comes to understand his view of the world and, since he is worried about him, spells out that "This is not a fairy tale. There are still many things here you don't understand"

(215). The shopkeeper had already acknowledged Yusuf's eagerness to hear stories and rebuked him: "Can't I get any rest from you? All you want is stories" (42). Ever practical, Khalil is well aware that it is highly unlikely that, as a shopkeeper, he will end up marrying a beautiful princess. When he reveals to Yusuf that he has had a relationship with an older woman who is a habitual customer at the shop, Khalil justifies his behaviour by emphasising his situation and the limited prospects he has. Upon realising that Yusuf cannot understand because of his story-like frame of understanding, the shopkeeper gives up: "Never mind, keep yourself pure for your princess" (200). Added to this, Yusuf is "seduced by the stories of paradise he hears on his journey into the interior" (Deckard 2009: 2801). Yet, Deckard underlines that those tales prove to be mere artificial paradises (2801).

Aside from Yusuf's own tendency to rely on stories, the novel itself introduces a story that shares noticeable similarities with the boy's love for Amina, Aziz's younger wife and Khalil's sister. At the end of the journey to the interior, Simba Mwene —an overseer— relates the story of a jinn who kidnaps a princess, keeps her in the forest in an underground cellar supplied with every comfort and comes to visit her every ten days. After falling in love with a woodcutter who found her prison by chance, the princess starts a secret relationship with him and eventually her lover asks her to elope with him, which she refuses to do because the jinn would easily find them. Unfortunately, the two star-crossed lovers are discovered and the jinn's revenge is terrible: the princess is beheaded and the woodcutter is turned into an ape. Although it seems unlikely to have ties with Yusuf's life, the story might act as a blueprint for his impossible love story with Amina. After his frequent visits to the Mistress and Amina have been discovered, Yusuf soon wonders how Aziz will behave towards him: "Would he turn him into an ape and send him to the summit of a barren mountain as the jinn had treated the woodcutter?" (Gurnah 2021: 238). Again, his tendency to associate life and stories is evidenced by his remarks; however, this story shares numerous similarities with reality rather than being different from it. Like the imprisoned princess, Amina is kept in Aziz's house in luxury, while Yusuf becomes aware of Amina's existence completely by chance. In both accounts, a proposal of elopement is made and refused because of the disastrous consequences it would bring upon the lovers. It is clear that Yusuf is not turned into an ape by Aziz, yet his subordinate condition to the merchant is as frustrating as the woodcutter's animal transformation.

Other story-like elements are disseminated throughout the plot of the novel. A good example of this is Yusuf's mother's opinion of offering food to the destitute mendicants who visit their home. Although Yusuf cannot see the point in feeding the beggars, she is adamant about helping them, since "virtue was its own reward"

(Gurnah 2021: 9) —which can be considered the moral of a story. Moreover, there is a recurring expression that sounds particularly story-like, especially because it is repeated three times by different characters and perspectives as the plot unfurls. When the beggar Mohammed wants to warn Yusuf to stay away from the weed, he pleads with him: "Learn from my terrible example, my little friend" (10). Further on in the novel, Mohammed's words are echoed again, although in a different context. Upon discovering that Yusuf does not know how to read, Hamid and his wife Maimuna are consternated and point him out to their children: "Learn from the sight he presents to us" (100). Finally, Yusuf is advised by Mohammed Abdalla to learn from Aziz, because "he sees the world as it is. And it is a cruel bad place, you know that. Learn from him!" (186). Although the expression is used in different situations, the repeated imperative 'learn' might point to the boy's inexperience. As a consequence, it may allude to the fact that things are not like Yusuf understands them, which will prove true as far as his subordinate condition as *rehani* and as far as Aziz and Amina are concerned.

As a matter of fact, underlining the fact that stories are extremely multi-layered and therefore a source of reading adventure, Gurnah stated in an interview that the adult version of a story is more complicated than how one understood it as a child (in "I Learned to Have Pleasure in Reading Simply because I Love Stories"). Little by little, Yusuf develops the awareness that reality and stories do not always dovetail. Life proves much harsher than fairy tales and undercuts idealised notions of paradise. Yusuf's sojourn with Hamid is already an eye-opener for the young boy: used to Aziz's lush garden, he is let down by the arid land where Hamid lives. Maimuna replies ironically that the boy can build them a beautiful garden replete with fountains and songbirds; then she adds: "I hope you'll also hang mirrors on trees as in ancient gardens, to catch the light and see the birds faint as they catch sight of their beautiful reflections" (Gurnah 2021: 67). Needless to say, in Aziz's garden mirrors are present and, according to Deckard, the merchant's walled courtyard with fruit-laden trees and geometric design symbolises paradise (2009: 2801). Therefore, Maimuna's description of a verdant garden introduces a peerless, unreachable "garden of paradise" (Gurnah 2021: 66) —further informed by a merchant's story about the stunning gardens in Herat and Hamid's reflections on paradise— which finds no correspondence in the dry landscape of the bush. As Hamid tells Yusuf: "You'll have to get used to the bushes and snakes, and just keep dreaming about your garden of paradise, until your uncle comes back for you" (68).

However, during the second journey with Aziz, reality manifests itself even more harshly and traumatically. During the inland journey, the merchant muses on the paradise-like features of the lands they are crossing and stresses that "it fills you

with longing. So pure and bright. You may be tempted to think that its inhabitants know neither sickness nor ageing. And their days are filled with contentment and a search for wisdom" (Gurnah 2021: 114-115). Instead, as Deckard highlighted (2009: 2865), those lands prove to be deadly for many porters and nature is far from idyllic, but rather teeming with biting insects. Other disconcerting sights punctuate the journey and crush the association of the surrounding lands with paradise. Upon reaching a village that has been raided by a warrior people, the caravan comes across several unburied corpses. On the journey, fights soon break out between the porters. Up to this point, it could be said that the clash between stories about paradise and reality further casts doubt on the image of East Africa as a paradise, as the references to Milton do. Yet, the journeys in which Yusuf participates pave the way for his own understanding of his situation and its far from paradise-like features. Most interestingly, Yusuf's vision of Aziz starts to change. While staying with Hamid, Yusuf witnesses a conversation between him and some of his friends who are outraged by Aziz's reputation: "'Do you know what I've heard about him, your partner?' […] 'That if his partners cannot pay up, he takes their sons and daughters as rehani. This is like in the days of slavery. It is not the way honourable people should conduct themselves'" (Gurnah 2021: 88-89). The comparison with slavery is as striking as these remarks are stinging, since Yusuf himself was taken as *rehani* by the merchant.

In addition to this, another dark side of Aziz's behaviour is revealed when Yusuf is struck by a sudden realisation regarding two porters who had been wounded in the previous journey and were therefore left to the care of some townspeople: "The straggling line of houses along the lakeside, and the sweet stench of rotting fish which reached them even at the town's edges, gave that explanation a different meaning. […] he knew with shamed certainty that the two men had been abandoned here" (Gurnah 2021: 136). Notwithstanding these mishaps, Yusuf keeps making reference to the paradise discourse while travelling, as evidenced by his comparison of the red cliffs encountered while drawing near to Chatu's lands with the gates granting access to paradise. However, it soon becomes evident that the lands they are going to cross bear no resemblance to an idyllic place. Indeed, their inhabitants' behaviour triggers powerful reflections on justice, another fundamental theme in the undermining of Yusuf's idea of paradise. As Zipes pinpoints, fairy tales are more truthful than realistic stories because they are imbued with a sense of social justice that cannot be found in societies (2019: 248). As a matter of fact, the attack on the caravan by Chatu's people and the mistreatment Aziz's men are subjected to is an episode that primes thought-provoking reflections on justice. Having deprived the caravan of their goods because he had been cheated by another group of merchants before, the sultan says: "What has brought you here all the way from your home? A search for justice? […] then you have

found it. I am taking your goods so I can give justice to my people for the goods they lost to your brother" (Gurnah 2021: 165).

Another unsettling notion is paired with the shattered concept of justice. Because of the journey to the interior, *Paradise* may be compared to *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad. It has been stated that this reading of *Paradise* and other novels presenting the trope of the journey makes them "ossified around colonial texts of journeys to the interior" (Hodapp 2015: 90). While this is certainly a good and valid point, it should be noted that in this case a parallel between the two works could prove fruitful, up to a point. According to J. U. Jacobs, the section of *Paradise* entitled "The Grove of Desire" is a reference to both Uncle Aziz's paradise-like garden and to the grove of death at the Company's Outer Station in *Heart of Darkness* (2009: 86). Pietro Deandrea brought to the foreground other intriguing connections between the two works which also include Yusuf's name; he is a "namesake of Conrad's" (2009: 175). In his opinion, the "god-like aura" that hovers over the Germans —who are credited with supernatural powers— echoes Kurtz's "supernatural reputation" among the natives in *Heart of Darkness* (Deandrea 2009: 175). Furthermore, *Paradise* shows a multi-layered and varied colonial society, which is redolent of a criticism that is often levelled at Conrad, namely that of describing the natives as an undifferentiated body of people (Deandrea 2009: 175). Indeed, *Paradise* has been defined as the reversal of *Heart of Darkness* from the perspective of East Africa (Concilio and Deandrea 2020: 666). In addition, in both works there is a terrible revelation awaiting the main characters. While Kurtz's anguished cry "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad 2007: 86) is extremely renowned, Yusuf is presented with a strikingly similar revelation on human nature, which is put forward by Aziz. Upon discovering the aforementioned numerous dead, unburied bodies of locals, Aziz's men decide to dig a grave for them: "Yusuf, go with them and see how base and foolish is the nature of men" (Gurnah 2021: 128). This expression is uttered again further on in the plot by the merchant, who has discovered that Yusuf has been paying visits to the Mistress and Amina: "Did I not tell you that our natures are base?" (Gurnah 2021: 239) —which can actually apply to many people: Yusuf's potentially ill-intended visits, the Mistress's calumny, and also Aziz's behaviour towards Amina, Khalil and Yusuf. Therefore, during the journey, Yusuf comes to realise that human nature is base and vile, a discovery which clashes with his mother's aforementioned opinion on virtue.

While the lack of correspondence between reality and stories, or at least story patterns and the episodes befalling him, is brought into focus by the inland journey, Yusuf's return to Aziz's house proves decisive in his realisation of the inadequacy of stories. Paradoxically, his doomed love for Amina perfectly coincides with the story of the woodcutter and the princess. However, such a reading of

reality proves traumatic because it only enhances the sense of paralysis that Yusuf feels. As happens to the woodcutter, it is clear to him that he cannot marry Amina and that he is going to end up like Khalil and serve the merchant all his life, with no possibility of breaking his shackles. There is no escaping the subordinate condition deriving from his ties to Aziz; the merchant's dependants are "de facto trapped, with no realistic alternative for a different life" (Berman 2023: 53). As Amina strikingly reveals to Yusuf: "If there is Hell on earth, then it is here" (Gurnah 2021: 228). Therefore, what the boy considered paradise turns out to be rather hellish.

It is at this crucial moment of awakening and revelation that a group of *askaris* reaches the village. It has been asserted that "the Europeans make significant appearance only at the end" (Sarvan 1995: 209). While I am not totally of this opinion —the Miltonic intertextual parallel between Adam and Eve and the Europeans features at the very beginning of the novel— it can be said that the presence of Europeans intensifies as the plot progresses and culminates in the arrival of the *askaris*. Khalil and Yusuf quickly close the shop and spy the face of the officer of the *askaris* from the cracks between the boards. The following passage is particularly important for its implications: "The German officer rose to his feet and walked to the edge of the terrace, his hands clasped together behind his back. *Gog and Magog*, Khalil whispered in Yusuf's ear" (Gurnah 2021: 246, emphasis in original). Gog and Magog are highly meaningful. Indeed, they are said to be brutes living at the edges of the world, where they used to ravage the lands of their neighbours and who know no language. In order to keep them outside the world, a wall was built, which "marks the edge of the world. Beyond that live barbarians and demons" (42). In Yusuf's troubled, paralysed personal situation, the two creatures, and the officer to whom they are compared, may be seen as exemplifying the difference between what is and what could be, between what will happen and what may happen. The constant clash between stories and reality might spur the boy to change his mind and perspectives, to run away with the soldiers and overcome the wall between a paralysed story-like situation and a reality open to changes for him.

In this sense, it is indicative that he reflects on his cowardice before darting off towards the column of leaving *askaris*. As a matter of fact, in the novel the reference to his cowardice figures two times: at the beginning of his life as *rehani* with Aziz and at the end of the novel. The fact that he picks up on that thought again not only creates a circular structure, but may also announce the end of his life as Aziz's subordinate and, therefore, a re-birth: "He saw again his cowardice glimmering in its afterbirth in the moonlight […]. Now […] he thought he knew what it would grow into. […]. He glanced round quickly and

then ran after the column with smarting eyes" (Gurnah 2021: 247). Therefore, I agree with Nina Berman when she contends that Yusuf's decision to join the *askaris* may have given him agency and led to a potential improvement of his condition (2023: 52).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, in *Paradise* both intertextual references to Milton and storytelling undermine the concept of paradise. The contradictory Miltonian representations of Europeans undercut the image of East Africa as a paradise because they contradictorily associate the Europeans with both Adam and Eve and the snake. In a similar vein, the contradiction ensuing from Yusuf's tendency to encase his life within stories or story-like motifs leads to the questioning of his idea of paradise, involving Aziz's house, personal freedom and Amina. While the journey to the interior and its harshness provide insights into human nature and the sense of justice, his encounter with Amina proves to be in tune with the story of the jinn and the princess.

However, such a story pattern, albeit being similar to reality, only results in a blocked condition which Yusuf can neither alter nor escape, until he takes the radical decision to abandon the merchant's house and join the *askaris.* As a result, in Gurnah's novel intertextuality and storytelling are intertwined and entail numerous effects, such as opening up new frames of thought, offering alternative perspectives and dispelling simplistic conceptions. Interestingly, both intertextuality and storytelling involve narratives whose creative power, in this case, undercuts assumptions rather than strengthening them. Aside from offering a potential reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the interesting use of intertextuality in *Paradise* contributes to spurring reflections on the meaning and traits of this literary device in postcolonial literature.

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Reviews

LATINIDAD AT THE CROSSROADS. INSIGHTS INTO LATINX IDENTITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Amanda Ellen Gerke and Luisa María González Rodríguez, eds.
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At the intersection of literary and socio-political criticism, *Latinidad at the Crossroads: Insights into Latinx Identity in the Twenty-First Century* (2021) explores the building process of a self-assigned, rather than a US-imposed Latinx identity, which reflects its multifaceted and constantly changing essence, as well as its crucial oscillations between sameness and difference, solidarity and individuality. In this vein, the volume starts with an overview by the editors, Amanda Ellen Gerke and Luisa María González Rodríguez, of the evolution of the terms used to describe the Latinx community through the years, proving that ethnic tags are socially constructed and are therefore subjected to an ever-changing communal and individual negotiation for inclusion and distinctiveness at the same time. Chicano/a were the first terms used, but due to their Mexi-centric conception and the clear European echoes of concepts like Hispanic, they were substituted by Latino/a. Only lately the terms Latin@, Latinx, and Afro-Latinx have started to be used.

Focusing on US Afro-Latinidad, and particularly on Afro-Latinas, is for sure one of the strengths of this volume. This Afro-diasporic approach is made explicit from the introduction —where the Afro-Latinx community's central claims and a poem by the Afro-Latina Sandra Maria Esteves are insightfully discussed— to chapters 3 and 5 by González Rodríguez and Esther Álvarez López, respectively. To date, only Jiménez Román and Flores' *The Afro-Latin@ Reader* (2010), Moreno Vega,

Modestin and Alba's *Women Warriors of the Afro-Latin Diaspora* (2012), Richardson's *The Afro-Latin@ Experience in Contemporary American Literature* (2016), Rivera-Rideau, Jones and Paschel's *Afro-Latin@s in Movement: Critical Approaches to Blackness and Transnationalism in the Americas* (2016), Fennell's *Wild Tongues Can't Be Tamed* (2021) and a few other authors have addressed US Afro-Latinxs' experience and literature.[1] This is a developing field in the United States, and almost inexistent in Spain, with the exception of scholars such as Liamar Durán-Almarza and her research (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013) on Josefina Báez and Chiqui Vicioso. In this sense, González Rodríguez and Álvarez López continue to develop this field by addressing a new generation of Afro-Latina authors who are still neglected by academia, namely the contemporaries Raquel Cepeda, Jasmine Méndez, Elizabeth Acevedo, Ariana Brown and Mayda del Valle.

Latinidad at the Crossroads does not only represent an important diversification of Latinx studies in terms of race and gender, but also in terms of nationalities. Traditionally Chicanxs, but also Puerto Ricans and Cubans due to their relationship with the United States —as US citizens and refugees from a Communist country, respectively— have been very present in US society and, thus, have hogged academic attention. However, as Fernando Aquino in Chapter 4, Jorge Duany (2008, 2011) and Silvio Torres-Saillant (1999, 2017) have claimed, since the 1970s Dominican migration has been increasing to form a massive presence, especially in New York. In this vein, by addressing the Dominican population in three out of the seven contributions (chapters 3, 4, and 5) *Latinidad at the Crossroads* responds to the growing importance of this subgroup within the US contemporary Latinx community and to its critical neglect in Latinx studies.

In Chapter 3, "Digging through the Past to Reconcile Race and Latinx Identity in Dominican-American Women's Memoirs", González Rodríguez explores the bildungsroman/travel autobiographies of two US Afro-Dominicans, Méndez's *Island of Dreams* (2013) and Cepeda's *Bird of Paradise* (2013). Through these literal and metaphorical trips, the authors negotiate a multifaceted identity and a transnational belonging that challenges their enforced "either-or" position —not only within the Dominican-American disjunctive, common to all Latinxs, but also within the Black-Latinx one, specific to the Afro-Latinx community, since in the US these are mutually exclusive categories.

In "Dominicans and the Political Realm of Latinidad in New York City", Aquino focuses on the extraordinary progress in winning New York City elections that Dominicans have made in the last three decades. What is especially interesting about Aquino's analysis is how Dominicans negotiate their identities and emphasize their articulation of a context-dependent national or a pan-ethnic identity to assure

their political success. While in Dominican-centered neighborhoods like Washington Heights, they stress their nationality, in Latinx-diverse boroughs like Queens or Brooklyn, they accept a pan-Latino identity. Thus, although identification choices need to be made within the boundaries of US social categories which are different to those in Latin America, this chapter shows that arriving groups still have some flexibility in their negotiations and that identities are highly situational and un-fixed.

In the last chapter addressing the Dominican community, "Identity Decolonization and Cosmopolitanism in (Afro)Latina Artists' Spoken Word Performances", Álvarez López analyses the performances of Elizabeth Acevedo (Dominican), Ariana Brown (Mexican), Mayda del Valle (Puerto Rican-Cuban) and Amalia Ortiz (Texan) to underline narratives, and particularly of spoken poetry, as sites of vindication and self-representation. Apart from honoring the Nuyorican tradition, performing implies a public negotiation and contestation of traditional notions about Latinx identity, as well as an epistemological decolonization since the embodied and situational essence of discourse, which is always articulated from a specific situation (time, place, race, gender, etc.), is clearly made visible through embodied performance. In this vein, this chapter, like the third one, challenges Latinx traditional ideas regarding race and gender, even if this means rebelling against their own cultural and familial affiliations.

Latinidad at the Crossroads also addresses the now canonical Chicanx studies in chapters 2, 7, and 8. In the second chapter of this volume, "Seismic Shifts in Chicano/a Literature Leading into the Twenty-First Century", Francisco A. Lomelí provides a state of the art review of Chicanx literature going from the Chicano Renaissance and its Spanglish and barrio-centric features, passing through the Chicano Postmodern Generation of the 1980s with renowned Chicana artists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga or Sandra Cisneros who explored dissident sexuality and genre blending, to the seismic shift of queer writing in the 1990s. Lomelí also discusses the new directions of Chicanx literature including transnational, non-socio-political, and postmodern writing, which blends low and high art.

As suggested by the titles of chapters 7, "Revisiting la Frontera: Consuelo Jiménez Underwood and Ana Teresa Fernández", and 8, "Border and Immigration: Revisiting Canonical Chicano Literature under Trump's Regime", the volume reconsiders the border in performative and constructivist terms. In this light, José Antonio Gurpegui again blurs the boundaries between literature, politics and socio-culture in his analysis of authors such as Tomás Rivera, Raymond Barrios, Alejandro Morales, Oscar Zeta Acosta and Miguel Méndez. Against Trump's attempt at Mexicanizing any immigrant of Hispanic origin, Gurpegui's goal is to revisit

canonical Chicano literature on the basis of the border history from the McCarran-Walter Act (1965, 1976), passing through the Simpson-Rodino bill (1986), operations such as Bloqueo (1993), Guardian (1994), Salvaguarda (1995) and Río Grande (1997) in the 1990s, to Trump's politics. Gurpegui also states that current Latinx literature's aim to reflect characters' search for identity does not mean distancing itself from social denunciation/activism, since to construct a frontier identity it is necessary to transgress normative cultures and social categories.

In Chapter 7, Ewa Antoszek analyses the pictorial and performative la frontera productions of two Chicana artists —Jiménez Underwood and Fernández— where their concerns about migration, indigenous communities, ecological destruction, and gender stereotypes are portrayed. Thus, as in Chapter 5, art, whether performance or installation, is proved to be able to reclaim space. Antoszek emphasizes that all Latinx communities, rather than just the Chicanx, are informed by la frontera, since the border is both a physical and a metaphorical place that symbolizes Latinxs' hyphenated identities, displacement and unbelonging. However, both she and Gurpegui (in Chapter 8) clearly focus on Chicanx experience, thus dismissing water borderscapes, as experienced by Caribbean communities, and other bordering practices such as the current gentrification in US neighborhoods. Furthermore, by quoting Laura E. Pérez, who states that the Latinx descend from Native Americans and Spanish colonizers, Antoszek reproduces the unfortunately common "meeting of two worlds" narratives that leave out Afro-descendants, as many Afro-Latinx authors and scholars such as J. T. Richardson (2016) and Marta Cruz-Janzen (2007) have claimed.

Finally, Chapter 6, "Encarnaciones Cubanas: Elías Miguel Muñoz and Queering of the Latina/o Canon", queers the canon in a double way. Firstly, Ylce Irizarry deals with homosexuality in Elías Miguel Muñoz's *The Greatest Performance* (1991), running through LGTBQI+ Cuban history from Castro to AIDS, as well as addressing gays and lesbians' different treatment, and sexuality as a resistance practice against heteronormativity. Secondly, drawing on Muñoz's *Brand New Memory* (1998), she proposes a ground-breaking paradigm to analyze Latinx literature —which she has developed in *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction: New Memory of Latinidad* (2016)—, distinguishing 4 types of narratives: those traditionally deployed by first generation migrants, "loss" and "reclaim," and those normally written by second generation migrants, "fracture" and "new memory." "Loss" and "reclaim" deal with acculturation issues. "Fracture" implies fighting against essentialist notions of Latinidad. "New memory" challenges the traditional dichotomy of either giving up one's own culture and thus living in an eternal nostalgia, or succeeding in the US. Furthermore, she argues that while the

first generation learned to be American, the second learns to be Cuban, but critically questioning their ancestors' narratives and nationalist fantasies.

As its title illustrates, *Latinidad at the Crossroads: Insights into Latinx Identity in the Twenty-First Century* (2021) contributes to the construction of an intersectional Latinidad, which is not only reflected by a single hyphen, but by a multiplicity of them. While maintaining solidarity and cohesion, and honoring legacy and roots, this volume shows a new memory of Latinx identities, which can no longer be homogenized under terms such as American-Dominican or Chicana, but should rather metaphorically use several hyphens to illuminate their hybrid, transnational and diverse origins, affiliations, and projects, thus also reclaiming their individuality and difference.

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Notes

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TRAUMA, GENDER AND ETHICS IN THE WORKS OF E.L. DOCTOROW

María Ferrández San Miguel
New York: Routledge, 2020

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María Ferrández San Miguel's *Trauma, Gender and Ethics in the Works of E.L. Doctorow* (Routledge, 2020) provides a fresh perspective on the work of a novelist who paved his way to be recognized as one of the most salient voices of contemporary North American literature. Over the last few decades, Doctorow's fiction has attracted considerable academic attention, giving rise to a good number of research monographs, edited volumes, and academic articles that approach the writer's work from different perspectives. His experiments with narrative form, as well as his socio-historical awareness, set him apart from other writers of his period, and have been the subject of scrutiny in many critical analyses of his work. Approaching Doctorow's fiction from perspectives as diverse as "historiography, sociology, postmodernism, psychoanalysis, Marxist criticism and deconstruction", critics have frequently focused their attention on the writer's postmodern narrative style, on his distinctive views on history and politics, and on his relationship with Jewish culture (Ferrández San Miguel 4). Taking the existing body of scholarship on the author as her point of departure, Ferrández San Miguel analyzes four of Doctorow's novels from the double perspective of trauma studies and feminist criticism, her ultimate aim being to prove that even if most studies so far have classified Doctorow as a postmodernist writer, his fiction shows an evident ethical engagement that "suggests a movement beyond postmodernism and toward the recuperation of faith in meaning and the possibility of truthful textual representation" (29).

After an enlightening explanation of her choice of corpus of analysis, Ferrández San Miguel moves on to sketch the main theoretical frameworks she uses to analyze the novels. This introductory section is informative and reader-friendly, and may be of use not just to those new in the fields of trauma studies and feminist criticism but also to experienced researchers. Thus, although the author states that it is not her aim to offer a fully detailed genealogy of trauma, she does provide a comprehensive overview of this critical framework from its origins to its most recent developments, laying special emphasis on its relationship with literary criticism. The author then provides a similar chronological overview of feminist criticism, explaining how the framework has progressively become "more complex, diverse and wide-ranging" as well as relevant to the field of literary criticism (20). Remarkably, as well as advancing some of the key analytical notions and issues that will be the focus of analysis in the different chapters, the author stresses in the introductory chapter the important role that close reading and narratology will play in her analysis. One of Ferrández San Miguel's strengths is indeed her ability to offer clarifying explanations of her aims and methods as well as to let readers know what to expect in each of the sections and subsections of the book. Therefore, whereas narratological aspects tend to be disregarded in favor of thematic analyses in literary criticism, Ferrández San Miguel's work ultimately proves that subject matter and narrative form are inextricably linked and should not be considered in isolation when analyzing literary texts.

The author also explores in the introduction the connections between trauma studies and feminist criticism, relating them to the ethical turn of the 1980s and 1990s. As she acutely points out, the aesthetic, the ethical and the political go hand in hand in both forms of literary criticism, and both frameworks share a wish to denounce and fight human suffering and injustice. That is why she believes that using them in combination to analyze Doctorow's novels can help us draw innovative and thought-provoking conclusions. The last section of the introductory chapter explores Doctorow's indebtedness to postmodernism and poststructuralism. Here, the author argues that in spite of including some postmodernist elements in his novels, the writer also moves away from postmodernism as he engages with "social, political and historical realities in an extremely meaningful way" (29).

Hence, the first chapter reads Doctorow's debut novel *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960) as a text that both subverts and updates the thematic and narratological conventions of the Western genre. Focusing mainly on the female protagonist Molly Riordan —a victim of rape— and the male homodiegetic narrator Mayor Blue —who witnessed the violent scene but was unable to halt it— Ferrández San Miguel discusses how the novel articulates, mainly thematically but also formally, the notions of traumatic reenactment, acting out and working through trauma,

while also exploring feelings of guilt and shame associated to the traumatic experience. To this purpose, she draws on the work of some of the main theorists of trauma: Sigmund Freud, Dominick LaCapra, Cathy Caruth and Anne Whitehead, among others. Furthermore, the author contends that the novel blurs the distinction between the categories of victim, perpetrator and bystander and highlights the important role of storytelling and community in the overcoming of trauma. From a feminist lens, the author argues that the novel subverts traditional gender configurations and denounces female powerlessness and subordination. The character of Molly plays a key role in this respect, as she challenges and subverts the hegemonic model of gender domination and violence and her female voice hovers over the narrative, challenging Mayor Blue's narrative authority.

The second chapter focuses on Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971), a novel that shows Daniel Isaacson's desperate attempt at working through his psychological trauma and to redeem himself from his guilt. The reasons behind the protagonist and narrator's psychological fragmentation are the imprisonment and execution of his communist parents —a fictional representation of the Rosenbergs— at the hands of the US government and his sister Susan's subsequent suicide attempt fifteen years later, which makes him reenact his traumatic memories. Ferrandez San Miguel's analysis of the novel from the double lens of trauma studies and feminist criticism shows that, as happened with Welcome to Hard Times, Doctorow successfully leads readers to reflect on the causes and consequences of psychological trauma, while also problematizing the victim-perpetrator binary. In this last respect, the author skillfully contends that Daniel's sexually violent and abusive behavior towards his wife Phyllis, together with his refusal to incorporate female voices in his narrative, may be best understood as attempts on the part of the protagonist and narrator to regain agency and control once the mechanisms of trauma have rendered him helpless and arisen in him intense feelings of shame and guilt. Ferrández San Miguel's thorough analysis of the narrative strategies used by Doctorow to represent formally the workings of Daniel's traumatized mind also stands out as one of the strengths of the chapter. Thus, drawing on the work of well-known theorists of trauma such as Laurie Vickroy and Anne Whitehead, the author provides detailed explanations of how, by means of introducing some narrative strategies that are typical of trauma narratives —more specifically, leaps in time and space, shifts in focalization and narrative voice, and repetitions— Doctorow awakens readers to the dangerous psychological consequences of prolonged and extreme suffering.

The third chapter analyzes Doctorow's bestselling novel *Ragtime* (1975), a work that captivated readers worldwide while also generating great academic interest, and that helped consolidate Doctorow's reputation as one of the main contemporary

North-American literary figures. The story, which is set in New York during the Ragtime Era, portrays the lives and hardships of three New York families —one African-American, one Jewish immigrant, and one WASP. As Ferrández San Miguel acutely argues, while the novel shows many features in common with Doctorow's previous fiction —thus, it also deals with the devastating effects of trauma on the human psyche— it drifts away from them in some respects. One of the novel's specificities is, according to the author, its renewed interest in social issues and, more specifically, in the collective traumas of some social groups that have traditionally been marginalized or oppressed in North-American society. Besides, as Ferrández San Miguel argues, Doctorow portrays in *Ragtime* characters who, in spite of being discriminated against for reasons of gender, race or class, are capable of developing survival strategies and/or channeling their negative experiences into creative energy. In this way, the novel mirrors the more recent shift in trauma theory from an emphasis on the "inescapability from the effects of trauma" towards a belief in "the possibility that traumatic experiences may have of generating resilience" (110, 108). In this last respect, Ferrández San Miguel's discussion from a feminist lens of female bonding as allowing the characters to develop coping mechanisms to overcome insidious trauma is also particularly enlightening. Lastly, from a narratological perspective, Ferrández San Miguel argues that it is by making use of irony and social satire, as well as by introducing shifts in focalization —*Ragtime* represents in fact Doctorow's first attempt at granting female voices a significant role in the narrative— that Doctorow provides critical commentary on the discrimination to which the above-mentioned social groups were subjected in turn-of-the-century New York, while also directing readers' attention to the contemporary state of affairs.

The fourth and last analytical chapter deals with *City of God* (2000), a novel that Ferrández San Miguel describes as "Doctorow's most philosophical novel" (162) and which represents the writer's "first attempt to engage with the Holocaust in writing" (152). *City of God* is a polyphonic text that features several different storylines —dealing with topics as varied as World War I and II, the Vietnam War, or bird-watching— which are brought together by an underlying preoccupation with (in)justice. Nevertheless, the author argues that Doctorow's engagement with the Holocaust is what ultimately leads his readers to rethink their own beliefs regarding their attitude towards the others. That is the reason why she places it at the center of her analysis. Ferrández San Miguel's compelling examination from the perspective of trauma studies of how the novel fictionalizes recent criticism on the problems and dangers associated with Holocaust memorialization and representation is particularly praiseworthy, as is her analysis of the novel's self-reflexivity. Regarding the novel's engagement with gender, the author aptly claims that even though gender issues are by no means Doctorow's central preoccupation

in the novel, the writer does indeed manage to subvert traditional gender configurations and to show a strong commitment toward gender dialogue.

Trauma, Gender and Ethics in the Works of E.L. Doctorow ends with an illuminating discussion in which the author locates Doctorow's novels within a trend of "ethically oriented postmodern texts" that includes novels such as Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) or Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). The author then summarizes critical debates on the topics of narrative empathy and reader response and puts forward the claim that Doctorow's fiction ultimately invites readers to confront emotionally and intellectually the devastating effects of injustice. According to Ferrández San Miguel, by asking his readers to bear witness to a wide range of traumatic experiences —while making sure we never manage to fully identify with the victimized characters in his novels—Doctorow invites us to respond empathically to the pain of the Other while also maintaining certain intellectual distance. Ultimately, E.L Doctorow's fiction and Ferrández San Miguel's thorough and well-rounded analysis share an underlying concern with literature's ability to foster social change and to prevent the repetition of past mistakes.

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LA PESTE ESCARLATA, DE JACK LONDON

Jesus Isaias Gómez López, trad. y ed.
Madrid: Visor Libros, 2022

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Jesús Isaías Gómez López ha traducido al español el relato de la catástrofe sanitaria con la que London predijo, ya en 1912, las consecuencias naturales y sociales de una pandemia asoladora. En esta edición, Gómez López asume un papel doble como traductor y como crítico literario e investigador. De hecho, esas dos facetas dictan la estructura binaria de la presente edición, ya que la traducción de la novela viene precedida por una introducción crítica en la que Gómez López guía al lector a través de los distintos temas mediante los que London construye el argumento principal de la historia.

La Peste Escarlata (traducción al español de *The Scarlet Plague*) traslada al lector, en solo seis capítulos, a una futura California del año 2073. En este mañana hipotético, la civilización moderna ha desaparecido. En su lugar, los pocos supervivientes han involucionado, convirtiéndose en seres primitivos. Ya no queda ni rastro del avance científico y tecnológico que otrora fuera el orgullo de la civilización, culmen del desarrollo humano. Las más estrictas leyes de la naturaleza han sustituido el importante papel que la ciencia jugaba como faro de la sociedad moderna más de sesenta años atrás. En este contexto posapocalíptico, el protagonista, un anciano James Howard Smith, relata a sus embrutecidos nietos las grandezas de la antigua sociedad, en la que él tuvo la suerte de vivir su juventud, así como el origen de su decadencia: la aparición de un germen desconocido, el de la "peste escarlata", que diezmó a la humanidad en apenas dos semanas.

Gómez López aproxima impecablemente su traducción al texto original en inglés y lleva un paso más allá el lenguaje directo y sencillo característico del estilo que London emplea en las partes descriptivas de la obra. Gómez López elige un registro informal para traducir los elementos léxicos más elaborados en el texto original: por ejemplo, si para London (1912: 14) "projected the battered handle of a hunting knife", para el traductor "el mango estropeado de un cuchillo de caza" (London 2022: 42) no se *proyectaba* hacia fuera, sino que "salía" del vestido de uno de los nietos. Asimismo, la emulación de la sencillez estilística de London se refleja en la decisión del traductor de convertir en varias oraciones simples aquellas más complejas en el relato original, como la subordinación en "[t]he boy, who led the way, checking the eagerness of his muscles to the slow progress of the elder, likewise wore (…)" (London 1912: 13), que da lugar a dos oraciones simples en la traducción. En el original, las intervenciones de los personajes son el aspecto más llamativo de la novela. London combina dos formas de expresión opuestas entre sí: el discurso elaborado y culto del abuelo-narrador —caracterizado por oraciones complejas y un registro elevado— y el discurso primitivo de los nietos —caracterizado por oraciones simples, onomatopeyas y una variedad léxica muy reducida—. Gómez López capta la intención del autor al concebir ambos discursos y los vierte al español fielmente. Por un lado, mantiene el empobrecido discurso de los nietos mediante una correspondencia léxica que refleja la involución humana posapocalíptica, para lo que se vale de términos utilizados en español "por ciertos estratos sociales de escasa formación educativa" (Gómez López 2022: 9): emplea barbarismos como equivalencias de los términos que los nietos pronuncian incorrectamente en el original, por ejemplo "agüelo" (London 2022: 47) para traducir "Grandser" (London 1912: 17), o palabras malsonantes como equivalencias de coloquialismos, así "vejestorio" (London 2022: 56) como traducción de "geezer" (London 1912: 40). Por otro, Gómez López mantiene, mediante el uso de un léxico elegante, de tono más elevado, ese carácter elaborado del discurso del abuelo-narrador que le permite adaptar su expresión al estado de ánimo que le producen los recuerdos de la situación previa a la peste. Entre otras, la expresión en español "manjar apetitoso" (London 2022: 46) está formada por términos grandilocuentes, al igual que en el original "toothsome delicacy" (London 1912: 22), para comunicar el placer que el abuelo sentía cuando comía cangrejo.

Además de por el uso del lenguaje, *La Peste Escarlata* destaca por el realismo exacerbado de una historia con una amplia variedad de temas transversales, que añaden profundidad al componente social y psicológico característico de la ficción de London, como también se aprecia en su distopía sociopolítica *The Iron Heel* (1907) (*El Talón de Hierro*). Así, la introducción adquiere especial interés, ya que resulta una herramienta indispensable para comprender los diversos elementos temáticos y estilísticos que subyacen en la novela.

Esta introducción crítica, "Jack London y *La Peste Escarlata*: la visión (pos) apocalíptica de una pandemia anunciada", cuenta con cinco partes.

En la primera, "La peste: la llamada de la naturaleza" (2022: 7-11), Gómez López expone algunas cuestiones relativas al tratamiento narratológico de la historia, como la construcción del relato a partir de dos narradores que convergen en la figura del abuelo-narrador protagonista: uno autodiegético, que relata el apocalipsis desatado en 2013, y otro omnisciente y heterodiegético, que, recurriendo a la focalización cero (Genette 1998: 46), establece un discurso narrativo en tercera persona para describir el panorama posapocalíptico de 2073. Cabe señalar que Gómez López alude aquí al primer elemento temático de la novela: la insignificancia del ser humano y del desarrollo de su civilización ante la inquebrantable superioridad de la fuerza de una naturaleza, que, para London, no muestra "ni sentimientos, ni caridad, ni piedad" (London 1966: 44). El interés de dicho argumento responde a que presenta una idea clave en el pensamiento naturalista de London que ya proyectara en dos novelas anteriores, *The Call of the Wild* (1903) (*La Llamada de lo Salvaje*) y *White Fang* (1906) (*Colmillo Blanco*): la decepción ante la degenerada y corrupta condición humana que, enfrentada al ímpetu de la naturaleza, queda reducida a la nada.

Las tres partes siguientes explican la causa subyacente a esa visión de la naturaleza como fuerza con una capacidad superior a la del ser humano que London refleja en la novela. Gómez López describe una "madre" naturaleza brutal y despiadada a partir del análisis de tres de los cambios que provoca en el entramado social, cultural y ético "ideal" de la sociedad pre-apocalíptica.

La segunda parte, "La peste pandémica: la llegada del Apocalipsis" (Gómez López 2022: 12-18), se centra en la completa aniquilación del orden establecido que estructuraba la sociedad antes de la irrupción del virus. El minúsculo germen —símbolo por relación metonímica de *naturaleza*— destruye el sistema de clases de la que fuera una "gran" civilización humana. Gómez López enfoca su estudio desde una perspectiva sociológica, atendiendo al retrato que London hace de una clase obrera cuyos miembros son auténticos bárbaros, violentos e irracionales —siguiendo a Raney (2003: 410-411) y Lovett-Graf (1996: 101)— y también desde una inexplorada perspectiva ontológica, sugiriendo que London recurre al componente apocalíptico como pretexto para exponer su pesimismo respecto a la condición humana: las leyes de la sociedad moderna que deberían asegurar la supervivencia del individuo no son suficiente para impedir que, a la larga, este se entregue inevitablemente a sus instintos más primarios.

El segundo cambio que desencadena la naturaleza en la obra se explora en la tercera parte, "El retorno al estado salvaje: la peste-pandemia como catástrofe"

(2022: 19-23), donde Gómez López indica la relación que London establece entre la pérdida de un lenguaje culto y bien articulado y la desaparición de los conocimientos y la cultura desarrollados por la humanidad durante los tres siglos previos. London alterna el inglés dotado de una sintaxis compleja y rico en adjetivos que utiliza el abuelo-narrador, cuando relata con nostalgia la gloria de su civilización perdida, y el inglés primitivo en el discurso de los nietos, que ha involucionado en cuanto al detalle y la expresividad hasta reducirse a onomatopeyas y frases simples. Gómez López interpreta la contraposición de esos dos registros lingüísticos a través de una pertinente comparación con otras obras del género posapocalíptico, como *Ape and Essence* (1948) (*Mono y esencia*) de Aldous Huxley. A diferencia del elemento de ciencia ficción al que recurre Huxley mediante los mutantes simio-humanos surgidos tras una debacle nuclear, London solo necesita servirse de su vena naturalista más mordaz para bosquejar el desolador panorama generado por la epidemia.

El último punto del ensayo preliminar a la traducción de la novela guarda estrecha relación con el cambio en el entramado ético y se comenta en la tercera parte, "El derrumbre la de la civilización: una lectura (pos)apocalíptica" (Gómez López 2022: 23-27). El ambiente dantesco del 2073 se ve intensificado por las ideas y creencias del protagonista, provocadas por la insensibilización que la naturaleza ha impuesto como norma entre los humanos: términos como "éxodo ario" o "colonización" se insertan en el discurso optimista de Smith acerca de la capacidad humana de volver a crear una sociedad basada nuevamente en la ciencia y la tecnología.

Como se deduce a partir de las tres partes comentadas, en la obra la naturaleza, por intermedio de un germen nuevo, desempeña un papel fundamental en la rápida destrucción de la civilización humana. La argumentación que ofrece Gómez López desde su perspectiva crítica del lector y filólogo es una contribución innovadora a las ideas aportadas por otros estudios (Kershaw 1999; Raney 2003), centrados tanto en la figura de Jack London como en los constructos ideológicos que fundamentan su ficción.

Por último, la parte con la que concluye la introducción crítica, "La peste escarlata: un modelo (pos)apocalíptico de literatura pandémica" (Gómez López 2022: 28-37), revisa las influencias de otros autores y otras obras del género "pandémico" en la creación de *La Peste Escarlata*. Al igual que Mousoutzanis (2009: 458-459) y Tarr (2015: 152), Gómez López establece evidentes similitudes argumentativas entre obras como *The Last Man* (1826) (*El último hombre*) de Mary Shelley, *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842) (*La máscara de la muerte roja*) de Edgar Allan Poe o *A Journey of the Plague Year* (1722)

(*Diario del año de la peste*) de Daniel Defoe. No obstante, son llamativas las aportaciones de Gómez López al relacionar la obra de London con *Ape and Essence* (1948) de Huxley y *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) (*Crónicas marcianas*) de Ray Bradbury, pues las tres obras comparten un punto común hasta ahora ignorado por la crítica: el avance científico descontrolado no siempre tiene consecuencias positivas, bien porque sus insuficiencias le impiden dominar por completo una fuerza tan impredecible como es la naturaleza —en el caso de London— bien porque se utiliza con fines destructivos como ocurre con las armas nucleares —en el caso de Huxley y Bradbury—.

La combinación de la introducción crítica y la traducción de la novela en la presente edición proporciona un primer análisis exhaustivo de la obra de London desde diversas perspectivas. Por un lado, permite apreciar la relación entre las ideas del autor y los aspectos que él traza en la novela; así, *The Scarlet Plague* resulta un reflejo de la visión escéptica que London tenía sobre el individuo: una visión recelosa de esa condición humana a la que considera inevitablemente egoísta, corrupta y primitiva. Por otro, permite aproximarse al complejo proceso traductológico del inglés al español de una obra en la que resulta esencial percibir la marcada variación entre los discursos del abuelo-narrador y de los nietos, pues —a modo de sociolectos— suponen manifestaciones tangibles de la decadencia del ser humano desde un estado de desarrollo y plenitud —civilización pre-apocalíptica— hasta otro en el que reinan la barbarie y el salvajismo —civilización posapocalíptica—. Gómez López, en su papel dual de filólogo y traductor, cumple este objetivo con éxito, presentando simultáneamente una traducción a un español directo y claro, que evoca el realismo del inglés original, capaz tanto de reflejar la degeneración de los hijos del posapocalipsis, ese retroceso al individuo de las cavernas cuya comunicación se reduce al intercambio de sonidos incongruentes como el discurso refinado de Smith.

En definitiva, *La Peste Escarlata* es el relato de una catástrofe en todos los sentidos, desde el ámbito sanitario hasta el social o el cultural. Y, sin embargo, la crueldad que se desprende de la novela sobrecoge no sólo por la detallada y descarnada descripción de los estragos que causa la enfermedad, sino también por los estragos que puede llegar a causar el ser humano cuando se siente amenazado por una extinción inminente. Esta es, de hecho, la mayor aportación de Gómez López al estudio de Jack London y su ficción, pues el crítico y traductor desvela el mensaje que London deseaba transmitir en última instancia con esta novela: el ser humano, corrupto y egoísta por naturaleza, es capaz de aniquilar a sus semejantes sin contemplaciones con tal de arañar un miserable segundo de vida.

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IN OUR OWN IMAGE: FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

David Livingstone
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Livingstone's book is an apt and enjoyable summary of the fictional accounts of Shakespeare's life from the 20th and 21st centuries. Partly due to recent popular cultural works such as the British sitcom *Upstart Crow* (2016-) and the award-winning *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), the topic has received the attention of critics in recent decades (Buffey 2020; Lanier 2007; O'Sullivan 2005; Sawyer 2016), but book-length discussions are still rather rare (Franssen 2016). Livingstone's *In Our Own Image* fills a few gaps, but still leaves plenty of room for investigation.

The book more or less follows a chronological order, insofar as it mentions a few 19th century texts in its Introduction, starts its analytical sections with early 20th century texts in Chapter 1, and gets to Robert Nye's *Mrs. Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (1993) and *The Late Mr. Shakespeare* (1998) in Chapter 5. Chapters 6 and 7 are to some extent exceptions, as they give an overview of the popular cultural and filmic treatments of the topic. The volume is relatively chatty and anecdotal when analyzing its works, in a way similar to O'Sullivan's Introduction (2005) in his anthology of fictional treatments of Shakespeare's life, which admittedly served as an inspiration for Livingstone (17). Nevertheless, *In Our Own Image* is based on a number of interesting and far-reaching assumptions, and although these ideas are not entirely demonstrated and are not always thoroughly analyzed, they are explored to an extent which gives the reader plenty of food for thought.

First, already the initial pages of the book reveal that, according to Livingstone, many fictional biographies of Shakespeare should be primarily read as autobiographies of the historian-writer-biographers (for the sake of simplicity hereafter referred to as "biographers") themselves. A similar assumption can be traced back to post-structuralist and feminist theories (Helms 1995: 339), but Livingstone takes this concept from Robert Nye's novel *The Late Mr. Shakespeare* and critics such as Sonya Freeman Loftis (9-10). Loftis observes that both George Bernard Shaw and Tom Stoppard continuously "create a history that conflates his own biography to that of Shakespeare", resulting in "a fusion of personalities" (2011: 115-116). Perhaps to avoid falling into the trap of intentional fallacy, Livingstone imagines this fusion in most cases as a half-conscious, or mostly unintentional, phenomenon, as he tries to find psychological or psychoanalytical connections between the biographer and Shakespeare. This can involve rivalry and a love-hate relationship with the "literary father", as in the case of Shaw (35) and perhaps, to some extent, Edward Bond's political morality play *Bingo* ([1974]; 146).

Another psychological parallelism may be "Shakespeare suffering from an inferiority complex, a chip on his shoulder, usually in relation to Marlowe" (42), which is similar to how a biographer such as Shaw or Stoppard supposedly feels in the fictional presence of the Bard (36). Such an assumption may indicate that Shakespeare potentially borrowed ideas or lines from the University Wits, especially Christopher Marlowe (see also Sawyer 2016). This viewpoint leads to the question of Shakespeare's questionable authorship and his potential plagiarisms, which is presented in *Shakespeare in Love*, a film which itself became the object of accusations as Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard's screenplay is supposedly "heavily influenced if not plagiarized from Shaw's *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* [1910]" (249; see also Loftis 2011) and the novel *No Bed for Bacon* (1941) by Caryl Brahms and S. J. Simon. This leads to further thoughts on the collaborative background of Shakespeare's plays: "how the canonical text came into being, including the role of actors, colleagues, collaborators, the authors of the Quarto editions and eventually the editors of the First Folio" (274).

In other cases, Livingstone detects a somewhat postmodernist, playful, and self-conscious attitude behind the "autobiographical" traits of the works that he analyzes. Robert Nye's *The Late Mr. Shakespeare* and Anthony Burgess's *Nothing like the Sun* (1964) provide good examples here. As Livingstone observes, "at times […] we are not sure who is speaking: Shakespeare, [the persona of] Burgess, [or] both" (103).

The second thoughtful assumption is that fictional biographies freely disregard the boundaries between historical sources, quotes from Shakespeare, and their own

fictionalizing strategies. As Livingstone says, "practically all of the works here make use of lines within the narratives from the plays and poems either assigning the quotes to Shakespeare himself or to one of his fellow characters" (311). In a way similar to Robert Zemeckis's film *Back to the Future* (1985), whereby Marty McFly plays and "gives" the song "Johnny B. Goode" (1958) to Chuck Berry, time-traveller characters repeatedly —for example, in the British comedy film *Time Flies* (1944)— provide his own famous lines for Shakespeare (236-238; see also Lanier 2007: 96). The language of these works is often heterogenic, as it can alternate between a quasi-Elizabethan language, a humorous and parodying approach to such a language variation, and a complete disregard of diachronic linguistics, adding contemporary vocabulary to the linguistic repertoire (313). Furthermore, writers such as Burgess and Nye also incorporate the style of previous fictional Shakespearean biographies and contain allusions to such works. For example, they refer to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), which itself presents a satirical and parodying attitude to Shakespearean plays, criticism and biographies (81; see also Benstock 1975: 396). Hence, multiple layers of intertextuality, pastiche, and parody are detected in these texts in a palimpsest-like manner.

The third important assumption of the book is that many of the analyzed works mix "high-brow and low-brow", insofar as the biographer "ventures into genre literature (detective, thriller, suspense, science fiction and horror novels)" (312). Accordingly, Livingstone boldly treats texts of high culture, literary pieces of popular culture, as well as entertaining television and cinematic films, on the same level. Chapter 6 focuses on written science fictional, fantastic, and erotic texts or thrillers which portray Shakespeare "as an Elizabethan super hero, detective, spy, ladies' man or general righter of wrongs" (17). Chapter 7 analyzes comics and films, both on the big and small screen. What is more, Livingstone aptly cross-references popular treatments such as *Shakespeare in Love*, the series *Dr Who* (1963-), and the *Blackadder* franchise throughout the book, even in those chapters which mostly discuss high cultural works. This seems to confirm Douglas Lanier's apt description of the complex love-hate relationship between popular culture and the classics, especially Shakespeare, whose persona "comes to signify what modern popular culture defines itself against, becoming in effect popular culture's symbolic 'Other'. And, as is often the case with the cultural 'Other', in many cases Shakespeare also becomes an object of ambivalent desire for popular culture —a source of still potent cultural capital and thus of legitimation" (2007: 95).

Livingstone detects feminist traits in some of the fictional biographies and refers to Virginia Woolf's famous parable on Shakespeare's imagined sister Judith in "A Room of One's Own" (1929), but never really delves deep into feminist theories. In general, relatively complex analyses are rare; instead, review-like summaries

saturate the book, occasionally peppered with informal and personal opinions. For example, Livingstone argues about a passage quoted from Nye's *The Late Mr. Shakespeare* that "I am, to be honest, not really sure what this is supposed to mean, but it certainly sounds profound, or perhaps tells us, once again, something about Nye's personal sexual preferences" (171). Charles Williams's *A Myth of Shakespeare* (1928) is described as "not good theatre, although it does have its moments" (77). Thus, unfortunately, the reader's overall impression is that subjective sentiments and passionate —or in some cases painful— reading experiences serve as the somewhat rickety foundation, and the theoretical observations and analytical sections only become icing on the cake. This would be more forgivable if the book worked better as an encyclopedic volume whereby the reader can quickly find rudimentary and intriguing information on a particular fictional biography. For this, the addition of a detailed index would be indispensable, as without this tool using the volume becomes relatively inconvenient. Luckily, the illustrations, which usually contain book covers of the analyzed pieces, help to a certain extent.

For the interests of a more theoretically involved reader, a similar book-length study (Franssen 2016) or Lanier's short but complex overview (2007) probably serve better. Nevertheless, Livingstone's volume raises relevant contemporary questions, and outlines answers to a certain degree in an entertaining manner, about (auto-)biographies, high and popular literature, as well as filmic treatments of Shakespeare's life.

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DISCOURSE STUDIES IN PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Eliecer Crespo-Fernández, ed.
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The monograph *Discourse Studies in Public Communication* comprises 13 chapters authored by different scholars from a variety of disciplines and research traditions. At first sight, these look heterogeneous, but there is a connection in their authors' interest in the analysis of *public communication* or, as Andreas Mussolf labels it in the preface, *public discourse studies.* This preface also suggests attributes shared by these chapters, which explicitly define their aims, relate them to specific discourse genres relevant for their objects of study (namely, political, gender-related, business, and academic) and explicate in detail their methods, including multimodal analysis.

Subsequent insights on the aims of this book are provided by the editor himself (Crespo-Fernández) in the Introduction to the volume, where he sets the boundaries of public communication as the basic object of analysis across the chapters: "any communication in any form directed at the general public and specific social groups for a variety of purposes" (1). Several examples of its scope are also provided, together with labels that typically abound in research in this direction, such as public sphere and hegemonic dominance, among others. Furthermore, Crespo-Fernández emphasises the fact that public communication is discourse-shaped and, as such, entails practices that are invariably tied to the cultural setting where these discourses are produced and interpreted, in other words, discourse "as language use in social life, as text in context" (2).

The editor acknowledges that the varieties of discourses and practices that can generically be labelled as "public communication" are enormous and also heterogeneous (this is also inevitably reflected upon the chapters selected for the book), and the fact that the discourse-analytic approach is also heterogeneous does not make things easier for the research in this direction. This is a consequence of the parallel difficulty of analysing discourse from a single (i.e. unified) approach. Crespo-Fernández lists three possible definitions of discourse: beyond the sentence, as language in use, and as social practice. The third one is deemed important, as corroborated by Fairclough (1992), for whom discourse *constitutes* the social side. This provides a further connecting attribute across the chapters in this volume: public communication is shaped as discursive phenomena and, as such, "they are socially oriented and they fulfil a social and communicative purpose in particular real-life contexts, as is the case in the contributions to this volume" (3).

The Introduction also summarises what the reader is expected to find in the chapters of the book, which reflect the heterogeneous nature of real-life discourses and provide evidence of society, social life, and social problems. Indeed, the chapters focus on different kinds of discourse (e.g. political, journalistic, computer-mediated, commercial, corporate, academic), approached from different research frameworks (critical discourse analysis, multimodality, cognitive metaphor theory, critical metaphor analysis, appraisal theory), analysing heterogeneous data (advertisements, television series, obituaries, lyrics, political manifestos and essays, newspaper editorials, cartoons, academic talks, company brochures, entrepreneurial pitches), extracted from different communicative contexts (classroom, office workspace, etc.) and through different media (social media, the written press, television, motion pictures, etc.).

Part I is devoted to political studies and comprises six chapters. In Chapter 1 ("Imagining the nation in British politics"), Ruth Breeze addresses the discursive representation of the nation/people from an exploratory, comparative perspective drawing from corpus assisted discourse studies, with a mixed methodology, and focusing on the politics of Great Britain. Her analysis shows how "naming practices and patterns surrounding key lexical items referring to the nation serve as discursive markers of political parties' ideologies, particularly as far as populism and nationalism are concerned" (34).

Chapter 2 ("Political and journalistic discourse regarding the Catalan declaration of independence. A critical analysis"), by Luis Escoriza Morera, starts with the claim that journalistic and political texts are ideal for the transmission of ideologies, and the chapter offers a critical discourse analysis of various political texts. Specifically, it examines the treatment of the concept of nation in the electoral manifestos presented by the five most-voted parties in the 2019 general election in

Spain. Catalonia is also an important issue of the chapter, as well as the scope of the label "Spain" itself.

In Chapter 3, María Muelas-Gil analyses "National vs international cartoons depicting Catalonia's independence process in the press" with a critical multimodal metaphor approach. She aims to contrast the metaphoric domains used by the press in political cartoons depicting Catalonia's independence process. Besides, she analyses the political and cultural (mis)conceptions behind the cartoons and their potential implications for the international audience's perception of Spain.

Chapter 4 by Gérard Fernández Smith is called "A corpus-assisted qualitative approach to political discourse in Spanish print and digital press." He describes persuasive communicative goals extracted from written Spanish media, focusing on a series of key words frequently used by politicians and reproduced by the media, and previously gathered from the main Spanish parties' electoral programs. Fernández Smith shows how politicians' discourses are reproduced in the press, specifically as part of an establishment that promotes and defends a particular way of thinking. Discourses are then built up as conceptual networks that are materialised through lexical combinations of key words.

Rosa María López-Campillo studies "Persuasive discourse in Daniel Defoe's political essays" in Chapter 5. Specifically, she focuses on two common rhetorical strategies used by Daniel Defoe as a political journalist in the first decades of eighteenth-century Britain: boosting and hedging. While the former is used to reinforce feelings of group membership and engagement with readers, the latter in turn conveys deference, humility and respect.

The last chapter of Part I is "Politics beyond death? An analysis of the obituaries of Belgian politicians" (Chapter 6), by Priscilla Heynderickx and Sylvain Dieltjens. They underline the importance of obituaries and focus on two aspects: their qualities (e.g. the indication of how a society copes with death and the fear of dying) and the presence of political orientation in the description of the deceased. Within the topic of politicians' obituaries, the authors conclude that one of the main characteristics of the obituaries of political figures is the coexistence of two discourses, namely the political discourse itself and the discourse about the personal qualities of the deceased.

Part II focuses on gender and sexuality studies, with four chapters. In Chapter 7 ("It all comes down to sex. Metaphorical animalisation in reggaeton discourse"), María José Hellín García analyses sex functions as the main conductive thread in reggaeton musical discourse, specifically how metaphorical animalisation frames the male perception of women. Animal metaphors indicate that perception as sexified, with parallel praising of beautiful and attractive physical appearance, outfits, suggestive dancing or provocative attitudes displayed by women.

Furthermore, this "female animalisation" conveys an image of today's woman as sexual and disinhibited in reggaeton.

In Chapter 8 ("Cyberbullying and gender. Exploring socially deviant behavioural practices among teenagers on Twitter"), Antonio García-Gómez explores the discursive strategies and self-presentation strategies that both male and female teenagers deploy and the impressions that they exhibit when they verbally abuse and victimise others, demonstrating tight relationships between the self-presentation strategies selected by each gender and the type of behavioural practices exhibited in the (cyber-)violence-related online communication acts analysed.

Chapter 9 ("A visual critical discourse analysis of women representation in Dolce & Gabbana advertising"), by María Martínez Lirola, uncovers the visual discursive representation of women in a sample of advertisements from a critical discourse analysis perspective, examining whether visual choices used by publicists to portray the woman in the corpus contribute to perpetuating gender stereotypes. She concludes that women are indeed represented as stereotyped, following traditional beauty standards, with their bodies portrayed as objects of desire. The female body is thus a symbol with a clear persuasive burden: the slim, young, and beautiful bodies have to be imitated because they conform to the cultural canons that are broadly accepted.

A TV series is the object of analysis in Chapter 10 ("Let's talk about sex in high school. The TV series *Sex Education*") by Raquel Sánchez Ruiz. The focus is euphemistic and dysphemistic discourse as used by teenagers in that series when talking about sex, which provides evidence of their beliefs and value judgements related to sexuality. This includes borrowings from other languages and abbreviations (clippings, initialisms), as well as metaphors, all of which work as euphemistic devices to talk about sex and related matters.

Finally, Part III is devoted to business and academic discourse studies, with three chapters. Chapter 11 ("Paralinguistic resources in persuasive business communication in English and Spanish") by Ana M. Cestero Mancera and Mercedes Díez Prados addresses how nonverbal paralinguistic signs are used in persuasive business communication in two parallel Spanish/British English corpora of TV entrepreneurial pitches. From all the paralinguistic possibilities, pauses/silences are underlined as the most profusely used in the corpus. These fulfil different functions: emphasising or regulating discourse. The chapter includes an analysis of how the use of paralinguistic resources is constrained by gender.

In Chapter 12, Carmen Varo Varo studies "Business discourse from a psycholinguistic approach," with an emphasis on (1) the mental organisation of linguistic knowledge into networks; (2) the strong ties between linguistic processes

and other cognitive functions; and (3) the effectiveness of the contrast principle which emerges from the lexical units and transcends the textual level.

Finally, Chapter 13 ("Compensatory discourse strategies in the bilingual university classroom") by Mary Griffith revolves around specific issues such as the errors in spoken performance in the bilingual classroom and the impact of these errors on overall intelligibility. A special emphasis is laid upon multicompetence, for which users must reflect on the formal aspects of language in use with regard to effective communication in bilingual public discourse.

The monograph *Discourse Studies in Public Communication* provides the reader with a glimpse of the kind of research carried out within the broad label of *public communication*. As mentioned above, the list of frameworks, approaches, contexts and discourses delimited within this generic label is wide-ranging, and so are the chapters of the book. In addition, the pieces of research selected by the editor to be included in the book are interesting, well-documented, rigorous and worth reading for anybody interested in the study of public communication. The volume can be considered as a complement to previous studies in the field of discourse-analytical research (Wodak and Koller 2008; Tannen, Hamilton and Schiffrin 2015) and, more specifically, to those regarding taboo and taboo naming in real life discourse practices (Crespo-Fernandez 2018).

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THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF HOSPITALITY IN U.S. LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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The ongoing flow of refugees, the outbreaks of wars and the continuous mobilisation of people under the threat of ecological crises do not cease to challenge our international, national and personal limits to the reception of the Other, the stranger. Infamous inhospitable practices, such as the British policy to send asylum-seekers to Rwanda, beg the following question: Is it even possible to talk about hospitality in our contemporary world? Jacques Derrida recognised that "[w]e do not know what hospitality is. Not yet. Not yet, but will we ever know?" (2000: 6). The authors of the essays in *The Poetics and Politics of Hospitality in US Literature and Culture* (2020), edited by Amanda Ellen Gerke, Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan and Patricia San José Rico, try to give a timely answer to these conundrums by studying literary and visual texts that address different acts of (in)hospitality in past and contemporary America. This work contributes to the growing field of hospitality studies that critically approach literature and culture, which includes the volumes *Cine y Hospitalidad: Narrativas Visuales del Otro* (2021), edited by Ana M. Manzanas and Domingo Hernández, and Ana M. Manzanas and Jesús Benito's *Hospitality in American Literature and Culture: Spaces, Bodies, Borders* (2017). Indeed, the present volume takes the latter as a point of reference and further delves into hospitality strands within a wide scope of literary traditions. The collection is part of the series "Critical Approaches to Ethnic American Literature", edited by Jesús Benito and Ana M. Manzanas, and is organised in twelve

chapters covering miscellaneous authors and texts, except for the first introductory chapter.

The first chapter lays out the theoretical framework, which is based on philosophical theories of hospitality, the backbone of the individual essays. More precisely, the volume relies on Emmanuel Levinas's ethical approach that demands responsibility from the self towards the Other, and Jacques Derrida's attention to the political and the ethical to address the contemporary challenges brought about by immigration and great flows of people, unveiling hospitality as inseparable from hostile processes both for guests and hosts (2020: 5-7). A subsection on early American literature gives some useful historical and literary context, although it could have been developed further to give an overviewing timeline of the socio-political attitudes reflected in all the literary periods of the texts to be studied later. In the second chapter Puspa Damai questions Gayatri Spivak's concept of "hospitality from below", where those who colonize are guests of the colonized host (Spivak 2002: 54; 2020: 24), and reads it against the experience of Native Americans through the analysis of three novels: Yellow Bird's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta* (1854), Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) and Sherman Alexie's *Flight* (2007). Examining the three novels together, Damai reaches the conclusion that hospitality in a postcolonial context entails violence to revert the process of colonisation (2020: 28), and stresses that an unconditional hospitality which includes all peoples, the environment and nonhuman entities (2020: 30-33) is the actual path to attaining a form of hospitality from below, where the colonized guests reverse their roles and occupy their initial role as hosts. In Chapter 3, Amanda Ellen Gerke skilfully brings to the fore language as a source of power that governs hospitality acts in Latino communities. In her analysis of Junot Díaz's "Invierno", from *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012), and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Gerke puts forward the figure of the hosted guest. In the stories this translates into a male migrant who gatekeeps other migrant women and children's access to spaces (2020: 39), as women remain hostages to imprisoning domestic spatialities. The imposition of protocols of linguistic control on female characters also prevents access to knowledge of the nation-state. This idea appears, for instance, in the male gatekeeper forbidding the matriarchal figure to learn English, the primary language of the country, which would give her agency and free access to the social spaces of the host-nation. However, Gerke suggests language is a double-edged sword when she argues agentive speech acts also allow women to challenge the host's patriarchal rule.

Chapter 4 continues the thought-provoking exploration of linguistic hospitality in barriocentric novels, scrutinising the previously discussed *The House on Mango Street* and Piri Thomas's *Down these Mean Streets* (1967). Luisa María González

Rodríguez brings together these texts to examine the concept of language divergence as a "symbolic strategy for maintaining spatial, social, and ethnic hierarchies" (2020: 59). She observes that for Latino migrants in America the English language works as a prestige language that facilitates their inclusion in the host country (2020: 61-64). Yet English imposes an inhospitable "alienation and estrangement" on those clinging to Spanish as a heritage language that links them to their home culture and identity (2020: 63). Also tapping into the hostility of language, José R. Ibáñez discusses the very habitability of language. Ibáñez dissects exile writer Ha Jin's much criticised choice of writing in English rather than in his native tongue, Chinese. Departing from the idea that language can be a place of residence (2020: 82; Derrida 1998: 1), Ibáñez questions the notion of the host's ownership of language. Ibáñez convincingly argues that Ha Jin develops his own hybrid style which incorporates, for example, the nativisation of Chinese expressions, to challenge "monolingual views of language while, at the same time, calling into question the rules that the host imposes on the guest" (2020: 89-90). Chapter 6 shifts the attention to instances of (in)hospitality in earlier American fiction through Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan's study of Nathaniel Hawthorne's historical short fiction. Guerrero-Strachan insists that Hawthorne uncovers contemporary anxieties over national identity and the fear of the Other by drawing from the provincial *locus*. For Guerrero-Strachan, "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" (1836) allows the author to criticise how colonisation imposes a societal state of inherent inhospitality, and "Endicott and the Red Cross" (1838) foregrounds Puritan intolerance toward groups professing other religions, which challenges Derrida's unconditional hospitality and reveals the Puritans as guests who become displaced hosts imposing their rule (2020: 105-106). Meanwhile, "The Gentle Boy" (1833) shows the necessity of hospitality if a societal order is to sustain religious tolerance.

In Chapter 7, Laura López Peña insists that openness towards alterity is key to hospitable acts in Herman Melville's work. Through a characterological analysis of *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876), López Peña demonstrates that openness towards the Other allows for a more true and unconditional hospitality (2020: 115-116). López Peña points to the ethical link between the self and the Other referencing Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas and Judith Butler, among others, and how "vulnerability […] make[s] us more hospitable or receptive to the suffering of others" (2020: 117). The failure of interpersonal connections results in unreciprocated hospitality, which negatively impacts the lives of the characters and further reinforces political and religious divisions. In the next chapter, Cristina Garrigós exquisitely surveys the multiple sides to food and eating as practices and metaphors of hospitality. She does so scrutinising three of Ruth Ozeki's novels. In her analysis of *My Years of Meats* (1998), Garrigós argues that, through the making

of a food programme, hospitality appears as an unauthentic spectacle. The portrayal of an authentic and hospitable America is challenged: Garrigós reveals the sanitisation of inhospitality towards ethnic minorities by showing, for instance, how hostility lies behind the choice to film a white middle class family for the programme instead of a poorer African American family. In her discussion of *All Over Creation* (2003), Garrigós explores the mutability of the guest and host categories in a farming community as well as the notion of parasitism. In her remarks on *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), Garrigós studies the cannibalism of the Other and dissects the notion of hospitality, which had not received critical interest in previous studies of this novel. She proceeds to analyse how hospitality is informed by Ozeki's Zen Buddhist perspective, which dissolves the self and the Other as differentiated entities (2020: 148), to make the point that hospitality entails interconnectedness with all beings. In Chapter 9, Patricia San José Rico traces how Irish migrants went from being considered unwelcome parasitic guests to becoming hosts in the American nation-state. Using a Levinasian and Derridean framework, San José Rico examines the social construction of race and the racialisation of the Irish as an Other in novels documenting the Irish-American experience, such as Frank McCourt's *'Tis* (1999), Mary Gordon's *The Other Side* (1989) and Taylor Caldwell's *Captains and the Kings* (1972). She also discusses how the Irish themselves erased certain identity features to pass and ultimately assimilate as white. The Irish thus became hosts in the country by differentiating themselves from other ethnic minorities at the expense of reinforcing the hostility towards the latter.

In the following chapter, Ana María Manzanas Calvo builds on the discussion of the mutable identities of guest and host in Tom Wolfe's *Back to Blood* (2012), Ana Lydia Vega's "Encancaranublado" (1992) and Francisco Goldman's *The Ordinary Seaman* (1997). She zones in on the sea and its colonial past as an analytical tool to examine the liquid line separating the host and guest, hospitality and hostility, mobility and statis in the (in)hospitable acts governing the arrival of Caribbean migrants in the US. She proposes that the hostility towards Caribbean migrants reflected in these texts harks back to the past and slavery, especially through the recurring space of the ship, reinscribing these migrant Others as "neo-slaves" (2020: 190), disposable entities under the nation's conditional law. In Chapter 11, Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger dissects hospitality in Tim Z. Hernandez's *Mañana Means Heaven* (2013) through a comparative analysis with the novel it reinscribes, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). Oliver-Rotger takes as a point of departure the road, a liminal site that prompts hospitable encounters and the dissolution of differences between the self and the Other (2020: 197; Manzanas and Benito 2017: 9). Against the fetishisation of ethnicity and the limitations of hospitality towards the guest found in Jack Kerouac's novel, Oliver-Rotger contends *Mañana Means Heaven* highlights the gender and racial differences of the guest, the main

female character (2020: 202-205). Oliver-Rotger proposes that this novel is a *Bildungsroman* where the female protagonist does not attain the mobility the road promised but, rather, becomes reconciled with her position as a migrant Mexican worker (2020: 208). Ángel Mateos-Aparicio and Jesús Benito Sánchez close the collection of essays with their study on zombies in the TV show *The Walking Dead* (2008-) from a Derridean lens. Following a thorough analysis of this figure, the authors argue that zombies represent the threat of immigrants in America, this is, parasites that erase the difference between the dead and the living, the host and guest, from within the host-nation (2020: 218-219). The negotiation of (in) hospitality for survival reveals the complexity of hospitality as a continuum between unconditional and conditional encounters. For instance, the protagonists' parasitic appropriation of welcoming communities shows the corruption of infinite hospitality (2020: 226). Meanwhile, a cannibalistic community of survivors blurs the distinction between the undead and the living in an illustration of the perversion of hospitality (2020: 226-227).

All in all, this volume is a compelling addition to the field of hospitality studies and a valuable resource for critical approaches to Otherness. The strongest point of this book is the wide range and scope of hospitality encounters it presents, from the role of food in hospitality gestures to the hostility of language. This reflects that hospitality is not a stable notion, but rather mutable and aporetic, a point made in all the essays, leading to the impossibility of a clear definition of hospitality, as Derrida signalled. The analysed texts range from American Renaissance works to contemporary ones and include a variety of groups that become guests and hosts of (un)welcoming acts of reception. Despite the diversity of thematic chapters, these remain quite isolated since the cross-references between them are not addressed within the chapters. The volume could have included a conclusion to put the multiple lines of research in conversation. The collection could also have benefited from a thematic arrangement to organise chapters that share clear linkages through the periods, works and approaches they discuss, with a view to highlighting these promising areas of research. With the exception of the last chapter, all the essays focus on literary works. In future volumes on hospitality the editors may consider expanding the types of texts to include more audio-visual texts, popular culture or new media, and in this way address newer horizons opened up by the subject of hospitality.

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