MISCELÁNEA

miscelánea

a journal of english and american studies

vol. 70

2024

literature, film and cultural studies
language and linguistics

revista de estudios ingleses y norteamericanos

miscelánea

vol. 70
2024

Literatura, cine y estudios culturales
Lengua y lingüística

FECYT-279/2024
Fecha de certificación: 14 de julio de 2016 (5ª convocatoria)
Válido hasta: 24 de julio de 2025

Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies se publica con la ayuda económica del Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras y del Vicerrectorado de Política Científica de la Universidad de Zaragoza.

Publicación semestral (2 vols. al año) del Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana de la Universidad de Zaragoza./ Published twice a year by the Department of English and German Philology, University of Zaragoza, Spain.

Las suscripciones deberán dirigirse a/
Please address subscriptions to:

Revista *Miscelánea*
Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza
Edificio de Ciencias Geológicas
C/ Pedro Cerbuna, 12. 50009 Zaragoza
puz@unizar.es http://puz.unizar.es

Precio de la suscripción (anual)/
Subscription price (2 volumes):
15 euros
(IVA incluido/ VAT included)

Edición y ©:
Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza
Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana
de la Universidad de Zaragoza

Selección de textos:
Consejo de redacción de *Miscelánea*

Vol. 70 - Diciembre 2024

Imprime:
Servicio de Publicaciones, Universidad de Zaragoza.

ISSN: 1137-6368
e-ISSN: 2386-4834
Depósito legal: Z-2811-2004

a journal of english and american studies

miscelánea

3

Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza

2024

Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana

Edición electrónica/
Internet homepage:

<https://papiro.unizar.es/ojs/index.php/misc>

Cuenta de Twitter:

@MiscelaneaUZ

miscelánea

Redacción, correspondencia e intercambios:
Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana
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Edición en Red/Online Edition:
<https://papiro.unizar.es/ojs/index.php/misc>

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ENDOPHORIC SIGNPOSTING: A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF TEXTUAL REFERENCES IN L2 CZECH MASTER'S THESES AND NATIVE ENGLISH ACADEMIC WRITING

MARCADORES ENDOFÓRICOS: UN ESTUDIO CONTRASTIVO DE LAS REFERENCIAS TEXTUALES EN EL INGLÉS ACADÉMICO DE TRABAJOS FIN DE MÁSTER ESCRITOS POR ESTUDIANTES CHECOS EN INGLÉS COMO SEGUNDA LENGUA Y POR HABLANTES NATIVOS

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.20249976

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to contribute to cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary discourse analysis, shedding light on English L2 learners' metadiscursive practices. Focusing on a specialised learner corpus of English-medium Master's theses written by Czech university students, the research explores the occurrence of endophoric markers and their characteristics. To enable cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparison, a reference corpus of representative L1 English academic discourse was compiled. A new taxonomy used here, which draws on Hyland's list of endophoric markers (2005) and an extensive literature review, categorises endophoric markers into three groups: purely directional, markers using specific words, and a category combining the first two. The study investigates the occurrence and function of these markers, focusing on anaphoric, cataphoric, and non-directional references. It also aims to identify differences in the usage of endophoric markers in English between L2 novice writers and experienced L1 academic writers, providing insights into trends and patterns in the employment of endophoric markers in academic writing in a way that accounts for disciplinary and linguistic factors. The results reveal higher endophoric marker frequencies in the Master's Thesis Corpus, suggesting distinctive discourse patterns among Czech learners using English as an L2, with a predominance of specific endophoric markers and notable cross-disciplinary variation.

Keywords: metadiscourse, endophoric markers, Master's thesis, academic discourse, cross-cultural analysis.

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es contribuir al análisis del discurso intercultural e interdisciplinar, arrojando luz sobre las prácticas metadiscursivas de los estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua. La investigación, basada en un corpus especializado de Trabajos de Fin de Máster en lengua inglesa escritos por estudiantes universitarios checos, explora el uso de marcadores endofóricos y sus características. Para permitir la comparación interlingüística e intercultural, se compiló un corpus de referencia que representa el discurso académico en inglés de hablantes nativos.

Se utiliza una nueva taxonomía que, basada en la lista de marcadores endofóricos de Hyland (2005) y en una extensa revisión bibliográfica, clasifica los marcadores endofóricos en tres grupos: puramente direccionales, marcadores que utilizan palabras específicas y una categoría que combina los dos primeros. El estudio explora dónde cuándo y cómo aparecen estos marcadores y la función que tienen, centrándose en las referencias anafóricas, catafóricas y no direccionales. También pretende identificar las diferencias que hay en el uso de marcadores endofóricos entre escritores noveles para quienes el inglés es su segunda lengua y escritores académicos expertos para quienes el inglés es su primera lengua. Así mismo, tiene como objetivo proporcionar información sobre tendencias y patrones en el empleo de marcadores endofóricos en la escritura académica en lengua inglesa, teniendo en cuenta la influencia en su uso de factores disciplinares y lingüísticos.

Los resultados revelan una mayor frecuencia de marcadores endofóricos en el corpus de Trabajos de Fin de Máster, lo que sugiere patrones discursivos distintivos entre los estudiantes checos que utilizan el inglés como segunda lengua, con predominio de marcadores endofóricos específicos y notables variaciones entre disciplinas.

Palabras clave: metadiscurso, marcadores endofóricos, Trabajos de Fin de Máster (TFM), discurso académico, análisis intercultural.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, metadiscourse has received considerable attention in English for academic purposes research. Metadiscourse markers in academic genres have been analysed using Hyland's (2005) classification scheme and in the models

published by Mauranen (1993) and Ädel (2006). Endophoric markers have been examined alongside other features of metadiscourse across various genres, languages, and disciplines, as well as over time. This study adopts Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse, which distinguishes between the interactive and interactional categories of metadiscourse. Interactional metadiscourse devices aim to engage the reader with the text (e.g. hedges, boosters, attitude markers), while interactive metadiscourse markers aim to guide the reader through the text (e.g. frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials).

Endophoric markers play a crucial role as metadiscourse devices, enabling writers to reference elements within the same text (e.g. *as mentioned above*, *in Section 3 below*). This, in turn, makes it easier for readers to make connections between different parts of the text and comprehend the author's argumentative structure. As Hyland states, these markers "make additional ideational material salient and therefore available to the reader" (2005: 51). By "referring to earlier material or anticipating something yet to come", writers help the reader "steer to a preferred interpretation or reading of the discourse" (2005: 51).

It is widely acknowledged that endophoric markers are crucial metadiscourse elements frequently employed in various forms of writing, such as books, research articles (RAs), student essays, Master's theses (MTs), and PhD dissertations. They act as signposts, guiding readers to specific facts, examples, methods, and research findings presented elsewhere in the text. However, endophoric markers are typically studied in conjunction with other categories of interactive metadiscourse, rather than as a distinct metadiscourse category.

Cross-linguistic variations in the use of metadiscourse including endophoric markers have been studied in RAs, MTs and essays written in English and other languages, such as Chinese (Kim and Lim 2013; Mu et al. 2015), Spanish (Mur-Dueñas 2011; Lee and Casal 2014), Catalan and Spanish (Martín-Laguna and Alcón 2015) and French and Norwegian (Dahl 2004), among others.

Several studies have explored metadiscourse use in learner academic writing in English, comparing L1 and L2 users and various proficiency levels (e.g. Liao 2020). Ädel (2006) discovered that Swedish students tended to overuse metadiscourse markers in their L2 English essays compared to American and British university students, indicating potential issues with communicative competence. In contrast, Burneikaitė's (2008, 2009) study comparing L1 and L2 MTs in English by students in Britain and Lithuania produced different results. The underuse of endophoric markers by L2 Lithuanian students was argued to be a consequence of their "inexperience in structuring lengthy texts" (Burneikaitė 2008: 45). Kobayashi (2017) investigated the developmental patterns of metadiscourse in L2 English essays by Asian learners with diverse L1 backgrounds,

identifying varying frequencies of metadiscourse use across proficiency levels. These differences were attributed to the learners' L1 rhetorical strategies rather than their lexical or grammatical competence or level of proficiency.

A wide range of cross-disciplinary studies have revealed varying frequencies and uses of endophoric markers in complete RAs (Cao and Hu 2014; Hyland and Jiang 2020) as well as in RA introductions (Del Saz Rubio 2011; Kawase 2015) and abstracts (Khedri et al. 2013; El-Dakhs 2018). Cao and Hu (2014) studied the use of endophoric markers in quantitative and qualitative RAs in three soft disciplines (applied linguistics, education and psychology). Clear cross-disciplinary differences were identified: the applied linguistics and education RAs employed linear references (i.e. forward or backward references) more frequently than the psychology RAs. Nevertheless, on the whole non-linear endophoric reference dominated (e.g. *see Table 1, in Fig. 2, as demonstrated in Excerpt 3*). Hyland (2005) noted that within soft disciplines, endophoric markers serve as a mechanism to enhance discourse, with a primary goal of facilitating readers' swift and direct access to relevant information distributed across various sections of the text.

In recent years, there has been significant attention given to the evolving understanding of interactive metadiscourse in academic writing, particularly in RAs, with a focus on its use across diverse disciplines, both soft and hard. Khedri et al. (2013) analysed 60 RA abstracts in applied linguistics and economics; Dahl (2004) examined 180 RAs in medicine, economics, and linguistics; Khalili and Aslanabadi (2014) studied 20 RAs in dentistry; and Celiešienė and Sabulyte (2018) compared metadiscourse marker usage in RAs in informatics, energy, and civil engineering. The results indicated that hard science texts employ more visual elements, which accounts for the frequent use of endophoric markers and code glosses. This practice ensures effective signposting and accurate interpretation by the reader of the information provided. Another cross-disciplinary research study compared Master's and doctoral dissertations across six disciplines written in English by L2 Hong Kong students (Hyland 2004). The results revealed that students in the hard disciplines, particularly those in engineering, demonstrated a relatively higher use of endophoric markers. This highlighted "the multi-modal nature of scientific discourse" (Hyland 2004: 147) and the increased dependence on arguments requiring frequent reference to elements such as tables, figures, examples, and photographs. Hyland and Jiang (2020) conducted a diachronic study analysing a corpus of 2.2 million words from articles in top journals across four academic disciplines, aiming to explore changes in interactive metadiscourse usage since 1965. The results indicate an increased usage of endophoric markers in English across diverse disciplines over the past 30 years. This upward trend seems to reflect a growing tendency for texts to become more explicit, employing

techniques like exemplification, illustration, and referencing tables and graphical data to clarify associations (Hyland and Jiang 2020).

Research into endophoric markers extends beyond RAs and includes other genres such as undergraduate essays (Ädel 2006), MTs (Lee and Casal 2014), postgraduate dissertations (Hyland and Tse 2004; Kawase 2015), and university textbooks (Hyland 1999). Bunton's (1999) study on postgraduate dissertations revealed that higher level endophoric references, i.e. those referring to larger portions of text or operating over greater distances, were more frequent. This phenomenon was attributed to the length of the texts. However, considerable variations among writers were also reported.

To date, research on Czech English-medium learner discourse has been limited to a handful of studies that concentrate on individual metadiscourse markers, such as sentence linkers (Vogel 2008; Povolná 2012), code glosses (Guziurová 2022), attitude markers (Jančaříková 2023) and self-mention (Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2023). However, there have been no investigations into the use of endophoric markers by Czech students in English.

As noted above, few studies to date have focused on metadiscourse in L2 MTs across soft disciplines. This paper aims to fill this gap by examining endophoric markers in L2 MTs written in English by Czech university students. Two corpora were compiled for this purpose: the Master's Thesis Corpus (MT_LLE) and the Research Article Corpus (RA_LLE). These corpora were used to compare and contrast the use of endophoric markers by English L2 and L1 writers, examining differences across levels of writing expertise and linguacultural dimensions. Additionally, the realisation of endophoric markers is compared across three disciplines, i.e. linguistics, literary studies, and education. These disciplines are integral to English studies at Czech universities, and the MTs included in the L2 corpus focus on these specific areas. A new taxonomy was devised and used in the analysis (for more details concerning the taxonomy, see Section 2.4).

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of occurrence, realisation, and function of endophoric markers in English-medium L2 (Czech) MTs and L1 published RAs?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the frequency of occurrence, realisation, and function of endophoric markers in English-medium L2 (Czech) MTs and L1 published RAs?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the frequency of occurrence, realisation, and function of endophoric markers in the three disciplines in English-medium L2 (Czech) MTs and L1 (English) published RAs?

2. Data and Methodology

2.1. Corpus Characteristics and Compilation

For the present study, two distinct corpora were compiled: the Master's Thesis Corpus (MT_LLE) and the Research Article Corpus (RA_LLE). Each of these corpora will be discussed in the following section, accompanied by an explanation of the selection criteria applied.

The analysis of endophoric markers was conducted on a specialised learner corpus of English-medium MTs written by Czech university students majoring in English language and literature, either at the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University in Brno. The corpus comprises theses written and submitted from 2010 to 2018. The following additional criteria were applied: the authors' native/first language is Czech (L1), and only theses awarded high grades, that is, 'A' ('Excellent'/'Merit'), were included. A total of 48 MTs were included in the corpus, distributed equally across three academic disciplines: linguistics, literary studies, and education, with 16 theses drawn from each discipline. Prior to the analysis, all MTs underwent a refinement process, which involved the removal of elements such as abstracts, citations, tables, and figures. This approach ensured that the analysis focused exclusively on the students' written discourse in running text found within the MT macrostructure. The corpus comprises a total of 948,000 words.

In order to investigate typical elements of metadiscourse in the MT corpus, it was necessary to compile a reference corpus representing L1 English academic discourse. Due to the fact that there is no corpus of English L1 MTs available, the reference corpus (RA_LLE) comprises RAs authored by scholars who are native English speakers and affiliated with universities in Britain or the United States. The authors' native speaker status (L1) is indicated by their names, affiliations, and CVs. The selection process exclusively considered articles from the same three fields or disciplines as in the MT corpus, i.e. linguistics, literary studies, and education. These articles were single-authored, produced between 2010 and 2018, and published in widely recognised international journals indexed in the Web of Science database. Linguistics articles were sourced from *Discourse & Communication*, the *Journal of Pragmatics*, and *Applied Linguistics*. Literary studies articles were selected from *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, *New Literary History*, and *SEL: Studies in English Literature*. Articles focusing on educational themes were taken from *Language and Education*, *Language Teaching Research*, and *Language Learning*. The corpus comprises 36 articles (12 articles per discipline), all of which have undergone the same cleaning process applied in the MT_LLE corpus. The total word count for this corpus is 243,000 words (see Table 1 below).

Corpus	No. of texts	Word count	Disciplines
MT_LLE	48	948,000	Linguistics, literary studies, education
RA_LLE	36	243,000	Linguistics, literary studies, education

Table 1. Composition of the MT_LLE and RA_LLE

2.2. Corpus Comparison and 'Tertium Comparationis'

Due to the unavailability of MTs authored by L1 English writers, no reference corpus could be compiled. Flowerdew (2015) aligns with Tribble (2002) in suggesting that in the absence of a directly comparable corpus, concessions must be made, and an 'analogue' corpus can be used. This refers to a corpus that closely resembles student writing in terms of genre and discipline (Flowerdew 2015: 60). The approach adheres to the 'tertium comparationis' criteria advocated by Connor and Moreno (2005: 155; see also Moreno 2008: 25). Therefore, the reference corpus of RAs (RA_LLA) was carefully compiled to mirror the MT_LLE corpus as closely as possible. Despite the differences between MTs and RAs in their aims, scope, audience, and criteria (Paltridge 2002; Flowerdew 2015), it has been argued that "there are significant overlaps in lexico-grammar and rhetorical functions" (Flowerdew 2015: 60). As certain sections of MTs (or dissertations) may eventually evolve into RAs (Swales 1990: 178), previous research on metadiscourse has often juxtaposed MTs with RAs, serving as potential templates for inexperienced writers (see, for instance, Koutsantoni 2006; Pujol Dahme and Selfa Sastre 2015; Abdollahzadeh 2019; Qiu and Ma 2019).

The MT_LLE corpus and RA_LLE corpus are fully comparable in terms of disciplines (linguistics, literary studies, and education), as well as the time span in which they were written (2010-2018). The analysis of the corpora thus incorporates the concept of intercultural, cross-linguistic and cross-disciplinary variation.

While it is worth noting that the sizes of these corpora vary, the primary focus of this study is to explore the occurrence of endophoric markers in theses written in English by Czech native speakers. To mitigate the discrepancies in corpus size, the research findings were normalised to occurrences per 10,000 words, and the log-likelihood ratio test was applied to account for size differences. This approach allows for drawing reliable conclusions while acknowledging the inherent limitations of the differing corpus sizes.

2.3. Procedure

Both corpora were compiled and searched using SketchEngine software (Kilgarriff et al. 2004). Statistical significance was determined using the non-parametric log-

likelihood test, following common practice in specialised corpus analysis. A significance level of <0.05 was established, with very low p-values indicated as <0.001.

Based on Hyland's (2005) list of endophoric markers and a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, a list of endophoric markers was compiled and searched within the corpora. After this initial stage, additional items identified as potential endophoric markers (e.g. *extract*, *excerpt*, *here*) were added to the list. It was required that every instance of potential endophoric markers be examined in context to ensure that they functioned as expected. According to Hyland and Tse (2004), who drew on Bunton's (1999) distinction between 'research acts' and 'writer acts', each potential discourse marker must be assessed to determine whether it carries propositional value (Example 1) or metadiscoursal value (Example 2) (Hyland and Tse 2004: 166).

(1) It was not enough for the teachers to value students' voices in the discussion; many of them felt they had to vanish completely, *following* procedures for discussion that completely removed the teacher from participation. (RA_EDU_04)

(2) *The following extracts* show other instances of Cherry's praise of Canadian-born ice hockey players while at the same time reiterating their Canadian regional allegiance and affinity. (MT_LIT_03)

The token *following* is used as a metadiscoursal device in Example 2; however, in the context of Example 1, it signals discourse-external relations.

Furthermore, within the dimension of interactive metadiscourse, careful attention has to be given to certain markers, which could be assessed either as frame markers or as endophoric markers, based on the context. Below are two examples of the token *analysis* in context (Examples 3 and 4):

(3) I turn now to an *analysis* of what these contrasts mean in terms of language use. (RA_LIN_12)

(4) Nevertheless, as demonstrated *in the analysis*, considerable attention to the choice of lexico-grammatical items needs to be paid. (MT_LIN_09)

In Example 3, the word *analysis* introduces or frames the content that follows and is typically categorised as a frame marker, labelling the stage of the discourse based on Hyland's theory of metadiscourse. In Example 4, the phrase *in the analysis* functions as an endophoric marker, referring to the specific analysis within the same text for content and clarification.

2.4. Taxonomy

When analysing endophoric markers, authors typically provide a list of such markers or offer a few examples (Hyland and Tse 2004; Hyland 2005). Bunton (1999), influenced by Mauranen's (1993) research on metatext and text reflexivity and by Crismore and Farnsworth's (1990) terms of reviews and previews, created a taxonomy of endophoric markers. He referred to them as 'text references' and proposed a taxonomy that distinguishes between linear and non-linear text references. Linear text references are explicit references to other parts of the linear text. They are further categorised based on the direction of the reference as reviews "looking back, repeating, summarising or referring to an earlier stage of the text" (e.g. *as noted earlier in the paper*), previews "looking forward, anticipating, summarising or referring to a later stage of the text" (e.g. *the next section*), and overviews "looking in both directions, referring to the current stage of the text in overall terms" (Bunton 1999: 45). It is worth noting that 'overviews' in this context concern references that consider the text from a broader perspective —e.g. "This was only used by X among the (subjects) examined in this thesis" (Bunton 1999: 46). Bunton also showed the level of reference (scope), which may refer to the written discourse as a whole or to a specific chapter. Additionally, he explored the distance to the text segment being referred to. Non-linear text references are explicit references to *tables*, *figures*, *charts*, or *appendices*.

This taxonomy, expanded using Hyland's (1999, 2005) theory of metadiscourse to distinguish between endophoric and frame markers, served as a valuable framework in Cao and Hu's (2014) analysis of RAs. Burneikaitė (2009) incorporated Bunton's (1999) classification of metatext into her work, which resulted in a classification that divides endophoric markers into non-linear and linear text references. As with Bunton's taxonomy, non-linear text references cover elements like *appendices*, *tables*, *figures*, *charts*, *graphs*, and *diagrams*. Concerning linear text references, the author classified them into several levels: thesis-level markers (e.g. *paper, study, thesis, analysis, dissertation, research (work), essay, article, project*), chapter/section-level markers (e.g. *chapter, (sub)section, part, paragraph*), sentence-level markers (e.g. *example, instance, illustration, sentence, case*) and vague markers (e.g. *above, below, further, following, previously, what follows, remainder*) (Burneikaitė 2009: 13).

In an attempt to capture and categorise all instances of endophoric markers identified in the corpora. I propose the following taxonomy. While it has some similarities with Bunton's taxonomy, it is primarily based on Hyland's definition of metadiscourse and the interactive dimension, taking into account additional elements identified in the data.

I partially agree with the decision to divide endophoric markers into linear and non-linear elements. However, when analysing the corpora, I came across instances of endophoric markers that might be classified as non-linear according to existing taxonomies, although their context and function indicated otherwise. For example, the marker *table* in the following sentences does not qualify as an example of non-linear reference since it refers back or ahead (see Examples in 5).

(5) As we have seen, the focus on significance also leads researchers astray in suggesting that nonsignificant findings should not even be reported, *as in Table 1 above*; not reporting full findings only helps to further obscure what was observed in the data and why patterns might or might not have been statistically significant in the first place. (RA_EDU_11)

Table 1 below represents only a sample of relevant verbs (i.e. verbs related to the issue of existence or appearance on the scene) as presented in the book. (MT_LIN_02)

For that reason, I abandoned the distinction between linear and non-linear and in its place propose the following taxonomy (see Table 2).

Endophoric markers are categorised into three groups: purely directional markers, markers using specific words, and a category that combines the first two. Markers using specific words can refer to the entire discourse (*article, essay, here* [non-directional reference], *paper, study, thesis, work*), to individual parts of the discourse (*analysis, chapter/subchapter, conclusion, discussion, introduction, page, paragraph, part, section/subsection*) or to items incorporated into the discourse (*appendix, chart, diagram, example, excerpt, extract, figure, here* [either as backward or forward reference], *table*). These markers can refer back or ahead by the use of tenses (Examples in 6) or immediate context (Example 7).

(6) *In the examples analysed so far, I have shown* how the interview is designed to foreground the IE's feelings and thoughts, to be collaborative rather than confrontational, and to establish a version of events in terms of what happened to her personally. (RA_LIN_01)

These key concepts *will be applied in the analysis* of online weight loss advertising. (MT_LIN_13)

(7) The items in the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986) reflect the above mentioned characteristics of an anxious student, as we can see *in these examples*: <EXAMPLE>, or <EXAMPLE>. (MT_EDU_09)

Moreover, they can also serve as non-directional endophoric markers, pointing to the current discourse, section, or incorporated item itself (Examples in 8). When combined with clearly directional markers, thus labelled as combined endophoric markers, they can, of course, serve as anaphoric and cataphoric signposting markers (Example 9).

Categories of EM	Subcategory	Type of reference	Examples of EM	Examples of EM in sentences from the corpora
Purely directional		Anaphoric	*above, aforementioned, before, earlier, previously, just, already*	For example, *as mentioned above*, many of the participants in this study viewed discussion both as a community-building exercise as well as an assessment. (RA_EDU_04)
		Cataphoric	*below, following/ as follows, further on, next, later (on), subsequently*	*Below* are some of the most frequent and notable references appearing in speeches of American presidents. (MT_LIN_01)
Specific	Reference to the entire discourse	Anaphoric	*article, essay, here (*non-directional reference*), paper, study, thesis, work*	My hope is that the issues addressed *in this paper* have at least raised some awareness regarding statistical significance testing, its accurate conduct, and its limitations, and that L2 quantitative research will benefit to some small, though perhaps significant, degree as a result. (RA_EDU_11)
		Cataphoric		As *this article* will reveal, in the early nineteenth century laughter is elevated to the condition of the language of feeling and indicative of Romantic genius. (RA_LIT_10)
		Non-directional		*This thesis* works with the concept of new racism, as dealt with in CDA by Dijk (e.g. 1991, 2000, 2002) or Wodak (2001) or by Romm (2010) and Kundnani (2007) in social sciences. (MT_LIN_10)
	Reference to individual parts of the discourse	Anaphoric	*analysis, chapter/ subchapter, conclusion, discussion, introduction, page, paragraph, part, section/subsection*	As mentioned in *Chapter 6*, the type of image that appears in the discourse is very significant and constitutes a part of the information load of the advertisement. (MT_LIN_13)
		Cataphoric		The deployment of such expressions thus appears to be doing other kinds of interactional work, a point which we will return to discuss in further detail *in section four*. (RA_LIN_06)
		Non-directional		It is far beyond the scope of *this section* to provide a comprehensive review of research on motivation and subsequent theories explaining the results. (MT_EDU_10)

Categories of EM	Subcategory	Type of reference	Examples of EM	Examples of EM in sentences from the corpora
Specific	Reference to items inserted into the discourse	Anaphoric	*appendix, chart, diagram, example, excerpt, extract, figure, here* (either as backward or forward reference), *table*	Consider the following metaphor: <EXAMPLE> *In this excerpt*, the speaker suggests that war has human-like qualities, demanding people change their attitude and act even when they do not want to. (MT_LIN_01)
		Cataphoric		Verbs that have been detected as the only representatives of a certain class will be included *in Table 15*. (MT_LIN_02)
		Non-directional		Alexander Scourby was an obvious choice to narrate the epic project for the American Foundation for the Blind (*see Figure 1*). (RA_LIT_08)
Combined (directional + specific)		Anaphoric	*e.g. above, preceding, previous + article, section, figure*	As with *previous excerpts*, Peng's positioning as a potential target of discrimination emerges in the spaces created by the interviewers' questions, and thus the ambiguity of his representational positioning results from its sequential location in the co-constructed production of talk. (RA_LIN_09)
		Cataphoric	*e.g. below, following, next + thesis, part, table*	More details on this issue are provided *in the following sections*. (MT_EDU_03)

Table 2. Taxonomy of endophoric markers with corpus examples

(8) However, the author is aware of certain weaknesses in her lesson plans that are defined *in the discussion*. (MT_EDU_16)

In this introductory section, I start by clarifying the distinction between first and second order concepts of im/politeness, briefly trace the history of mock politeness within impoliteness studies and present the definition of mock politeness which will be employed in this paper. (RA_LIN_05)

While on the surface some of these items may not seem inherently tied to a rhetoric of uncertainty and doubt, closer inspection of concordance lines and texts (*see Table 3*) reveals the rhetorical function each serves in the discourse. (RA_LIN_04)

(9) As *the previous discussion* has implied, curricular thinking has been more the exception than a well-honed practice in ISLA. (RA_EDU_08)

This is even more evident *in the following subchapters (6.2 and 6.3)* where particular models of instructional design are introduced. (MT_EDU_14)

Directional markers include anaphoric (e.g. *above, aforementioned, before, earlier, previously, just, already*) and cataphoric (e.g. *below, following/as follows, further on, next, later (on), subsequently*) markers. These can be used, for example, in adverbial phrases (thus labelled as purely directional markers) (Example 10) or in nominal phrases, usually in combination with specific markers (but not exclusively, as in Example 11), thus labelled as combined markers, where they function as premodifiers (Example 12) or postmodifiers (Example 13).

(10) *As mentioned earlier*, the topic of weight loss can be considered as a very sensitive issue because it is closely connected with the concept of ideal body image and lifestylism. (MT_LIN_13)

And *later on*, this distinction will lead me to navigate between ways of reading for description and the varied ambitions of so-called "descriptive reading" as such. (RA_LIT_05)

(11) Together with *the above stated definition*, this settles the notion of error clear enough for the purposes of this work. (MT_EDU_07)

However, the design of her extended response from line 8 onwards quickly shifts to a more experiential display of emotionality, including the same *features previously noted in section 3 above*. (RA_LIN_01)

(12) We have described the role of experiments, measures, corpora, and basic skills tutors *in previous sections.* (RA_EDU_12)

(13) As can be derived from *the example above*, it is not sufficient to teach the students only the separate concepts of language. (MT_EDU_02)

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the quantitative analysis of endophoric markers in the two corpora are summarised in Table 3. The frequency of endophoric markers found in the learner corpus, consisting of MTs written in English by Czech university students, was significantly higher (41.6 per 10,000 words) than in the RA_LLE reference corpora, with 28.7 occurrences per 10,000 words. This difference was found to be statistically significant (LL test, p-value <0.001).

Endophoric marker categories	Subcategories	MT_LLE		RA_LLE		LL G2	p-value
		n	pttw	n	pttw		
Purely directional		608	6.4	60	2.5	64.6176	<0.001
Specific		2,079	21.9	509	21.0	0.8714	0.3506
	Reference to the entire written discourse	234	2.4	132	5.4	47.8588	<0.001
	Reference to individual parts of the written discourse	927	9.8	69	2.9	140.9983	<0.001
	Reference to items incorporated into the written discourse	918	9.6	308	12.7	15.9739	<0.001
Combined		1,256	13.2	128	5.3	127.0166	<0.001
TOTAL		**3,943**	**41.6**	**697**	**28.7**	**89.3992**	**<0.001**

Table 3. General frequency of endophoric markers across the corpora (Abbreviations: n: number; pttw: per ten thousand words)

Comparing the three categories of endophoric markers (purely directional, specific, and combined), the highest frequency of endophoric references in both corpora was associated with specific endophoric markers. The frequency of specific markers was nearly the same in the MT_LLE and RA_LLE corpora (21.9 and 21.0, respectively; LL test, p-value 0.3506), which may indicate a genre-related trend in research writing. This aspect will be examined further in a cross-disciplinary analysis of specific endophoric references later in this section.

Another salient observation regarding specific reference and its three subcategories is the frequency of referencing items integrated into the discourse. This referencing frequency was notably higher in the RA_LLE corpus (12.7 occurrences) compared to the MT_LLE corpus (9.6 occurrences), and this difference was found to be statistically significant (p-value < 0.001). In contrast, combined endophoric markers were more prevalent in the MT_LLE corpus (13.2) than in the RA_LLE corpus (5.3), and again this difference was statistically significant (p-value < 0.001). Similar results have been found in engineering RAs, where a greater density of lexical bundles occurred (e.g. *is shown in Figure*) (Hyland 2008). This may suggest that Czech undergraduate students tend to be exceptionally clear or meticulous when directing their readers to specific parts of their discourse in

English-medium theses. They emphasise this by using multiple endophoric markers simultaneously, as illustrated in Example 14.

(14) *It has been mentioned in the opening paragraph of this section (see page 49)* that in his novel Ellis attributes the rampant indifference that leads to the collapse of communication not only to the influence of television but also of glossy magazines. (MT_LIT_05)

Within each category of endophoric markers (i.e. purely directional, specific, and combined), endophoric markers can be categorised as anaphoric or cataphoric. Additionally, specific reference markers can also be classified as non-directional (see Table 2).

Concerning the overall distinctions among anaphoric, cataphoric, and non-directional references, Table 4 provides a summary of the data in both the RA_LLE and MT_LLE corpora. Anaphoric reference predominates over cataphoric in both corpora, as authors tend to revisit previously mentioned content, reinforcing the reader's recollection of already presented knowledge. Anaphoric reference occurs most frequently among Czech L2 English student writers, at a rate of 16.3 occurrences per 10,000 words, while L1 English expert writers predominantly use non-directional reference, with a frequency of 13.2 instances per 10,000 words. This difference is statistically significant (p-value < 0.001). However, the difference in the use of non-directional reference between the MT_LLE and RA_LLE corpora was not found to be statistically significant (p-value 0.0952).

	MT_LLE n	MT_LLE pttw	RA_LLE n	RA_LLE pttw	LL G2	p-value
Anaphoric reference	1,548	16.3	246	10.7	54.4399	<0.001
Cataphoric reference	1,273	13.4	131	5.4	126.7413	<0.001
Non-directional reference	1,122	11.8	320	13.2	2.7844	0.0952

Table 4. Anaphoric, cataphoric and non-directional endophoric markers across the corpora

In Lee and Casal's (2014) investigation of engineering MTs, the results indicated that L1 English writers directed readers' attention to previously and subsequently discussed material equally. In contrast, Spanish L1 authors primarily included vague anaphoric reference markers. It is worth noting that Czech students use all three types of reference at comparable frequencies, ranging from 11.8 to 16.3 occurrences in their English-medium theses. Expert English L1 writers, conversely,

exhibit a clear preference for non-directional and anaphoric reference, with frequencies of 13.2 and 10.7 occurrences per 10,000 words, respectively.

Anaphoric markers, which were used both purely directionally and in combined phrases, were counted collectively, and the comparison of their frequency across the corpora can be seen in Figure 1. The most frequently used anaphoric markers in all three corpora were the words *above* (frequency of 4.8 in MT_LLE and 2.0 in RA_LLE) and *previous/ly* (2.0 in MT_LLE and 0.7 in RA_LLE). This aligns with the findings of Hyland and Jiang (2020), who identified *above* as the most frequently used linear marker in both 1965 and 1985. The third most frequently used anaphoric marker in the MT_LLE corpus was *already*, occurring at a rate of 1.4, in contrast to its significantly lower incidence in the RA_LLE corpus, where its frequency was 0.2. This vague anaphoric reference is not commonly used in English; however, in Czech, the formal phrase "jak *již* bylo zmíněno" [as has *already* been mentioned] is a frequently used anaphoric marker within academic discourse. Therefore, the more frequent use of the marker *already* by Czech students when writing in English might be attributed to cross-linguistic influence from the Czech language.

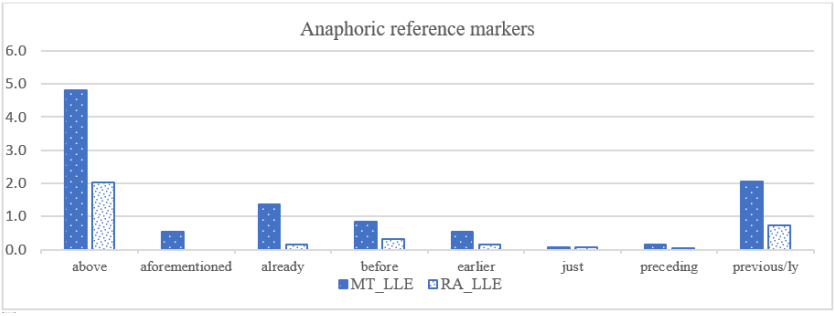

Figure 1. Anaphoric reference markers (purely directional and combined, counted together)

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of cataphoric reference markers across the corpora. The two most commonly used cataphoric markers were consistent across both corpora: *following* (frequency of 6.0 in MT_LLE and 2.2 in RA_LLE) and *below* (1.8 in MT_LLE and 1.3 in RA_LLE). Czech students and expert writers used *next* at a similar frequency (0.6 and 0.5, respectively). Czech students also employed the marker *further (on)*, but this marker did not appear in the RA_LLE corpus. A similar pattern was observed with the marker *subsequent/ly*, which was absent from the RA_LLE corpus.

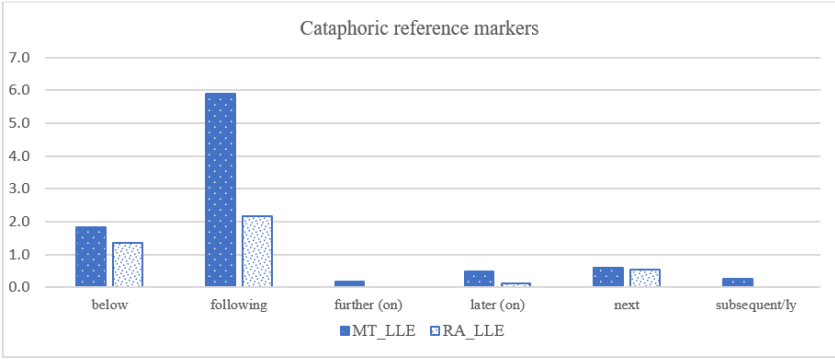

Figure 2. Cataphoric reference markers (purely directional and combined, counted together)

The following part of the results section will examine cross-disciplinary variations regarding the occurrence, realisation, and frequency of endophoric markers. A more in-depth exploration is provided for specific endophoric markers and their three subcategories, as these markers were the most frequent form of endophoric reference across both corpora.

Table 5 presents the distribution of references to the entire discourse, drawing data from the category of endophoric reference using specific expressions. When referencing their written discourse, authors predominantly employed terms such as *thesis* and *work* in MTs, and *article* and *study* in RAs. The second most frequently used term in the MT_LLE was *here*, which ranked third in the RA_LLE corpus. However, it had a higher frequency than in MT_LLE, with 1.2 occurrences per 10,000 words. *Here* functioned as a self-reference word to denote the thesis or article itself. In parts of the corpora it was challenging to discern whether the reference pointed to the entire discourse or a specific part (e.g. a section) (see Examples 15 and 16). Consequently, all instances of *here* referring to the entire discourse or its parts were included in the count.

(15) The interview excerpts considered *here* come from a larger ethnographic project involving individuals who immigrated to a small Midwestern city in the US, which I have named Midtown, and who were enrolled in free ESL classes offered by a social services agency. (RA_LIN_09)

(16) In conclusion I would like to say that I hope I have correctly grasped the issues compiled in this section, however, I rather apologize *here* for any prospective misinterpretation. (MT_LIT_04)

Reference to the entire written discourse	MT_LLE		RA_LLE	
	n	pttw	n	pttw
article	0	0.0	42	1.7
essay	0	0.0	8	0.3
here	41	0.4	29	1.2
paper	20	0.2	18	0.7
study	19	0.2	32	1.3
thesis	119	1.3	0	0.0
work	35	0.4	3	0.1
TOTAL	**234**	**2.5**	**132**	**5.4**

Table 5. Distribution of reference to the entire written discourse (in specific category only)

As mentioned above, endophoric reference to individual parts of the discourse and to items incorporated into the discourse reveals similarities in the research-oriented genre (theses and articles). Therefore, a closer examination of these two subcategories, especially investigation of cross-disciplinary variations among the three disciplines (linguistics, literary studies, and education), would be insightful.

Table 6 summarises the distribution of references to individual parts of the written discourse, drawing data from the specific-only and combined categories and counting them together. The relative frequencies clearly indicate that referencing individual parts of the written discourse was significantly higher in MT_LLE than in RA_LLE across all three disciplines, possibly explained by the length of the research genre. While references to *chapters* and *subchapters* were the most frequent endophoric markers across all three disciplines of MT_LLE, such references were naturally absent in RA_LLE, as these are not part of the texts. Reference to *sections* and *subsections* occurred across all three disciplines, with the incidence consistently higher in MT_LLE than in RA_LLE.

Concerning frequency of references to specific parts of discourse across disciplines, linguistics showed the highest occurrence of endophoric reference in both MA_LLE and RA_LLE (19.7, 9.4 respectively). However, upon closer examination of specific references to *analysis* and *discussion*, which appear in both research genres and are considered core parts of each research study, clear differences emerge.

Reference to *analysis* was more frequent in RAs than in MTs in linguistics and education studies, highlighting the significance of analysis sections in RAs, as recognised by expert writers. Reference to *discussion* was also more frequent in RAs in linguistics, with the same frequency found in MTs and RAs in education.

Reference to *pages*, frequently mentioned in lists of endophoric markers in various studies of RAs (cf. Hyland 2005; Lee and Casal 2014), was absent from RAs in all three disciplines, and in the MT corpus only 19 instances were found.

Based on the description so far and the contents of Table 6, it is evident that reference to individual parts of the discourse was lowest in literary studies MTs and RAs. This is explained by the focus of the discipline itself; as analysis and discussion are distributed throughout the discourse in literary studies, there is no clear tendency to refer to them explicitly.

Reference to individual parts of the written discourse	Linguistics		Literary studies		Education	
	MT_LIN	RA_LIN	MT_LIT	RA_LIT	MT_EDU	RA_EDU
	pttw	pttw	pttw	pttw	pttw	pttw
analysis	3.3	4.0	1.1	0.0	0.2	0.4
chapter/subchapter	4.4	0.0	4.1	0.0	8.8	0.0
conclusion	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0
discussion	0.6	0.8	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.2
introduction	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.0
page	0.2	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
paragraph	0.3	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.5	0.0
part	4.4	0.1	1.3	0.4	3.0	0.1
section/subsection	6.1	4.2	0.8	0.6	2.2	1.2
TOTAL	**19.7**	**9.4**	**8.8**	**1.1**	**15.0**	**1.9**

Table 6. Distribution of reference to individual parts of the written discourse (data taken from specific and combined category, counted together)

Table 7 illustrates the distribution of references to items incorporated into the discourse, with data taken from the specific-only and combined categories and counted together. Once again, endophoric markers are used significantly less in the discipline of literary studies in both MTs and RAs. The highest frequency was identified in linguistics studies in both MTs and RAs (with the frequency almost equal), while in the discipline of education, RAs displayed much higher use of these markers than MTs (15.2 to 9.6, respectively).

Reference to items incorporated into the discourse	Linguistics		Literary studies		Education	
	MT_LIN	RA_LIN	MT_LIT	RA_LIT	MT_EDU	RA_EDU
	pttw	pttw	pttw	pttw	pttw	pttw
appendix	1.6	0.3	0.1	0.0	2.2	0.2
chart	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0
diagram	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
example	8.9	5.8	0.6	0.4	1.0	3.4
excerpt	0.5	4.9	0.6	0.0	0.0	1.9
extract	2.5	7.9	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
figure	2.3	4.8	0.0	0.4	2.6	2.0
here	3.0	1.0	0.3	0.4	0.4	1.6
table	7.8	1.9	0.0	0.0	2.6	6.0
TOTAL	**28.2**	**26.8**	**1.7**	**1.1**	**9.6**	**15.2**

Table 7. Distribution of reference to items incorporated into the discourse (data taken from specific and combined category, counted together)

Regarding the actual words used in the endophoric markers, the most frequently used references to incorporated items in linguistics MTs were *example*, *table*, and *here*, whereas in linguistics RAs, they were *extract*, *example*, *excerpt*, and *figure*. In literary studies MTs and RAs, the most frequent references were *example* and *here*. The endophoric marker *here* is used either as an anaphoric marker (Example 17) or a cataphoric marker (Example 18), often substituting for words such as *example*, *extract*, *excerpt*, etc.

(17) Initially putting laughter and tears together, Hazlitt soon adopts the conventional approach of having tears signify pathos and laughter embodying derision: <EXAMPLE>. While laughter is not a sign of pity *here*, it is indicative of the sympathetic imagination since laughter reflects our capacity to discern what is "unreasonable and unnecessary" in others and act accordingly. (RA_LIT_10)

(18) Let me demonstrate it on a few examples *here*: <EXAMPLE>. Simple structured compliments such as <EXAMPLE> or <EXAMPLE> are often exploited by the characters as well (10.2%). (MT_LIN_11)

In the education MT corpus, the most frequently used reference words in this subcategory were *table*, *figure*, and *appendix/appendices*, while in the education RA corpus, they were *table*, *example*, and *figure*. In education RAs, references to *tables* were twice as frequent as in MTs (6.0 and 2.6, respectively). References to *figures* were almost the same in MTs as in RAs. Another distinction was that

authors of MTs across all three disciplines made more references to *appendix/ appendices*. Once again, the variation is attributed to the structural norms of RAs in different journals, where appendices are not common, while in MTs, use of appendices is frequent.

The occurrence of endophoric reference to items incorporated into discourse, especially to visual aids like *figures* and *tables*, is notably scarcer in literary studies than in linguistics and education. This scarcity can be explained by the primary focus in literary studies on descriptive analysis, introduction of and commentary on quotes from literary works or secondary sources, and presentation of important examples.

When combining references to *examples*, *excerpts*, *extracts*, and *here* in linguistics, authors in both MTs and RAs relied on them more than authors writing within the field of education (14.9 in MTs and 19.6 in RAs in linguistics compared to 1.4 in MTs and 6.9 in RAs in education). In contrast, references to findings summarised using visual materials (e.g. *charts*, *diagrams*, *figures*, and *tables*), the differences were less pronounced. Authors of RAs in education showed a higher reliance on these visual materials (8.1 in RA_EDU, 6.1 in MT_EDU), whereas in MTs this type of reference was more frequent in linguistics (11.8 in MT_LIN, 6.7 in RA_LIN).

4. Conclusion

The extent to which endophoric markers are explicitly taught in academic English writing courses varies. In many courses, the primary focus is on teaching students to structure their writing, develop arguments, use evidence, and cite sources properly. However, depending on the course's curriculum, the instructor's approach, and the students' proficiency levels, endophoric markers can be covered to some extent. These markers are crucial for ensuring coherence and cohesion in academic writing. Endophoric signposting helps readers understand the relationships between different parts of the text and navigate the content smoothly, making it particularly important in longer and more complex pieces of writing, such as the MT.

The analysis of endophoric markers across the Master's Thesis Corpus (MT_LLE) and the reference corpus, the Research Article Corpus (RA_LLE), has revealed distinctive patterns in how Czech university students majoring in English language and literature use these markers compared to L1 English-speaking writers.

A new taxonomy of endophoric markers was developed for this study. The taxonomy categorises endophoric markers into purely directional, specific, and combined markers, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how these markers

function in different contexts. The overall findings revealed that the MT_LLE corpus contained a significantly higher frequency of endophoric markers (41.6 per 10,000 words) as compared with the reference corpus (28.7 per 10,000 words in RA_LLE). This difference can be attributed to the respective length of the two types of written discourse, as described in other research studies (cf. Bunton 1999). However, discourse length cannot be the sole factor influencing the use of endophoric markers. Crismore et al. (1993) suggest that the use of metadiscourse is closely linked to socio-cultural contexts. This is consistent with the findings reported in a study by Afzaal et al. (2021) on the use of metadiscourse markers, comparing introductions of MTs written in Chinese and US universities. The lower use of metadiscourse markers found in Chinese introductions was attributed not only to the shorter length of the texts but also to socio-cultural factors. In Chinese writing, readers are required to take on a larger role in determining the relationship of specific sections within the text as a whole (Afzaal et al. 2021: 12).

The more frequent use of certain types and realisations of endophoric markers in RA_LLE suggests a clear link to the function of endophoric markers as used by expert writers. Notably, combined endophoric markers integrating specific and purely directional markers were more prevalent in the MT_LLE corpus, indicating a comprehensive approach by Czech students in guiding readers within their English written discourse, albeit suggestive of their inexperience. Conversely, specific markers referring to the entire discourse, individual parts, or items incorporated into the discourse were equally prevalent in both the MT_LLE and RA_LLA corpora (21.9 and 21.0, respectively; LL test, p-value 0.3506), suggesting a shared emphasis on signposting and guiding readers through research-genre texts. Furthermore, within this category, referencing to the discourse itself or to items incorporated into the written discourse prevailed in RA_LLE compared to MT_LLE, and the results were found to be statistically significant.

The examination of anaphoric, cataphoric, and non-directional reference highlights further differences between the corpora that cannot be explained solely by the length of the texts that make up the corpora but rather by the function of particular endophoric markers. Anaphoric reference dominates in Czech L2 English student writing, whereas English-speaking expert writers primarily employ non-directional reference, indicating a difference in the use of markers between Czech students and experienced L1 English-speaking writers. Similarly, Cao and Hu (2014) identified a prevalence of non-directional reference in their study. Therefore, academic English courses that emphasise the significance of non-directional reference, as observed in expert writing, can enhance students' proficiency in the use of English academic discourse.

Cross-disciplinary analysis also revealed variations in the use of endophoric markers. For instance, linguistics exhibited a higher occurrence of endophoric reference in both the MT_LLE and RA_LLE corpora. On the other hand, MTs in education displayed a significantly lower incidence of these markers than RAs in the same discipline. This is something that can be addressed by instructors of academic English by encouraging students to use more endophoric reference when presenting their results in the discipline of education. They could reference items integrated into their discourse, such as *tables* and *examples*, based on and closely related to either the quantitative or qualitative methods of their research study.

Academic writing instruction in English and coursebooks typically cover metadiscourse and include exercises for practising specific structures. However, endophoric markers are often treated as implicit knowledge that everyone is expected to possess and use. Consequently, there tends to be a lack of exercises with which to practice this aspect.

These findings highlight the potential for enhancing English academic writing courses, enabling students to develop skills for effectively communicating their ideas and arguments in written form. Additionally, students should be familiarised with the conventions of English academic discourse in their discipline, including the use of endophoric markers. One approach could involve students identifying endophoric markers in samples of specific text genres, thereby making their implicit knowledge about the use of endophoric markers explicit. Moreover, instruction on metadiscourse, including endophoric markers, can be integrated with introductory lessons on using corpus tools and building their own corpora. Awareness-raising activities could be employed to compare the use of endophoric markers in expert writing within their discipline with their own written output. Such activities can facilitate their development as proficient and knowledgeable writers and corpus users, which can later assist them in constructing their own corpora and conducting research.

I acknowledge several limitations in this study. Firstly, there was a discrepancy in the size of the corpora, suggesting a need for an increase in the size of the reference corpus. To address this issue, the research findings were normalised to occurrences per 10,000 words. Additionally, there is potential for further research, including the addition of another reference corpus, such as one made up of PhD dissertations written in English (L2) by Czech university students, to investigate developmental patterns. Further research could also involve a broader range of disciplines, possibly including the hard sciences. Despite these limitations, the corpus-based analysis provided valuable insights into how Czech students use endophoric markers in their MTs across three disciplines in the humanities.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the Czech Science Foundation grant 21-12150S *Intercultural variation in writer-reader interaction in English-medium academic discourse by Czech and Anglophone novice writers.*

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Received: 10/12/2023
Accepted: 03/04/2024

‘FEEDBACK MEANS THE WORLD TO ME’: CONSTRUCTING PROXIMITY IN CANON-COMPLIANT FANFICTION

‘FEEDBACK MEANS THE WORLD TO ME’: LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA PROXIMIDAD EN LA FANFICCIÓN AJUSTADA AL CANON

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202410256

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Abstract

This paper examines the linguistic strategies used in English to create proximity within the online fandom community. The study applies close reading techniques to analyse three works of fanfiction belonging to a canon-compliant subgenre. It explores how authors from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds establish a relationship with their readers by demonstrating their affiliation with fandom (proximity of membership) and dedication to the source material (proximity of commitment). To investigate these techniques, the study employs the model of proximity defined by Hyland (2010), extended by the findings of Suau-Jiménez (2019, 2020). The analysis includes both the main text and the metatext, revealing similarities in the techniques used by the authors to establish proximity through organisation, argument, credibility, stance and engagement.

Keywords: proximity, interpersonality, fanfiction, fan studies, genre.

Resumen

Este artículo examina las estrategias lingüísticas empleadas en inglés para crear proximidad dentro de la comunidad de fan en línea. El estudio incorpora técnicas de lectura atenta para analizar tres *fanfictions* o fanficciones pertenecientes a un

subgénero que se ajusta al canon. Explora el modo en el que autores de diversos orígenes socioculturales establecen vínculos con sus lectores demostrando su afiliación al *fandom* o comunidad fan (proximidad de pertenencia) y su dedicación al material original (proximidad de compromiso). Para investigar estas técnicas, el estudio emplea el modelo de proximidad definido por Hyland (2010), ampliado por los hallazgos de Suau-Jiménez (2019, 2020). El análisis incluye tanto el texto principal como el metatexto y revela que hay similitudes en las técnicas empleadas por los autores para establecer las facetas que constituyen la proximidad: organización, argumentación, credibilidad, postura y compromiso.

Palabras clave: proximidad, interpersonalidad, fanficciones, estudios sobre aficionados, género.

1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to explore how reader interaction is encouraged by the linguistic strategies used in English by fanfiction writers. The first section of the article introduces fandom as a community with defined practices, such as the creation of fanfiction. In the following parts, fanfiction will be described as a form of communication between writers and readers. Furthermore, I will briefly present research on fanfiction and introduce the notion of proximity, which may be constructed within fanfiction to facilitate interaction and engagement among members of the community, and present the analysis of the study data. In the last section, I will discuss the results and attempt to determine how fanfiction writers may construct proximity in canon-compliant fanfiction and how they use language to present and justify their writing.

1.1. What is a Fandom?

The word "fan" comes from the Latin *fanaticus*, which describes a devotee (Jenkins 1992). Fans participate in activities to express their deep affection for a certain product or person; they form a community and create texts, art and music based on their common interest. An online group that shares traditions, opinions, perspectives and social norms is called a fandom (Kobus 2018). Each fandom has its object of affection such as a video game, book or television series. A fandom is characterised by their practices of "prosumption", meaning consumption and production. "Prosumer", a term coined by Alvin Toffler (1980), was defined as an agent who both consumes a product and produces it in remade form. These practices of "prosumption" include critical reinterpretation (Silberstein-Bamford 2023), appropriation, immersion (Van Steenhuyse 2011) and creative output.

Fans form groups and function as communities with defined practices, constituting a participatory culture "inviting many forms of participation and levels of engagement" (Jenkins 1992: 2). Fanfiction writing is one of the practices used for initiating interaction and discussion among members of the community.

1.2. What is Fanfiction?

Fanfiction is one of the most popular forms of production within fandom. It allows the writer to disaggregate and reorganise the source material and create a text based on another text (Hellekson and Busse 2014). By reusing features from a well-established universe, such as characters or settings, fanfiction develops a new narrative which refines the source material and makes it flawless in the eyes of the author (Oberc 2015). Fanfiction is the result of deep analysis of source material and expands on certain scenes, plotlines and character personalities. It is a process of "retelling" carried out in a participatory culture, which allows people to assume multiple roles simultaneously, that is, author, receiver and critic. Online writing allows everyone, regardless of their gender, age or social status, to express their opinions, be creative or engage in discussion with the help of the story (Menise 2020).

Classifying fanfiction can be difficult because each fandom has its own set of terms and conventions. Fanfiction is not a single uniform category; instead, we can only identify certain patterns and trends within it. Several taxonomies have been developed for fanfiction over the years (see Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Pugh 2005; Kobus 2018), although there is no official system of categorisation to date. This study focuses on canon-compliant fanfiction, a type of fanfiction that does not change the original storyline and whose main purpose is to explain and elaborate on certain aspects of the plot (Kobus 2018). The story may be set before, during or after the events of the original work. Writers often interpret the original events and draw conclusions, which are then incorporated into the new text. In canon-compliant fanfiction, any additions to the plot must be implemented convincingly to ensure the reader understands how they improve upon the original. These additions function in much the same way as arguments.[1] An argument is a new element of the plot which aims to enhance and complement the original work, increasing the satisfaction of both the author and the readers.

A fandom has an in-group register, which is also a criterion for membership. It is assumed that several genres of fanfiction coexist within a fandom, and members employ specific terminology to refer to original material. To be a member of a fandom, one must possess a satisfactory comprehension of the source material and the related terminology. Similarly, discourse communities also require "a threshold of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise"

(Swales 1990: 27). A fandom may be considered a discourse community that uses specialised terminology and tropes to achieve its communicative goals.

1.3. Interactions in Digital Fanfiction Writing

In participatory cultures, shared practices such as writing and reading fanfiction serve as means of communication. Communicative events happen mostly in the metatext (e.g. author's notes, comments, tags) and across multiple websites (author's social media), where every fan may participate.

With the emergence of the Web 2.0, most fandom activities shifted to the internet, and several websites were established to serve as repositories for user-generated content and to facilitate interaction. In the context of fanfiction, authors may either post their work all at once or release it in a serialised format, with new chapters being published on a schedule or whenever they find time. Some authors may choose to release their work in parts to gather feedback from readers.

The most popular webpage for posting fanfiction, Archive of Our Own (AO3), allows users to interact with fanfiction passively and actively through two levels —textual and metatextual. The textual level concerns the story itself, while the metatextual level allows for interaction between the author and readers. For fanfiction to be published on AO3, it needs to have a proper description and appropriate tagging, as the fans use tags to search for content. Tags are metatextual markers that inform the reader of the type of content they may anticipate. The AO3 syntax of tagging is not specifically regulated and may be seen as a distinctive mode of communication, or a space where the author may include their informal reflections. At the end of each chapter, readers can post their comments. The comments section also enables the readers to engage in conversation between themselves or with the author. When the format of fanfiction is serialised, AO3 allows the user to subscribe to a particular piece and be notified of new updates via email. Readers may give 'kudos' to a work (equivalent to a 'like' on social media) or bookmark it, that is, save it to a user account or private collection so they may return to the story without the fear of forgetting the title or author. A comment section may be used as a means of communication, but the author of fanfiction may also communicate with readers using the author's notes, which appear before the main text. The author's notes may give reasons why the story was written or explain certain cultural conventions, but they are predominantly used to share the author's thoughts, ask readers for opinions and show gratitude to readers for reading the story. In the author's notes, writers may also provide links to their social media profiles so they can stay in touch with readers outside AO3.

Fanfiction may be divided into parts, although the lines separating them are often blurred. Texts open with an introduction, which informs readers about when and where in the source material's timeline the fanfiction takes place, while the main body presents the arguments (author's additions) followed by the ending.

The participatory nature of a fandom allows everybody to be a creator. Fanfiction writers post under pseudonyms and seldom disclose personal information such as nationality, age or gender. A fandom may be considered a safe space, and fanfiction writing encourages participants to explore their gender identity or sexual preferences without revealing their identity to the public (see Dym et al. 2019; Dym and Fiesler 2020). Fanfiction provides a means for writers to reflect on and interpret the emotions evoked by the source material, as well as to modify and enhance the story to make it more engaging and satisfying for both the author and the reader.

AO3 is a platform for fans to exchange feedback. Public reviews are encouraged and valued. Readers can choose to interact with the work of other fans by sharing their opinions on the story or the writing. Feedback can reassure authors and lead them to improve their writing by offering constructive criticism. As Cheng and Frens noted, such exchanges improve interpretive skills, allowing for reflection on both source material and fanfiction from different perspectives. The ability to improve writing based on feedback applies to creative, professional and academic writing (2022: 402). Furthermore, more dedicated writers of fanfiction often collaborate with a 'beta-reader', who reviews their work before publication.

Fanfiction is part of an online gifting culture, which determines the amount and type of interaction expected between members and the assumed reciprocity of contributions. Metatext is used to perform various fan activities including criticism and appraisals. Every individual may feel a need to engage with fan creations, whether directly or indirectly, by liking a work of fanfiction or leaving a comment (Kobus 2018). Individuals give and receive fan products, resulting in the creation of social relationships centred around a mutual object of affection (Hellekson 2009). Reciprocity can deepen the bond between individuals and may increase the prestige of good authors, earning them renown for their selfless creations (Kobus 2018).

To have their work assessed, writers need to establish a certain level of interaction with the audience. This can be achieved through the use of metatext, engagement markers and the organisation of the fanfiction itself, which includes the effective portrayal of characters, a well-constructed narrative and an emotional resonance with the reader that may prompt them to engage with the text. It has been observed that fans tend to document their observations and discuss any rejection or reinterpretation of the established material in the metatext (Bennett 2014).

1.4. Previous Studies on Fanfiction

One of the most prominent studies on fan behaviour is Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (1992), which uses De Certeau's (1984) notion of poaching to describe fans as meaning-makers while placing them in a position of resistance to the publishing industry. At first, analyses falsely treated fans as a homogenous group (Bronwen 2011) and focused heavily on feminist and gender overtones found in fanfiction. Russ (2014) states that fanfiction is explicitly feminist pornography, while Lamb and Veith (2014) argue that fanfiction is a sphere where explicit sexual content must be understood as a woman's desire for equality in a relationship, which does not fall under societal hierarchies of gender roles. Woledge (2006) observes that in fanfiction texts, a woman's hidden desire for intercourse is reshaped as the highest form of trust and emotional connection. In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on power dynamics within digitally-mediated communities, such as the work by Harris (1998) and Jancovich (2002), who explored how fans' migration to the internet space has impacted their activity and their relationship with social hierarchies, using theories developed by Foucault and Bourdieu. Furthermore, scholars studied how fans are attached to media and how they interact with it in relation to fanfiction (see Gray 2003; van Monsjou and Mar 2019). Fanfiction has been considered a feminist genre (see Bacon-Smith 1992; Bury 2005; Woledge 2006) and a space for activism (see Allred and Gray 2021), identity expression (see Dym et al. 2019; Dym and Fiesler 2020) and communal literacy acquisition (see DeLuca 2018; Rodriguez Aragon and Davis 2019).

The anthology *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (2014), edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristine Busse, provides an overview of fan studies and situates this scholarly work mainly within the realms of media and cultural studies. The book explores fan creations and the ways they are written and distributed.

However, this existing research has been limited to fanfiction's psychological, social and cultural aspects, while its linguistic features have not been sufficiently explored. Previous linguistic research into the genre has mostly contributed to second language acquisition (see Black 2005, 2006), self-taught critical literacy (see Edfeldt et al. 2012) or linguistic practices in mixed-language fanfiction (see Leppänen 2012). What seems to be lacking is a thorough exploration of the linguistic facets of fanfiction written in English. This paper aims to explore the linguistic aspects of discourse within and around fanfiction.

Fanfiction is a reader-oriented type of writing. Fanfiction authors must convince readers of the validity of their additions to receive a positive reception. This behaviour is also present in other reader-oriented genres. In research articles, writers establish proximity to enhance the credibility of their claims. Fanfiction

authors may also use proximity to persuade readers, as this notion focuses on positioning the author in relation to their text and community, which ought to satisfy the reader's expectations (Hyland 2010). Compared to other subgenres, proximity may be most prominently visible in canon-compliant fanfiction due to its purpose of enhancing the original work: authors may make specific language choices to establish proximity, therefore increasing the validity of their additions.

Proximity fosters reader-oriented writing, as the recipient needs to recognise the structure and anticipate the writer's purposes. Proximity has been applied to academic writing (see Hyland 2010; Dressen-Hammouda 2014; Zhang and Cheung 2018; Herrando-Rodrigo 2019) and is assumed to be part of the process of negotiating authors' claims in articles. Furthermore, proximity has been applied to multimodal discourse (see Scotto di Carlo 2014; Tereszkiewicz and Szczyrbak 2022). Different facets of proximity (credibility and stance) portrayed in promotional genres have been studied (see Suau-Jiménez 2019, 2020), but there appears to be little or no research on proximity in fanfiction. Proximity may be a crucial element in understanding the intrinsic reciprocity associated with writing practices within fandom.

This article will seek to reveal ways in which fanfiction writers construct proximity in canon-compliant fanfiction and how they use language to present and justify their argument using Hyland's (2010) framework of proximity as expanded by the findings of Suau-Jiménez (2019, 2020).

1.5. Proximity

Proximity is a well-researched notion among academic, popular science and educational genres (see Hyland 2010; Dressen-Hammouda 2014; Scotto di Carlo 2014; Zhang and Cheung 2018; Herrando-Rodrigo 2019; Luzón Marco 2019; Hyland and Zou 2021; Tereszkiewicz and Szczyrbak 2022; Bocanegra-Valle 2023, among others), whereas studies of proximity in other genres seem to be scarce (see Suau-Jiménez 2016, 2019, 2020). Proximity has been chosen as the theoretical framework for this research due to its applicability to reader-oriented writing such as fanfiction. Whereas terms such as metadiscourse, interdiscursivity, interpersonality and stance may also concern closeness between interactants, they touch upon different relational aspects. Metadiscourse concerns linguistic resources that organise the discourse, helping the reader interpret the text as intended by the author (Hyland 2004). In contrast, proximity focuses on specific strategies within metadiscourse. Interdiscursivity refers to connections between different texts. One facet of proximity —credibility— may also draw on shared knowledge from other texts. Both interpersonality, which concerns the relationship between the writer

and the reader, and stance, which refers to the writer's attitude towards the information, are incorporated into the notion of proximity (Hyland 2010). Therefore, proximity seems to be the most comprehensive notion with which to analyse linguistic strategies used to model the relation between the author, the reader and the presented content in the fanfiction genre.

In the context of academic discourse, Hyland argues that authors use a variety of linguistic resources to represent themselves and their material while fulfilling the audience's expectations. Authors were observed to use meticulously chosen lexis to establish readers as "interactants" (2010: 116) with whom they discuss arguments within the norms of the community. Similar observations have also been made outside strictly academic contexts. Both Wang and Csomay (2024) and Scotto di Carlo (2014), using Hyland's concept of proximity, studied how speakers in TED talks pass their knowledge on to non-expert listeners through linguistic strategies of engagement and persuasion. Various facets of proximity in promotional discourse, such as stance and credibility, have been researched by Suau-Jiménez (2016, 2019, 2020), who suggested that travel agencies and hotels construct proximity to encourage customers to choose their services.

Proximity may be divided into proximity of membership and proximity of commitment (Hyland 2010). Proximity of membership refers to the author's use of linguistic conventions to present themselves as knowledgeable members of the community. In fandom, this is achieved through a deep comprehension of the source material and a proficiency in the use of vocabulary and register that mirrors the original. Proximity of commitment reveals the author's attitude towards the original text, that is, which elements they appreciate, which parts of the material are in their opinion underdeveloped, and which elements should be elaborated upon to derive more satisfaction from the reading. These two facets of proximity are used to emphasise the "recipient design" of the text, which refers to the various ways in which a writer may express respect and sensitivity towards other readers through a carefully chosen lexicon and range of topics (Sacks et al. 1974: 727). Fanfiction writers may need to establish proximity as an invitation to the reader to enter the discourse and analyse the validity of their contributions.

Proximity is created through aspects such as organisation, argument, credibility, stance and engagement (Hyland 2010). Here, it is worth noting that Hyland's model was originally proposed as applicable to English-language academic and popular science genres. Suau-Jiménez (2016) argues that proximity is achieved differently according to the genre in which it is constructed and is a result of at least three variables: language, genre and discipline. These variables render specific patterns of genre-related rhetorical functions. In later research, Suau-Jiménez et al. (2021) proposed a new concept called discursive interpersonality. The notion of

discursive interpersonality focuses on each text and its discourse as the starting point for analysis. It encompasses a broader variety of strategies according to each genre's features, which include verbal, visual and lexical-grammatical markers (self-nomination, evaluative adjectives, imperative verbs) not included in Hyland's previous model.

Organisation refers to the form of the presented argument (Tereszkiewicz and Szczyrbak 2022), such as the structure of the text and the location of the main argument. The argument adheres to the readers' expectations, and it attempts to show the author's respect and engagement with the field of research. In fanfiction, an author's reinterpretation of elements from the original material can be considered an argument. Arguments may include added scenes that seek to further explore certain events not present in the source material, or they may elaborate on abandoned or unresolved themes from the original text. Proper organisation impacts the reader's experience, as the reader may anticipate the parts in the fanfiction where additions have been integrated to enrich the original narrative. Organisation may also portray modifications as convincing and plausible for the audience.

In research articles, credibility is established by demonstrating expertise in research methods and meticulous work while maintaining objectivity. In popularisation, credibility is maintained by using direct quotes and reporting verbs to attribute statements to the scientist (Tereszkiewicz and Szczyrbak 2022). Suau-Jiménez (2016) and Suau-Jiménez et al. (2021) highlight that in promotional genres, the involvement of the reader is more marked. Writers may try to attain credibility through direct allusions (*you/the readers*) or imperative verbs or personalised agentive self-mentions (*I*, *me*, *my*, *our*) as they try to persuade the reader in a friendly, trustworthy way. The same may be said for fanfiction: credibility may be achieved through references to the source material and the author's self-mentions in the metatext.

Stance linguistically portrays the author's perspective. Stance represents the "attitudinal dimension" (Hyland 2005: 176), that is, how writers present themselves and convey their opinions. In scientific writing, authors often use modals (*should*, *can*) and hedging (*seems*, *appear*) to qualify their commitment and present their arguments as plausible, opening up space for discussion, whereas in popular science articles, this tentativeness is often removed, and the scientists are presented as expert contributors through the use of boosters. Popularisations tend to emphasise the ingenuity of research findings through evaluative adjectives like *great* or *crazy* (Scotto di Carlo 2014: 600). In some genres, stance and engagement markers (inclusive *we*) may overlap (Suau-Jiménez 2016), although they have different functions. The authors may appear more persuasive if they personalise the

text (through self-nomination), demonstrate membership (plural *we*) or use attitudinal markers such as *imposing* or *magnificent* (Suau-Jiménez et al. 2021: 128). The research paper's author responds to an ongoing discourse and anticipates the reader's response, who may only find particular arguments valid. Writers of fanfiction also have to situate themselves within the existing discourse and persuasively present their interpretation. As will be shown in the findings and discussion sections, fanfiction is a highly affective and interaction-driven channel of communication, full of evaluative adjectives and pronouns used to express the author's position and persuade readers.

Engagement is the direct address to readers to make them feel involved and inspire interaction (Tereszkiewicz and Szczyrbak 2022). Engagement is reader-oriented, as it uses inclusive pronouns, direct questions, personal anecdotes and references to shared knowledge. In research articles, engagement is maintained by inclusive *we* to indicate that the author is part of the same community and shares the same area of interest, whereas in popular texts, inclusive *we* assumes solidarity. Xia and Hafner (2021) observed that in the online popularisation process assisted by audio-visuals, the speaker creates a participatory relationship between the speaker and the audience through the use of the first person plural and its possessive adjective. Furthermore, engagement can be increased by combining gestures, humour, informality (lack of punctuation, slang, emoji) and visuals. In fanfiction, these behaviours function on both the metatextual level (where authors may make humorous remarks or directly ask readers for feedback) and the textual level (where they may incorporate visuals) of fanfiction writing.

2. Methodology and Material

To conduct this study, a case study approach was adopted, and a corpus consisting of three fanfictions was gathered from the Archive of Our Own website, the site of choice for authors who write in English. Each is part of the subgenre known as canon-compliant fanfiction and is based on different source material. AO3 allows the writer to publish under a pseudonym; however, authors may refer readers to their social media accounts in the metatext. In the present case, two of the three authors studied have shared personal information on social media outlets (see Table 1). Canon-compliant was selected as the subgenre studied due to its restrictive form. Arguments or contributions have to be carefully crafted so they fit the original narrative while being a valuable addition. Texts were selected based on their tags (canon-compliant) or clearly established timeframe within source material in the work's description. To provide variety in the study, chosen texts are based on different source materials and have been written by different authors. As

the writer must assure the audience that they are a member of the community and are knowledgeable of the original text through specific language cues, the texts were analysed in search of proximity-creating linguistic techniques, which position authors as competent colleagues who bring innovative contributions to the community.

Title	Author (gender, age, nationality)	Type of source material	Number of words	Date of publication online	Serialisation
"Whoops, I Almost Killed You Again 天官赐苦，鬼拂□忌" (WIAKYA)	TentativeWanderer (unknown, 20+, unknown)	Book	5,664	2020-12-11	Published weekly over a month
"hey son, i killed your daddy" (HSIKYD)	MissingNoo (nonbinary, 26, American)	Manga	8,942	2021-06-07	Published fully
"I Love You the Same" (ILYTS)	Yllirya (female, 26, unknown)	Video Game	3,901	2023-11-10	Published fully

Table 1. Corpus presentation

This study adopts the concept of proximity (Hyland 2010) broadened by Suau-Jiménez's (2019, 2020) findings to demonstrate how different authors construct proximity through organisation, argument, credibility, stance and engagement. Using close reading techniques, linguistic features are identified for each of the five facets that help the writer establish a connection with their readers, both in the main text and in the metatext.

3. Findings

3.1. Organisation

In the context of fanfiction, organisation may refer to both the textual and metatextual levels. On the textual level, each text starts with the introduction of the time and space, locating the novel event on the canon[2] timeline. Locating the action within a timeframe requires knowledge about the chronology of the events and specific nomenclature which situates the author as an expert with proper qualifications, thus expressing membership in the fandom (Examples 1 and 2):

(1) When had it started? He wasn't sure. The change seemed gradual. What had changed over the past few months? Most notably, his acquisition of an interesting new housemate in Puji Shrine, roughly five months ago.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(2) It starts out as a deceptively nice day for this. […] The Kyoto exchange event is over and a collective sigh has passed through the school, a deep breath none of them even realized they were holding.

(HSIKYD, 2021)

Mentioning the important events from the source material (Example 1: "housemate"; Example 2: "Kyoto exchange event") confirms the author's expertise and belonging to the target community. Example 1 also uses rhetorical questions to initiate interaction with the reader and represents the train of thought of the main character, who in the original book often speaks to himself. Both examples establish approximate location and time, shaping the spatio-temporal characteristics of the argument in the context of important original situations. Both examples use lexicon associated with the passing of time and motion ("started", "gradual", "changed", "over" in Example 1; "passed" in Example 2) to enrich the dynamics of the narrative before the introduction of the argument (additional scenes).

In the third fanfiction, which is based on a game, the introduction is placed in the metatext. In the description and tags (Example 3: "Tag: After 4.2 AQ"), the author specifies that this new scene takes place directly after an important plot line (called AQ —archon quest). In the notes, the writer states that they attempt to explore the emotional trauma that the characters endured during the events (Example 3: "fic is the result of these. I couldn't go by how Neuvi can feel in his old position".) Locating the event within the timeframe is done outside the text itself:

(3) Tag: After 4.2 AQ
Notes: 4.2 AQ left me with a lot of feelings and this fic is the result of these. I couldn't go by how Neuvi can feel in his old position —even before the AQ— but especially now in the light of the new events and truth. Knowing what is in his future. (ILYTS, 2023)

a. deeply, Wriothesley who would do anything for Neuvillette, reasoning, Confession

Considering the metatextual level of fanfiction, some visual tools may be used at the beginning or end of a chapter to provide context and strike a less formal tone. In the present case, visuals are only used in the first fanfiction, which is based on a popular Chinese novel. They segment the text and provide humorous commentary on the previous chapter, at the same time engaging the reader. As demonstrated in

Example 4, the author uses intertextuality to reference both the internet-specific mode of communication known as memes and the original source by creating a comic image (as indicated by the watermark of the site where the original meme was modified with text boxes —Kapwing). The author establishes a connection between their work and the audience's common knowledge by referencing the important event from the source material (giving the ashes), which was originally not fully developed. This also sets a humorous tone for the fanfiction.

(4)

(WIAKYA 2021)

a. Humor, Plot, Xie Lian/Misfortune, Danger, Canon Compliant, Feelings, plot with feelings, Filling in the plot hole of, how Hua Cheng managed to "survive" Xie Lian's curse, Written and proofread to an exacting standard, Serious Injuries

In two fanfictions, the main addition is foregrounded on the metatextual level in the tags. As tags appear before the main text, the reader may anticipate the contributions and their purpose ("reasoning" in Example 3a; "Filling in the plot hole of how Hua Cheng managed to 'survive' Xie Lian's curse" in Example 4a).

3.2. Argument Presentation

Not all arguments are well-received. To conduct a proper discussion, arguments must be negotiated as credible contributions to existing knowledge. In fanfiction, an argument is a new addition that satisfies the audience's needs and is relevant to the established universe. If the source material is an ongoing series, the authors often argue for innovations in the most topical fragments:

(5) Renovations, that's new. Wriothesley only nods, not seeing the need to ask for more as he's sure this will be explained soon. He trails along Neuvillette as he leads them to the audience's area —and it's a smaller disaster. [...] To sit in the empty Opera Epiclese's partially ruined interior and [...] To look at the stage that hosted their sufferings.

(ILYTS, 2023)

Example 5 is an excerpt from a fanfiction of a regularly updated video game and refers to the newest events from the game's story. The destruction of the theatre's interior is a significant event in the game's story. However, the source material does not mention the main characters' reaction to the loss of the building. The author presents their interpretation of possible reactions and links it to the original event. This addition (argument) addresses the needs of the gamers who were unsatisfied with the lack of continuity or coherence within the game itself.

Entextualisation may take different forms to meet the audience's needs. As shown by Examples 6 and 7, it may take the form of quotations from the source and character-focused narrative ("'In two or three years, my kid will get sold to the Zen'in clan. Do whatever you want'" in Example 6 is a quote from the source material) or references to the cultural aspects of the original material (in Example 7, "zhang" is a Chinese unit of length, varying depending on dynasty). Proximity is also constructed by specific language choices, including terminology or references to characters and objects from the original source, which establish a link between the new text and the canon ("gege" and "san lang" in Example 8 are official nicknames for the characters in the book). Shared knowledge also adds to the readers' engagement.

(6) Something flashes across Megumi's expression. Whether it's hatred or hope, Gojo can't quite tell. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?" 'In two or three years, my kid will get sold to the Zen'in clan. Do whatever you want.'

"Before he died, he told me he'd planned to sell you to the Zen'in clan",

(HSIKYD, 2021)

(7) In the past, whenever he went fishing, there would hardly be any fish fit for human consumption within a one-zhang radius of him.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(8) Xie Lian confessed, "San Lang, I…I lost the ring you gave me". Hua Cheng said, "I know". Before Xie Lian could feel properly mortified,

Hua Cheng added, "Don't worry, gege, nothing bad will happen to it, I promise".

(WIAKYA, 2021)

3.3. Credibility

Authors establish credibility in fanfiction by demonstrating knowledge of cultural norms followed in the original story setting (Example 9: "hebao") or by the proper use of honorifics (Example 10: "Okkotsu-senpai").

(9) Notes:
Drawstring pouch: hebao 荷包, for storing small objects, hung at the waist. For pics, see https://ziseviolet.tumblr.com/tagged/hebao

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(10) Megumi cuts in, "[...] and tried to kill Okkotsu-senpai?"

(HSIKYD, 2021)

Credibility is also maintained when an author portrays commitment and deep knowledge of the material. ILYTS is a fanfiction of a video game, with characters inspired by particular nations and their cultures. The source material implies that, in addition to the global language, constructed for the game, different nations within the game use real-life languages, based on the culture they are inspired by. This information is less known by casual fans, so the author may use this fact to develop the characters further and portray them switching between the native and the second language when under emotional turmoil (Example 11). The author may also reference more obscure or hidden elements of the plotline, demonstrating their expertise on the subject matter (Example 12: "usurper of his predecessor" or "Mekas are still working"). Code-switching and recontextualisation of specific terminology can signal to the reader that the writer is knowledgeable about the source material and is not just a casual fan.

(11) "I am yours, *Mon Chéri*. I love you now and I will love you forever. You have my word".

(ILYTS, 2023)

(12) […] the byproducts of the usurper of his predecessor and him, the ones he could, he *should* hate —that freed all of them. He, somehow, even made it happen that the Mekas are still working in the city […]

(ILYTS, 2023, emphasis in original)

In some genres, credibility may be increased if the reader is more directly acknowledged (Suau-Jiménez 2020). This may be achieved by direct allusions (Example 13: "few readers"), self-mentions (Example 14: "went straight to my heart"; Example 15: "means the world to me") or imperative verbs (Example 13: "Talk to me"; Example 14: "happy reading!"; Example 15: "find me"), as in the following passages:

(13) Talk to me [...] The first few readers might not have seen it 'cause I added it later.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(14) went straight to my heart [...] happy reading!

(HSIKYD, 2021)

(15) Feedback means the world to me [...] find me also on twt :)

(ILYTS, 2023)

3.4. Stance

Stance in fanfiction is almost unidentifiable on the textual level, but tags and author's notes are abundant in stance-taking expressions. Stance is mostly indicated by attitude markers (Example 16: "I just love them" and "so much"; Example 17: "IMPORTANT"; Example 18: "joyful enough"), self-nomination (Example 18: "talk to me"; Example 20: "means the world to me") and opening a space for discussion (Example 20: "I'd love to read your thoughts"). Stance may also be represented by a visual resource such as emojis (Example 22).

(16) Additional Tags: god. I just love them both so much.

(HSIKYD, 2021)

(17) IMPORTANT!!: AO3 is screwing with my upload time. [...] I'm writing this to manage your expectations.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(18) Dear people who were/are joyful enough to talk to me.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(19) hey, i hope you enjoyed this! thank you so much for reading.

(HSIKYD, 2021)

(20) Feedback means the world to me, I'd love to read your thoughts, let it be even just a few words or a bunch of emotes. I'm immensely grateful for all!♥

(ILYTS, 2023)

(21) I think it's so impractical of Hua Cheng to give Xie Lian his ashes. Probably wouldn't do it myself, because it looks like the set-up for a tragic Romeo-and-Juliet death situation […].

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(22) a Ghost King does not do take-backsies. 💍🔪💍✍💍☠💍⚠💍🎭💍☢

(WIAKYA, 2021)

Example 17 directly acknowledges a framing of the argument to meet the audience's needs ("I'm writing this to manage your expectations"), representing the author's intent to avoid disappointing readers while contributing to the fandom. Example 19's lack of proper capitalisation indicates an informal tone, highlighting the proximity of membership as a fellow fan. The author's notes may explain what was the motivation behind writing this work. As shown in Example 21, the author wanted to explore the consequences of giving a valuable possession (ashes) to another person ("it's so impractical", "set-up for a tragic").

3.5. Engagement

Engagement is essential to the reciprocal nature of fanfiction, as it directly acknowledges readers and attempts to connect to them. In fanfiction, engagement may only be seen in the metatext. While the second person pronoun *you* is the most explicit way to bring the reader into the discussion, authors may use inclusive *we* to introduce themselves as a member of a community with shared experience (as in Example 23: "we saw some dust"):

(23) about the Opera: we saw some dust flying around when the Narwhal came […].

(ILYTS, 2023)

The second person pronoun *you* is also used in fanfiction as the preferred way of engaging the community (Example 24: "If you want to, you can share"). Engagement is also possible through directives (Example 25: "please go along") and questions (Example 26: "Attack until when/until what happens?").

(24) If you want to, you can share the fic memes and info posted on my accounts here!

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(25) […] please go along with my HC that it suffered some harm in the process.

(ILYTS, 2023)

(26) […] the way she phrased her order […] "Attack Hua Cheng"? Attack until when/until what happens?

(WIAKYA, 2021)

In the author's notes, a number of engagement markers have been included. In these fanfictions, the author's notes appear to be structured similarly. First, the writer may thank the reader for choosing their text to read (Example 28: "thank you so much for reading"; Example 29: "Thank you for reading!"); then they try to further establish a bond with the audience by sharing their social media accounts (Example 27: "My Twitter:@TTTVWanderer"; Example 28: "you can also find me on tumblr!"; Example 29: "find me also on twt") while encouraging the audience to leave comments regarding the accuracy of the fanfiction in relation to the canon material (Example 27: "I welcome constructive criticism!"; Example 28: "comments and kudos always make my day!"; Example 29: "Feedback means the world to me").

(27) Notes:

I welcome constructive criticism! Even stuff that's not exactly criticism, but suggestions or preferences. I like seeing different points of view, and I'm not going to let them affect me unduly, so do me a favour and tell me if you felt something was off.

Click kudos to feed me. Click comment to bless me. Share this fic to PURIFY. MY. SOUL! […]
My Twitter: @TTTVWanderer
My Tumblr: @tentative-wanderer

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(28) Notes:

hey, i hope you enjoyed this! thank you so much for reading. i think toji's such an interesting character […]
in the meantime, i don't really use twitter, but i've got an instagram meme/shitpost page that's mostly jjk right now. you can also find me on tumblr!

comments and kudos always make my day! thanks again!

(HSIKYD, 2021)

(29) Notes:

Thank you for reading! Feedback means the world to me, I'd love to read your thoughts, let it be even just a few words or a bunch of emotes. I'm immensely grateful for all!♥

find me also on twt ☺

(ILYTS, 2023)

The reader's attention is attracted by the author's notes which directly address them and encourage them to interact through discourse markers ("in the meantime" in Example 28), personal thoughts ("i think toji's such an interesting character" in Example 28) and non-verbal communication (emoji in Example 27; Example 29).

Additionally, engagement can be enhanced by referencing real-life events. In fanfiction, the author's notes may refer to personal or real-life events to facilitate discussion (Example 30: "Happy Winter Solstice! [...] I bet many people are celebrating it this weekend"). The use of appropriate register and slang can increase the accessibility of the material, promoting open interaction (Example 31: "lonely dawg. No-pressure").

(30) Happy Winter Solstice! Technically it's not here yet but I bet many people are celebrating it this weekend

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(31) Or just come chat with this lonely dawg. No-pressure chats in which it's okay if you or I reply super late.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

In fanfiction metatext, there are numerous examples of informality, indicated by colloquialisms, slang, emoticons and emojis. These elements may provide a sense of genuineness and entertainment, which encourages author-reader communication.

4. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The objective of this study was to determine ways in which fanfiction writers may construct proximity in canon-compliant fanfiction and how they use language to present and justify their argument. Interpersonality within the discourse community is crucial; in the fanfiction genre, the relation between the writer and their audience is reciprocal, as the author provides the fan with content, and the reader offers their commentary or critique.

The study demonstrates that proximity may play a crucial role in facilitating interaction and discussion among participants. Writers establish proximity of membership by displaying their expertise within the area of shared interest, using specific terminology, informality and proper organisation. Authors achieve credibility in fanfiction through self-mentions, referencing obscure elements of the original storyline, incorporating quotations and providing additional explanations in metatext. The argument should be framed through cultural references, specific language choices and overall recognisability to link the text with the original material. Proximity of commitment is formed through stance and by displaying personal attitudes. Addressing the audience directly and informally may increase

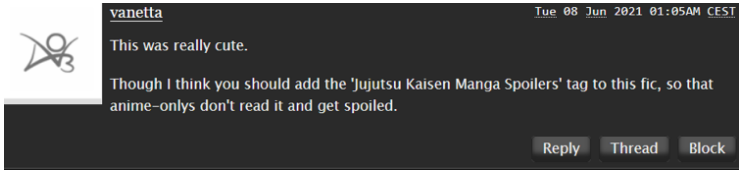
their engagement by reducing the tension of the interaction. Proximity is a means for the author to encourage the reader to engage in discussion about the validity of a particular addition.

Established proximity may result in interaction in the comment section, as fans, encouraged by the authors' direct address and requests for feedback, provide commentary in the form of praise (as shown in Example 32: "this was beautiful"), critique (as shown in Example 33: "you should add") and discussions about elements in the fanfiction (as shown in Example 34).

(32)

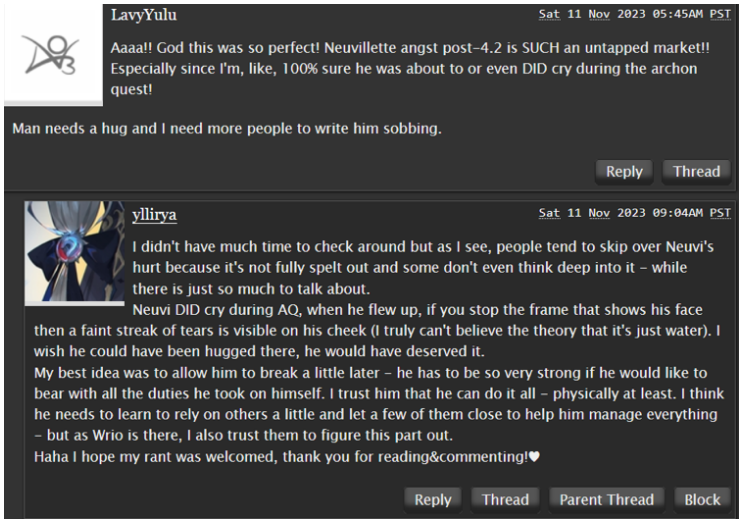
(HSIKYD, 2021)

(33)



(HSIKYD, 2021)

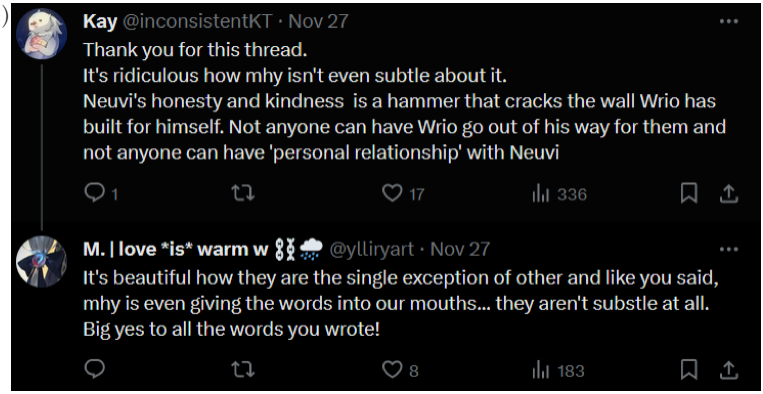
(34)



(ILYTS, 2023)

The analysis of the collected data indicates that proximity seems to be present in fanfiction text and metatext. Establishing proximity in canon-compliant fanfiction may facilitate discussion through various tools, such as the comment section or authors' social media (only two of three writers shared their social media profiles in author's notes):

(35)



(X account of ILYTS author – yllirya)

(36)

(Tumblr account of HSIKYD author – MissingNooo)

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The corpus analysed is relatively small, consisting of only three fanfictions, totalling 18,507

words and representing only one subgenre. Furthermore, full information about the authors' background was inaccessible.

Nevertheless, the texts were written by different authors and were based on different materials, each representing a different medium, that is, a book, a manga, and a video game. It is worth noting that these fanfictions were published in different years and reflect different stages of the source material. While the book is complete, the manga and video game are ongoing franchises that are constantly evolving. Despite these differences, proximity was achieved through similar means, facilitating further discussion and engagement.

Further research is needed to investigate the creation of proximity in different subgenres of fanfiction and textual contexts. Additionally, methods for creating proximity in fanfictions about real-life people or historical figures should be explored. As fanfiction is a hybrid genre, proximity may be achieved differently according to the tags and subgenres, which may also be taken into consideration.

Notes

1. Arguments in academic writing are additions to the existing knowledge that the author wants the readers to accept. They need to adhere to readers' expectation and to be adequately justified (Hyland 2005).

2. Source material which serves as the foundation for fan creations and is a unifying force within the fandom community. May be used as an adjective to mean "original".

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Received: 15/02/2024
Accepted: 07/05/2024

A CORPUS STUDY OF BREXIT POLITICAL DISCOURSE: EXPLORING MODALITY THROUGH LEXICAL MODALS

UN ESTUDIO DE CORPUS SOBRE EL DISCURSO POLÍTICO DEL BREXIT: LA MODALIDAD A TRAVÉS DE LOS MODALES LÉXICOS

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.20249837

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the lexical modals used in the political speeches given by Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn during the final months of the Brexit process. This study explores whether lexical choice shows the politicians' commitment to their constituents, particularly to determine which lexical modals each politician uses and which semantic implication(s) these modals convey. The study is descriptive-interpretative and uses the corpus-assisted discourse studies approach. It contributes to research on modality in the English language by examining parts of speech other than (semi)auxiliary modal verbs. As the corpus analysis shows, lexical modals are a prominent resource employed by politicians to present facts to their audience.

Keywords: modality, lexical modals, corpus-assisted discourse studies, political discourse, Brexit.

Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar los modales léxicos utilizados en los discursos políticos de Boris Johnson y Jeremy Corbyn durante los últimos meses del proceso del Brexit. Este estudio se centra en investigar si la elección léxica muestra el

compromiso de los políticos con sus votantes, determinando qué modales léxicos utiliza cada político y qué implicación o implicaciones semánticas transmiten. El estudio es descriptivo e interpretativo y se ha realizado mediante la metodología del análisis del discurso asistido por corpus. Este artículo, al examinar otras clases de palabras diferentes a los verbos modales, contribuye a la investigación sobre la modalidad en la lengua inglesa. Como muestra el análisis del corpus, los políticos emplean los modales léxicos como un recurso destacado para presentar los hechos a la audiencia.

Palabras clave: modalidad, modales léxicos, estudios del discurso asistido por corpus, discurso político, Brexit.

1. Introduction

After the United Kingdom (UK) held a referendum on June 23, 2016, to determine whether the country should remain a member of the European Union (EU) or leave it, a process known as Brexit was initiated. Although the referendum result was fairly close —52% vs 48%—[1] more than half of voters chose to leave the EU. From the time the referendum was held until the withdrawal took effect, a few years went by in which the political confrontation between the leaders of the country's two main parties, Boris Johnson of the Conservative Party and Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour Party, drew wide attention.

As language is the main instrument at the disposal of politicians, it is relevant and worthwhile to analyse political discourse, since linguistic traces can uncover political stance. Speakers may have different opinions on the same issue, leading to the presentation of facts in one way or another; therefore, the speaker's attitude towards a given proposition is very significant from a linguistic point of view and is related to so-called modality.

The semantic category of modality is mainly associated with the speaker's attitude towards the situation or facts expressed in the clause. Apart from including a (semi)auxiliary modal verb in the verb phrase, there are other linguistic devices that the speaker can use to express modality. According to Huddleston and Pullum, "lexical modals" are other word classes (i.e. adjectives, adverbs, nouns, lexical verbs) that can also convey the same meaning as (semi)auxiliary modal verbs (2002: 173). Depending on the meaning expressed in the utterance, modality is classified as either epistemic or deontic (Huddleston 1988a: 78-80).

Therefore, this paper aims to compare and analyse the lexical modals used in the political speeches of both politicians during the last months of the Brexit process. As most studies on modality have focused exclusively on (semi)auxiliary modal

verbs, we intend to study the connections between modality expressed through lexical modals and the political context in which it occurs, namely the Brexit process (Paltridge 2012: 186). This analysis thus fills a gap in the research on modality and seeks to shed light on the nuances and intricacies of modality, further expanding the scope of modal research by exploring the concept beyond the realm of (semi)auxiliary modal verbs. In this sense, the study extends a previous analysis of (semi)auxiliary modal verbs in the Brexit political discourse (Orrequia-Barea and Almazán-Ruiz 2021), as there is relatively scarce literature on the topic and a lack of case studies. These two studies examine how modality might influence the public's perception of facts since politicians use it, for instance, to present facts as possible or necessary.

This descriptive-interpretative study uses Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) as its methodology (Baker 2020). It describes lexical modals using data from political discourse on Brexit. The study seeks to answer three main research questions: (RQ1) Which parts of speech —other than (semi)auxiliary modal verbs— are more commonly used to express modality in the political speeches of Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn on Brexit? (RQ2) Are lexical modals more frequently used than (semi)auxiliary modal verbs? (RQ3) Which politician uses lexical modals more frequently in his discourse and what does this reveal?

After this introductory section, this paper is organised as follows. Sections 2 and 3 provide the political and theoretical background, focusing on political discourse on Brexit, and on modality and lexical modals, respectively. Section 4 describes the data and methods used to analyse the corpus. Sections 5 and 6 include the results and the discussion. Finally, some conclusions are drawn in Section 7.

2. Language, Politics and Brexit

Language is a distinctive feature of human beings, which becomes particularly relevant in politics. In political contexts, language is used to persuade the audience to take a particular political position. According to Ananko, communication in politics is essential as it helps political processes advance (2017: 128). Furthermore, communication can contribute to politicians' ability to influence society and make it more cohesive. In this vein, Chilton and Schaffner state that "politics cannot be conducted without language, and it is probably the case that the use of language in the constitution of social groups leads to what we call 'politics' in a broad sense" (in Dunmire 2012: 735). Likewise, Fairclough highlights that politics is language since it "consists in the disputes and struggles which occur in language and over language" (1989: 23).

Political language functions as an index of the speaker's current view of reality, just as the audience's interpretation of the same language may indicate an entirely different perspective (Edelman 1985: 10). Discourse interpretation and the possible implicit message underlying the words uttered become crucial in the political context, because expressing thoughts and conveying ideas is not neutral, and language always carries a purpose and meaning. Still, language simultaneously represents the intended meaning of the utterance (Ekawati 2019: 6). In this regard, the context and the timing of political discourse must be considered, as they will determine the interpretation of the particular language aspects analysed. Furthermore, the linguistic devices used to reach the electorate can reveal how politicians present facts.

As is well known, the UK has been notably ambivalent to EU membership. Only two years after joining the EU, the country held its first referendum to determine whether to remain in the European alliance, and two-thirds of voters chose to maintain membership in 1975 (Somai and Biedermann 2016: 139). Several decades later, the British nation again faced a choice between remaining or embracing an uncertain future shaped by a new reality (Torrecuadrada García-Lozano and García Fuente 2017: 5), as numerous socio-economic and political aspects would have to be decided if the UK ultimately split from the EU. In the so-called Brexit referendum on 23 June 2016, Britons voted to leave the EU.

The Brexit movement demanded the UK's exit from the EU, primarily to restore the nation's control. In an attempt to please Euroskeptics, the Prime Minister at the time, David Cameron, negotiated a deal with the EU to improve the UK's economic governance, competitiveness, sovereignty and control over the welfare state, and the free movement of people (Torrecuadrada García-Lozano and García Fuente 2017: 14). The unexpected result of the referendum led to Cameron's resignation, and a particularly troubled period in the UK political scenario began. After two years of negotiating with the EU to make Brexit take effect, his successor, the Conservative Theresa May, also resigned as Prime Minister. Then, the former Mayor of the City of London, Boris Johnson, clearly in favour of Brexit, became Prime Minister.

3. Mood, Modality and Lexical Modals

In a broad and traditional sense, the distinction between mood and modality is established by defining the former as a grammatical category that, in English, can be expressed in different ways. The latter, in contrast, is a semantic category related to the different implications expressed in the sentence. As Nuyts states, these two concepts have been the subject of numerous linguistic studies, both synchronic and diachronic (2016: 2). However, although mood and modality often appear together, the scholar

points out that while "mood is the older term", "modality […] has become the absolutely dominant concept in the last several decades" (Nuyts 2016: 1).

According to Huddleston (1988a; 1988b), mood is a grammatical property of the verb phrase, similar to tense or aspect, and can be marked analytically by the presence of (semi)auxiliary modal verbs. In addition, the subjunctive and the imperative are considered inflectional mood-related forms. Nuyts (2016) remarks that the term mood has been used in the literature to refer to three linguistic domains: the domain of the grammatical characteristics and formal realisations in the verb phrase, the dichotomy of indicative and subjunctive, and the domain between the distinction of sentence types and their illocutionary classification. Nevertheless, it could be said that mood is "the grammatical coding of modal meaning in verb inflections" (Depraetere and Reed 2020: 207). As Khomutova concludes, mood is also considered "the morphological means of expressing modality" (2014: 400).

Modality is defined as a semantic category related to different meanings or functions, which, as Huddleston et al. point out, "express certain kinds of alteration in the relation of clause contents to reality" (2021: 70). The authors state that "modality relates to the ways in which the possible situations described in a clause can relate to reality" (2021: 69). In this regard, a given situation can be expressed in various ways, which affect and determine the sense and meaning of what is described in the clause. Although modality is mainly expressed in English by non-inflectional resources such as modal verbs, other lexical categories such as adverbs, adjectives or nouns can be related to the expression of modality.

Since modality relates to how events are presented in an utterance, the speaker's perspective and involvement in these events become particularly meaningful. Accordingly, a distinction is made in the literature between what is considered modal and non-modal, and this distinction is associated with the dichotomy between factual and non-factual (Palmer 2001: 1). As Traugott states, "modal utterances are non-factual and […] involve speaker's comments on the necessity or possibility of the state of affairs" (2011: 382).

The concepts of possibility and necessity become particularly relevant in the context of modality, since the traditional and most widely used classification among scholars (Quirk et al. 1985; Huddleston 1988a and 1988b; Bybee and Fleischman 1995; Palmer 2001) is to determine whether events are presented as something that may happen or as something necessary. Although there is no agreement in the literature when it comes to establishing a taxonomy of types of modality (Nuyts 2016), in a traditional and general sense, modality can be epistemic and deontic.

There is also a lack of consensus regarding terminology and the typology used to distinguish modals. However, the two most widely accepted terms in the literature

are epistemic and deontic. Scholars (e.g. Rozumko 2019; Huddleston and Pullum 2002) use the etymology of both terms to clarify them. Both terms, epistemic and deontic, are derived from the Greek *knowledge* and *binding,* respectively. That is the reason why epistemic modality is related to "qualifications concerning the speaker's knowledge", and deontic modality is connected to "a matter of imposing obligation or prohibition, granting permission, and the like" (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 178).

Therefore, establishing the differences between the two types of modality[2] entails determining the speaker's viewpoint on the events conveyed in the utterance. According to Palmer, "with epistemic modality, speakers express their judgements about the factual status of the proposition" (2001: 8), whereas "deontic modality relates to obligation or permission, emanating from an external source" (2001: 9). Palmer's words can be used to determine a broad distinction between the two types of modality. Nevertheless, more significant traits are worth mentioning.

As Rozumko states, it is necessary to consider that linguistic communication involves not only the speaker but also the addressee and the social context in which communication takes place (2019: 19-20). Hence, when analysing modality, it is important to consider that events or what is said by the speaker are rarely intended to express their viewpoint. Moreover, Nuyts points out that in both types of modality, a scale can be established to determine the degree of certainty or possibility in the case of epistemic modality and the level of obligation regarding deontic modality (2016: 36-39).

Even though modality in English is mainly expressed by the presence of (semi) auxiliary modal verbs in the utterance, Huddleston and Pullum state that there are other "items expressing the same kind of meaning as the modal auxiliaries, but which do not belong to the syntactic class of auxiliary verbs" (2002: 173). The scholars use the term "lexical modals" to refer to these items and include "adjectives like *possible, necessary, likely, probable, bound, supposed*, adverbs like *perhaps, possibly, necessarily, probably, certainly, surely*, verbs like *insist, permit, require*, and nouns like *possibility, necessity, permission*, and similar derivatives" (2002: 173).

Modal meanings are "understood to involve subjectivity or grounding in the speaker's perspective" (Traugott 2011: 390), and including modal words in the proposition may reveal the speaker stance. Accordingly, Simon-Vandenbergen claims that modal choices unveil "the speaker's position in the discourse" and that a high degree of commitment to a specific position reflects the speaker's aim to convince others of a questionable standpoint (1997: 353). Therefore, it is worth studying the use of lexical modals to determine whether the political protagonists of this study present facts or whether they try to avoid positioning themselves clearly in revealing the truth value of a given argument.

4. Data and Methods

4.1. Procedure of Analysis

The first step of our study was to compile the data. Both politicians' speeches were downloaded from the internet using the programming language R.[3] Boris Johnson's corpus was extracted from the British Government's official website.[4] We restricted the query using the different options the website displayed. Firstly, we selected the dates from 24 June, 2019, until 31 January, 2020. Secondly, we set some keywords as filters, namely 'PM' (Prime Minister) and 'speech'. Additionally, we restricted the query to search for speeches delivered only by the Prime Minister. Once downloaded, we checked that the word 'Brexit' was mentioned to avoid those in which it did not appear. Eleven speeches were retrieved in this case, which together made for a corpus of 16,869 tokens.

The Labour Party's official website allows users to download their leader's speeches from "The Jeremy Corbyn Archives".[5] In this case, the same criteria were followed: we set the dates from June 24, 2019 to January 31, 2020, downloaded all the speeches retrieved by the query, and checked whether the word 'Brexit' was mentioned in each speech, discarding the ones in which the word did not appear. The corpus comprises 35,251 tokens from 28 speeches.

In the second stage, we compiled an exhaustive list of lexical modals using Huddleston and Pullum's (2002) classification as a foundation. Following their criteria, our classification also incorporated "similar derivatives" (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 173) regarding morphology and semantics; the researchers' proficiency in the English language, their intuition and the use of English dictionaries were essential at this stage. Table 1 shows the classification of lexical modals in terms of word class and ordered alphabetically.

Adjectives	Adverbs	Nouns	Verbs
(un)bound	*actually*	*assurance*	*allow*
(un)certain	*(un)certainly*	*(un)certainty*	*assure*
(un)clear	*(un)clearly*	*intention*	*convince*
convinced	*indeed*	*necessity*	*ensure*
(un)likely	*maybe*	*permission*	*intend*
(un)necessary	*(un)necessarily*	*possibility*	*let*
(im)possible	*perhaps*	*promise*	*permit*
(im)probable	*(im)possibly*	*proposal*	*promise*
supposed	*(im)probably*	*reassurance*	*propose*
(un)sure	*surely*	*request*	*require*
	truly	*requirement*	

Table 1. Compilation of lexical modals classified by word class

The analysis was conducted using the software *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff et al. 2014). This tool was used to manage the two sub-corpora analysed in this paper. We used the concordance function to query the items in Table 1 and checked whether they appeared in the corpora. Secondly, the concordance lines were downloaded, and the authors manually annotated these stretches of text for the type of modality according to the distinction made in Section 2, namely epistemic and deontic. The small size of the corpus also allowed us to annotate each lexical modal in terms of degree of certainty: strong, medium or neutral modality. Then, a comparison was made between the two annotations, and an agreement was reached between the annotators in cases of doubt.

The statistical test used to carry out the analysis was the log-likelihood measure. The cut-off point for the p-value was established at $p<0.05$ "to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the observed difference is unlikely to be due to chance and therefore is statistically significant" (Brezina 2018: 12). Thus, if the result is larger than 3.84 (the cut-off point for significance at $p<0.05$), it is statistically significant (Brezina 2018: 84). To calculate such a test, we used Paul Rayson's online Log-Likelihood Calculator.[6]

The last step was to look up the lexical modals in a reference corpus. *CPQWeb* software (Hardie 2012) was used to perform the comparison with a reference corpus, that is, the *British National Corpus* (BNC). The use of this tool instead of *Sketch Engine* was motivated by the part-of-speech tagging available in the former, as *CPQWeb* allows the user to specify word class using tags, particularly the UCREL CLAWS C6 tagset.[7] The verbs were queried using the lemma search. Verbs and nouns that coincide in form, e.g. *promise*, were looked up using tags, i.e. NN0 for nouns, which refers to neutral for number, such as in *aircraft*; and VVB for verbs, which stands for the base form of lexical verbs, except the infinitive, such as in *take* or *live*. Finally, for the (semi)modal auxiliaries, two different tags have been employed, namely VM0, which refers to modal auxiliary verbs such as *can, could* or *will* and VMK for modal catenative (*ought to, used to*).

4.2. Corpus Description and Analytical Framework

The corpus consists of transcribed speeches delivered by Johnson, Prime Minister of the Conservative Party, and Corbyn, the leader of the opposition at that moment, of the Labour Party[8]. Table 2 shows the distribution of the two sub-corpora.

	Tokens	**Types**
Boris Johnson	16,869	2,926
Jeremy Corbyn	35,251	4,149
TOTAL	**52,120**	**7,075**

Table 2. Distribution of the corpora

The methodology used to carry out this study is CADS, as it combines corpus linguistics and discourse studies, which are two methods commonly considered quantitative and qualitative, respectively (Arcano 2020; Partington 2004). CADS aims to uncover meanings that are not obvious (Partington et al. 2013) but not in a "particular language or linguistic variety but rather a particular situation, purpose or function repeatedly enacted within a speech community" (Taylor and Marchi 2018: 61).

According to Morley, combining these two methods "increases the researcher's analytical capacity to an extent greater than would be predicted from the sum of the two" (2011: 10). On the one hand, corpus linguistics allows researchers to manage huge amounts of texts using digital technology to study language, providing objectivity to the research since patterns that are not visible at first glance can be uncovered (Taylor and Marchi 2018: 2). On the other hand, discourse studies aims to analyse how language is employed, revealing subtle or underlying discourse. The corpus becomes a valuable tool for discourse analysts, allowing researchers to explain how language constructs discourses or reality (Baker 2006: 183). Researchers must account for the patterns found in the text, as "interpretation is also an essential step in any corpus-based analysis" (Biber in Baker 2006: 2). In addition, to carry out the statistical analysis intended, descriptive statistics have been employed, with a specific focus on frequency distribution. This method aims to determine the frequency of occurrence in the dataset.

5. Results

This section aims to answer the first two research questions. RQ1 explores how modality is conveyed through lexical modals in the speeches of the two politicians from a quantitative perspective. As mentioned previously, lexical modality is expressed using items with the same meaning as (semi)auxiliary modal verbs but that are not classified as such. Therefore, modality can be expressed through nouns, adjectives, adverbs and other lexical verbs. To answer this first research question, we thoroughly searched each sub-corpus for every lexical modal listed in Table 1 of Section 4.1. The results are depicted in Figure 1.

As Figure 1 shows, both politicians rely on verbs and adjectives to express modality. However, the least frequently used word class to express modality differs between the two politicians. Johnson uses nouns less frequently (10.11 per cent), while adverbs were the least used category by Corbyn (9.2 per cent). However, Corbyn used more nouns (19.54 per cent vs 10.11 per cent) and verbs (46.36 per cent vs 40.43 per cent) than his counterpart.

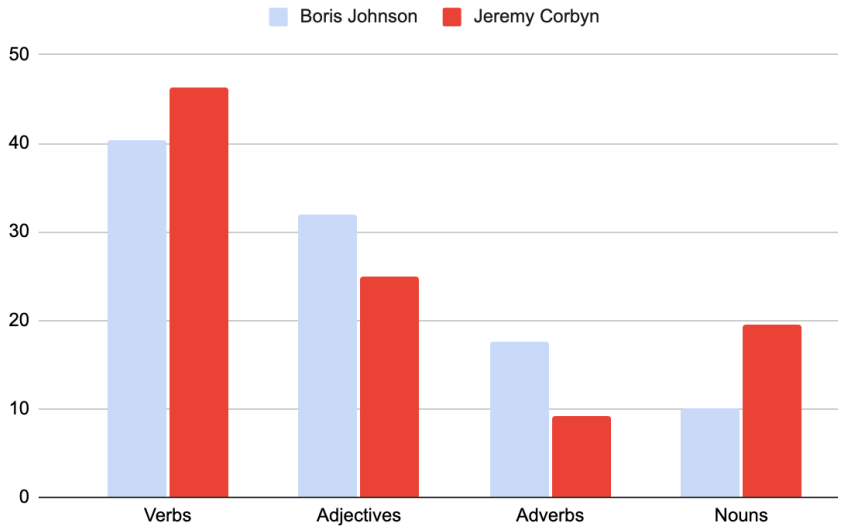

Figure 1. Percentages of lexical modals used by each politician

In the following lines, the use of each word class will be explained.[9] Table 3 shows the results of modal verb use by Johnson and Corbyn.[10]

	Boris Johnson			**Jeremy Corbyn**		
Verb	Hits	NF	LL	Hits	NF	LL
let	23	13.6	253.16	52	14.8	580.50
ensure	20	11.9	250.68	24	6.9	221.23
allow	15	8.9	154.81	17	4.9	154.71
promise	6	3.6	70.77	10	2.9	113.43
propose	4	2.4	42.49	5	1.4	47.98
insist	2	1.2	24.52	0	0	0.01
assure	2	1.2	22.15	3	0.9	31.23
intend	2	1.2	17.1	0	0	0.04
require	2	1.2	13.12	10	2.9	82.91

Table 3. Number of hits, normalised frequency and log-likelihood results of lexical modal verbs

As shown in Table 3, *let* is the most frequently used verb in both sub-corpora (253.16 in Johnson's sub-corpus and 580.5 in Corbyn's), followed by the verbs *ensure* (250.68 and 221.23, respectively) and *allow* (154.81 and 154.71, respectively). The next most significant verb in both sub-corpora is *promise* (70.77 in Johnson's and 113.43 in Corbyn's). Another frequent verb in Johnson's sub-corpus is *propose* (42.49), and in Corbyn's, it is *require* (82.91). It is also noteworthy that some verbs occur in one sub-corpus but not in the other. For instance, the verbs *insist* and *intend* were employed in Johnson's speeches but not in Corbyn's.

Adjectives are the second most prevalent grammatical category used by Johnson (31.91 per cent) and Corbyn (24.9 per cent). Table 4 shows the adjectives retrieved from both sub-corpora.

	Boris Johnson			**Jeremy Corbyn**		
Adjective	Hits	NF	LL	Hits	NF	LL
possible	23	13.7	254.48	5	1.4	32.82
clear	14	8.3	144.69	34	9.8	361.57
sure	7	4.2	65.65	6	1.7	45.64
necessary	6	3.6	57.88	6	1.7	49.08
impossible	4	2.4	43.03	1	0.3	6.54
convinced	3	1.8	37.45	0	0	0.01
certain	2	1.2	14.14	1	0.3	4.28
likely	1	0.6	5.59	7	2	55.87
supposed	0	0	0.01	1	0.3	7.12
bound	0	0	0.01	1	0.3	6.82
uncertain	0	0	0.00	1	0.3	9.01
unlikely	0	0	0.01	1	0.3	6.94
unnecessary	0	0	0.00	1	0.3	9.16

Table 4. Number of hits, normalised frequency and log-likelihood results of lexical modal adjectives

The analysis reveals that *possible* is the most frequently used adjective by Johnson, with a log-likelihood result of 254.48. In addition, Johnson employs other adjectives with regularity, including *clear* (144.69), *sure* (65.65), *necessary* (57.88) and *impossible* (43.03). In contrast, *clear* is the adjective with the greatest log-likelihood result in Corbyn's sub-corpus (361.57). It may be worth noting that the use of *likely* (55.87), *necessary* (49.08) and *sure* (45.64) are also

significant. Another remarkable aspect of Corbyn's speech is that certain adjectives are absent from Johnson's sub-corpus, such as *supposed*, *bound*, *uncertain*, *unlikely* and *unnecessary*. In the same vein, *impossible*, *certain* and *convinced*, though retrieving hits in Corbyn's sub-corpus, are not statistically significant, as the result is less than 6.63 in the first two cases and less than 3.84 in the last one.

Adverbs are the third most frequently used word class in Johnson (17.55 per cent) but the least used in Corbyn (9.2 per cent). Therefore, Corbyn infrequently uses adverbs to express modality in his speeches. The results can be seen in Table 5.

	Boris Johnson			**Jeremy Corbyn**		
Adverb	Hits	NF	LL	Hits	NF	LL
indeed	14	8.3	157.89	0	0	0.07
perhaps	6	3.6	50.36	3	0.9	16.70
truly	4	2.4	49.29	10	2.9	126.78
actually	5	3	42.9	7	2	54.49
necessarily	2	1.2	19.54	0	0	0.00
certainly	2	1.2	14.87	1	0.3	4.63
maybe	0	0	0.02	2	0.6	14.29
surely	0	0	0.01	1	0.3	6.78

Table 5. Number of hits, normalised frequency and log-likelihood results of lexical modal adverbs

Table 5 shows that, although Corbyn uses this resource less, the variety of adverbs is more extensive than in Johnson's case. The most widely used modal adverbs in Johnson's sub-corpus are *indeed* (157.89), *perhaps* (50.36) and *truly* (49.29). However, in the case of Corbyn, the most prevalent are *truly* (126.78) and *actually* (54.49). As in previous categories, some adverbs do not retrieve hits in either corpus. For instance, *maybe* and *surely* do not appear in Johnson's sub-corpus, whereas *indeed* and *necessarily* do not appear in Corbyn's. The case of *indeed* is also remarkable, as it is the most significant item in Johnson's adverbs, but does not occur in Corbyn's sub-corpus.

The last word category to comment on is lexical modal nouns. As previously stated, these nouns are the least used resource by Johnson (10.11 per cent), but they are used by Corbyn more than his opponent (19.54 per cent). Table 6 summarises the results of both sub-corpora.

	Boris Johnson			Jeremy Corbyn		
Nouns	Hits	NF	LL	Hits	NF	LL
promise	6	3.6	77.85	12	3.5	154.63
proposal	5	3	51.24	18	5.2	203.98
permission	3	1.8	34.8	0	0	0.01
certainty	2	1.2	24.83	3	0.9	35.26
possibility	2	1.2	17.48	2	0.6	14.55
uncertainty	1	0.6	9.92	7	2	86.34
intention	0	0	0.01	4	1.2	37.93
assurance	0	0	0.00	2	0.6	21.11
reassurance	0	0	0.00	2	0.6	26.02
necessity	0	0	0.00	1	0.3	8.96

Table 6. Number of hits, normalised frequency and log-likelihood results of lexical modal nouns

As Table 6 shows, the noun *proposal* (203.98) is Corbyn's most frequently used noun, whereas *promise* is the most used by Johnson (77.85), making his political commitment explicit. Although Corbyn also uses the noun *promise* (154.63) to express modality, Johnson, on the other hand, favours the use of *proposal* (51.24) and *permission* (34.8). As expected, Corbyn makes use of a wider variety of nouns. For this reason, many nouns do not retrieve hits in Johnson's sub-corpus: *intention*, *assurance*, *reassurance* and *necessity*. Similarly, the noun *permission*, which occurs in Johnson's texts (34.8), does not appear in Corbyn's.

RQ2 compares the frequency of lexical modals to (semi)auxiliary modal verbs. For this question, the results of each word class will be compared with a previous study on (semi)auxiliary modal verbs using the same corpus (Orrequia-Barea and Almazán-Ruiz 2021). In addition, results for each politician regarding the expression of modality will be contrasted with how modality is expressed in a reference corpus such as the BNC. The results of this analysis will provide information about whether modality is a resource typically used by politicians in their speeches.

Results were similar in both politicians in the case of (semi)auxiliary verbs. Whereas Johnson's most frequently used (semi)auxiliary modal verbs are *will*, *can*, *going to*, *would* and *should*, Corbyn coincides in the first two, *will* and *can*, but the following ones are *would*, *should* and *could*. Regarding the semantic implications, both politicians use the modal verbs similarly: the epistemic readings of *will* and *can* and

the deontic use of *will*. It makes sense that the most recurrent meaning is epistemic rather than deontic since the former implies possibility, whereas the latter, obligation. Politicians are not expected to place obligations on their electorate if they want to win votes. As previously stated, *will* is also used in this reading to express promises regarding the deontic modality (Orrequia-Barea and Almazán-Ruiz 2021).

In this context, (semi)auxiliary modal verbs are used more commonly by politicians than lexical modals. Johnson's use of (semi)auxiliary modal verbs represents 14.55 per cent of the words in the corpus, whereas the one referring to lexical modals is 1.11 per cent. In this regard, Corbyn uses (semi)auxiliary modal verbs slightly more than Johnson, with a result of 15.2 per cent, while he uses lexical modals less than his opponent, 0.74 per cent (Orrequia-Barea and Almazán-Ruiz 2021). As can be seen, in the political arena of Brexit, (semi)auxiliary modal verbs are the most widely used resource to express modality. This result was expected, as (semi) auxiliary modal verbs are the words expressing modality par excellence in the English language.

Nevertheless, the comparison is not complete unless we check how modality is expressed in a reference corpus, that is, how frequently speakers use the different ways of expressing modality. To do so, (semi)auxiliary modal verbs and lexical modals have been queried in the BNC.

The results retrieved in the reference corpus show that (semi)auxiliary modal verbs are used less frequently (1.3 per cent). As mentioned above, Johnson's and Corbyn's percentages were 14.55 and 15.2 per cent, respectively. Therefore, we can see that (semi)auxiliary modal verbs as a resource to express modality are overused in the context of Brexit, as politicians used this strategy twice as much as the language speakers, showing their stance, against or in favour, in the discourse.

Concerning lexical modals, it is unsurprising that these items (1.11 vs 0.74 per cent) are not used as frequently by politicians as (semi)auxiliary modal verbs. As previously mentioned, the latter has been traditionally considered the resource used to express modality par excellence. However, when comparing the lexical modal results obtained in this study with the BNC occurrences, the BNC results are closer to Corbyn's use of lexical modals than Johnson's. In fact, lexical modals have a 0.28 per cent presence in the BNC, whereas Cobyn's is 0.74 per cent. In the case of Johnson, the use of lexical modals is 1.11 per cent. The data indicate an overuse of lexical modals by Johnson. Table 7 summarises the comparisons.

	Boris Johnson	Jeremy Corbyn	BNC
(Semi)auxiliary modal verbs	14.55	15.2	1.3
Lexical modals	1.11	0.74	0.28

Table 7. Use of (semi)auxiliary modal verbs and lexical modals expressed in percentages

The data in Table 7 answer the third research question, which will be discussed in more detail in Section 6. As can be seen, Johnson uses modality more frequently in his discourse. Even though Corbyn uses (semi)auxiliary modal verbs more than the Conservative leader, lexical modals are more recurrent in Johnson's discourse. It is noteworthy that modality occurs more frequently in the analysed corpus than in the BNC. As shown in Table 7, lexical modals are a more prominent resource in the political discourse than in general language. However, in the literature, more attention has been given to (semi)auxiliary modal verbs than to this linguistic device. In this sense, this study contributes to emphasising their importance in presenting facts to the audience.

6. Modelling Lexical Modals

This discussion section presents concrete examples from both sub-corpora and describes the modality types established in the theoretical framework used. Thus, this section aims to answer RQ3 from a qualitative perspective, considering the different degrees of modality and the various lexical modals used to express it. In the political context under discussion, lexical modality can reveal framing strategies, that is, the speaker's stance and viewpoint in presenting events and arguing for or against them (Cheng 2016).

As described in section 3 above, epistemic modality connects the speaker's knowledge and the referenced facts or actions presented in the discourse. According to Rozumko, certainty is not an absolute category but can be expressed according to a scale which establishes the degree of certainty (2019: 37); therefore, a distinction can be made between strong, medium and neutral modality. Thus, examples from the corpus will be used to discuss their semantic implications and politicians' viewpoints when presenting facts regarding Brexit.

The adverb *necessarily* mainly expresses the epistemic meaning of necessity. However, the syntactic polarity changes when combined with *not*, and it is used to express that what is said is possibly but not definitely true. This adverb falls within the strong modality scale according to Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 207), and in the corpus, only Johnson uses this formula, as shown in Examples 1 and 2.

(1) That is *not necessarily* the case in the digital age.

(BJ - epistemic necessity)

(2) When I fully intend to be around, though *not necessarily* in this job, we will look back on this period, this extraordinary period, as the beginning of a new golden age for our United Kingdom.

(BJ - epistemic necessity)

Other adverbs, such as *certainly*, are also used to express necessity. As seen in the following examples, both politicians use the word to indicate that what is stated must necessarily be so. Besides, it should be considered that even though "epistemic *certainly* belongs with the strong modals", it "does not suggest any reasoning from evidence" (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 207).

(3) It isn't really the fault of the places and it *certainly* isn't the fault of the people growing up there.

(BJ - epistemic necessity)

(4) That must be followed by radical and decisive action that will only be delivered by a Labour government. It *certainly* won't come from the Tories.

(JC - epistemic necessity)

As Rozumko points out, this epistemic adverb implies a restricted knowledge of the facts on the speaker's behalf (2019: 440). Despite this, it is used to emphasise what appears true from their perspective, as demonstrated in Examples 3 and 4. According to Simon-Vandenbergen, expressions of certainty are a "tactic strategy" to "persuade the audience of the essential rightness of their claims" (1996: 408). Through this adverb, both politicians establish the essential accuracy of their assertions, communicating their confidence in the validity of their arguments.

Similarly, the speaker's degree of conviction is made evident by the adjective *certain*, which determines their position on the events described. The meaning of Examples 5 and 6 are closely related to the use of the modal verb *must* when expressing logical necessity, since the speaker expresses that given the evidence, no other conclusion can be inferred from it.

(5) I'm absolutely *certain* there will be displays celebrating the dawn of a new age of electric vehicles, not just cars or buses, but electric planes, made possible with battery technology being developed now in the UK.

(BJ - epistemic necessity)

(6) That is why Labour will not support this Bill, as we remain *certain* there is a better and fairer way for this country to leave the EU.

(JC - epistemic necessity)

It is important to note that the use of these linguistic devices indicates a high level of confidence in the speaker's position, which is clearly emphasised in Example 5 through the adverb *absolutely*. Johnson uses this adverb to add force to his degree of certainty. In fact, the degree of certainty becomes clearer and more assertive when the noun category is used because the noun *certainty* formulates the facts in the utterance, indicating confidence and assertiveness in the speaker's perspective. "It creates the image of a knowledgeable person who knows what he or she is talking about and who therefore deserves public trust and political power" (Simon-Vandenbergen 1996: 390). Thus, it inspires confidence, as the speaker seems to be committed to the truth of their claims (Simon-Vandenbergen 1996: 390).

(7) I can assure them that under this government, they will have the absolute *certainty* of the right to leave and remain.

(BJ - epistemic necessity)

Once more, the Conservative leader emphasises his speech by highlighting the degree of certainty with the premodifying adjective *absolute*. This strategy makes his discourse more assertive, making it easier for him to influence the audience, persuade them to trust his arguments and establish a greater sense of credibility and authority. Interestingly, the Tory leader is the only one who introduces the adjective *convinced* in his speech, thus demonstrating that he is entirely certain about the facts to which he refers, which must necessarily be so, as Example 8 shows.

(8) I am *convinced* that an overwhelming majority in this House, regardless of our personal views, wishes to see Brexit delivered in accordance with the referendum.

(BJ - epistemic necessity)

Likewise, the certainty of what is expressed in a statement can be shown using the adjective *clear* and the adverb *clearly*. In any context, the speaker could denote a high level of confidence in a statement when using them. This linguistic strategy can be considered a means of emphasising one's conviction and conveying a sense of clarity in the message. The speaker can enhance the persuasiveness of their argument and establish a greater sense of credibility and authority, as the following examples show:

(9) If an agreement is to be reached, it must be *clearly* understood that the way to the deal goes by way of the abolition of the backstop.

Our vision is *clear*: to unite and level up across the whole United Kingdom.

(BJ - epistemic necessity)

(10) It is becoming increasingly *clear* that this reckless government only has one plan, to crash out of the EU without a deal.

It is *clear* they have tried to hide the truth of a no deal Brexit.

(JC - epistemic necessity)

Nevertheless, the adjective *necessary* can also be interpreted from the perspective of deontic modality, as it presents the facts as requirements. According to Huddleston and Pullum, deontic necessity is very close to obligation, and the adjective mentioned above usually "takes a mandative or infinitival complement" (2002: 207). In Example 11, the Labour leader steadfastly commits himself to take all necessary measures to avoid a no-deal departure from the EU.

(11) We will do everything *necessary* to stop a disastrous No Deal for which this government has no mandate.

(JC - deontic necessity)

Deontic necessity is also expressed in the corpus by means of lexical verbs such as *require*, which is more recurrent in Corbyn's speeches than in Johnson's. From Corbyn's point of view, the country requires and demands certain conditions regarding Brexit, as shown in Example 12.

(12) The office of the Prime Minister *requires* integrity and honesty. This inequality is unsustainable and immoral. Ending it *requires* government action.

(JC - deontic necessity)

While necessity and certainty correspond to strong modality, the medium degree corresponds to the meaning of probability (Huddleston and Pullum 2002). However, in the corpus analysed in this study, there were no hits for uncertain terms such as *probably* or *probable*. As a result, politicians presented their discourse as factual. This absence indicates that both leaders were confident in their assertions and did not feel the need to rely on speculative language. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that weak modality does appear in the corpus through lexical modals such as *possible*, *perhaps* or *maybe*.

The adjective *possible* presents events as likely to occur. Both politicians use this item in the analysed corpus, though Johnson does so more frequently. When a statement expresses the possibility of a fact, the speaker presents it as potentially happening but not entirely certain of its fulfilment. In Example 13, Johnson presents the facts as a probable occurrence that is further emphasised by the comparative form. This construction makes him add emphasis and significance to the possibility, lending greater credence to the argument presented. Using the comparative form highlights the likelihood of the event, resulting in a more compelling and impactful presentation than when using only the adjective in its base form. Overall, Johnson's linguistic choice in this example appears to be discoursally effective in conveying the importance of the presented information.

(13) By 2050, it is more than *possible* that the United Kingdom will be the greatest and most prosperous economy in Europe.

(BJ - epistemic possibility)

Similarly, in Example 14, Corbyn expresses his factual appraisal. In his view, the achievement of a positive goal, such as reducing carbon emissions, would imply a necessary increase in public spending, which he perceives as an unfavourable outcome, explicitly manifest with the premodification (*massive*) of the head noun.

(14) Bringing our carbon emissions down [...] will only be *possible* with massive public investment in renewable energy and green technology.

(JC - epistemic possibility)

The adverbs *perhaps* and *maybe* are used when the speaker intends to express that events are possible despite their uncertainty about them (Rozumko 2019: 443). According to the author, the use of *perhaps* "signals that an opinion or interpretation is offered to the addressee(s) for consideration" (444). The following example illustrates how the Tory leader presents the possibility that what is stated can be considered from a different perspective.

(15) They can see that we have a clear vision for our future relationship with the EU - something that has *perhaps* not always been the case.

(BJ - epistemic possibility)

However, this epistemic adverb is also used from a concessive perspective; when it is uttered, the speaker presents a counterpoint to the facts stated. This use of *perhaps* can be observed in Example 16 and, as Rozumko notes, "the concessions marked by *perhaps* emphasise the positive aspects of the situations, and signal solidarity with the addressee" (2019: 445).

(16) I don't think I've heard a single member call for an ever closer union or ever deeper integration or a federal destiny [...] *perhaps* I've missed it but I don't think I've heard much of it Mr Speaker.

(BJ - epistemic possibility)

The adverb *perhaps* is also used to express a polite request. In the corpus, Corbyn uses it to indirectly invite the Prime Minister to explain some issues he does not consider entirely clear, as the examples in 17 show. This adverb leaves open the possibility that Johnson is not, in fact, capable of explaining what Corbyn is demanding of him. Through this discursive strategy inherent to the engagement system (Martin and White 2007: 105), Corbyn adeptly aligns with a section of the audience that echoes his doubts about Johnson's inability to offer a satisfactory response.

(17) *Perhaps* he'd like to explain why these documents confirm the US is demanding the NHS is on the table in the trade talks?

Perhaps he can tell us what has changed?

(JC - deontic possibility)

Huddleston and Pullum also observe that certain lexical verbs such as *allow* and *permit* "can express deontic possibility, permission" (2002: 208). In the analysed corpus, the verb 'allow' is one of the most frequent lexical modal items used by both politicians. As Examples 18 and 19 show, both politicians use it to present a plausible situation:

(18) A deal that *allows* us to create a new shared destiny with them.

(BJ - deontic possibility)

(19) We can create natural solutions to bring down emissions and *allow* our wildlife to flourish, because currently wildlife is in crisis.

(JC - deontic possibility)

However, the verb *allow* is also used to clarify what both leaders are reluctant to accept. The following examples show that the two politicians' clashing positions express a lack of permission from a deontic perspective.

(20) Leaving the EU is a massive economic opportunity - to do the things we've not been *allowed* to do for decades.

(BJ - deontic permission)

(21) They're not *allowed* to pledge not to sell out our NHS in a trade deal with Donald Trump.

(JC - deontic permission)

In both cases, *allow* is used in passive structures, thus emphasising that the patient subjects of the sentence receive the action of the verb and avoid mentioning the agent subject. However, while Johnson focuses on things the UK has been unable to do because of the EU, Corbyn highlights the aspects his party will not permit the government to do.

As previously mentioned, deontic modality is also concerned with expressing other meanings such as prohibition, desires or promises. In the political context analysed here, Johnson's most frequent noun is *promise*. As is known, a promise entails that one will certainly do something for somebody else, and frequently, politicians show the audience their intentions as promises, as Johnson does in Example 22.

(22) We are going to fulfil the repeated *promises* of parliament to the people.

We will not accept any attempt to go back on our *promises* or scrub that referendum.

(BJ - deontic volition- promise)

As observed, the Prime Minister combines the lexical modal *promise* with (semi) auxiliary modal verbs —*be going to* and *will*— which allows him to emphasise and reinforce the idea of volition and his implication of acting. However, this noun allows Corbyn to criticise his opponent by mentioning all the promises the Tory

government has failed to keep regarding Brexit. The political confrontation is evident in the Labour leader's statements, as observed in Examples in 23:

(23) Johnson's deal will be just the beginning of years more painful negotiations and broken *promises*.

Who cannot tell the truth about the Brexit negotiations that he has so far failed to deliver on, or one who keeps on making *promises* that turn out to be a mirage the following day.

(JC - deontic volition - promise)

Although both politicians use the verb *promise*, it is worth mentioning that when this happens, the Conservative leader commits to doing what they say they will do and will give the people what they commit to. This is part of the framing strategy of Brexit, as Examples in 24 illustrate:

(24) Mr Speaker, we *promised* the people we would get Brexit done.

So I have *promised* to find a long term solution to social care once and for all. And that is what we will do.

(BJ - deontic volition- promise)

Once again, Corbyn uses this lexical modal verb —*promise*— to criticise the Conservative government's performance and directly accuses its leader of failing to deliver on his promises. In the examples in 25, Corbyn highlights the Conservative government's failure to uphold their promises and fulfil their commitment. From them, it can be inferred that such inconsistency can lead to a loss of confidence and trust from the British people.

(25) His predecessor *promised* to end austerity but spectacularly failed to deliver.

Friends, today is the 31st of October, the day Boris Johnson *promised* we would leave the EU. [...] But he has failed. And that failure is his alone.

(JC - deontic volition - promise)

Interestingly enough, the Labour leader prefers to introduce the noun *proposal* in his speeches and uses this noun more frequently than Johnson. The difference in meaning between the two nouns —*promise* and *proposal*— is rather evident since a proposal should be understood as a plan or idea that is suggested. Corbyn uses this noun to criticise the Tory government's actions again and question whether its ideas for a successful Brexit could be effective, as shown by examples in 26.

(26) These *proposals* are nothing more than a cynical attempt by the Prime Minister to shift the blame for his failure to deliver.

Mr Speaker, the Government's *proposals* are neither serious nor credible.

(JC - deontic volition - suggestion)

In Example 27, the Labour leader shows his sharpest criticism when he emphasises that the Conservative government's proposals are unrealistic and will, therefore, be rejected in Brussels. The tone of the speech becomes more assertive when he alludes to the Prime Minister to criticise his lack of involvement even though he is aware of the facts.

(27) The current *proposals* would damage the whole UK economy.

> The *proposals* are unrealistic and damaging and will —as I think the Prime Minister knows— be rejected in Brussels, in this House, and in the country.
>
> (JC - deontic volition - suggestion)

The empirical data and corpus analysis illustrate how modality is strategically employed as a "linguistic and ideological tool" to "frame their argument in a purpose of persuading the electorate and soliciting their support" (Cheng 2016: 172). In this sense, it can be seen how lexical modals are as effective as (semi)auxiliary modal verbs when conveying modality. The speaker reveals his position to the audience through modality since epistemic modality presents the facts as necessary or likely to happen. On the other hand, deontic modality, which is much more complex because it involves the speaker's perspective on what is to be done, allows them to suggest, recommend or propose something. Either type of modality shows the speaker's perspective and degree of involvement in the events expressed in the statement.

7. Conclusions

This corpus-based study has analysed the Brexit political discourse of the then UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, and the leader of the opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, from the Labour Party. The results have been shown from two perspectives: quantitatively, we have presented the data regarding the frequency of occurrences of lexical modals of both politicians when discussing Brexit in the corpus. On the other hand, qualitative interpretation has made it possible to show a semantic analysis of the lexical modals found in the corpus, thus distinguishing between epistemic and deontic modality.

As far as RQ1 is concerned, the corpus analysis has shown that lexical modals are a prominent resource employed by politicians. Adjectives and verbs are the most common words used by both politicians. However, nouns are Johnson's least frequently used word class, and adverbs are the least frequently used by Corbyn. In the case of Brexit, as illustrated, this strategy has been used more frequently than in other contexts of the English language, which reveals the significance of lexical modals in political discourse.

However, when comparing lexical modals with (semi)auxiliary modal verbs (RQ2), the latter are still the items used par excellence when expressing modality, as the answer to the second research question has shown. The quantitative analysis has revealed that politicians employ lexical modals as a prominent resource. When compared with a reference corpus, Johnson and Corbyn use lexical modals with a higher frequency than in the BNC. (Semi)auxiliary modal verbs are used twice in the discourse of Brexit. In contrast, lexical modals are used similarly in Corbyn's case but are far more frequent in Johnson's corpus.

Finally, the qualitative analysis has focused on a semantic analysis of the lexical modals found in the corpus. The discussion to answer RQ3 has revealed that politicians employ lexical modals to present factual information with high assertiveness. In a sense, lexical modals help politicians to establish a tone of confidence in their statements. This is evident in Johnson's use of the (semi) auxiliary modal verb *will* or the lexical modal *promise* to discuss Brexit, which effectively enhances the credibility of his claims to voters. The analysis demonstrated that the use of lexical modals is more common in Johnson's speech than in Corbyn's. This linguistic resource serves as an effective tactic to obscure a clear position regarding the facts. Thus, it becomes an advantageous strategy for the speaker to refrain from (not) subtly committing himself. As a result, this article contributes to research on modality in the English language, as it delves into examining parts of speech other than (semi)auxiliary modal verbs in political discourse. This study sheds light on the complexity of modality and its expression through various lexical words and their use in the political context.

So far, lexical modals have been neglected in the literature, as studies on this phenomenon are rather scarce as opposed to (semi)auxiliary modal verbs. However, as this study shows, lexical modals are another resource used by politicians, which should also be explored since they serve to convey the meanings of modality. This study is original not only in highlighting the importance of these particular words but also in encouraging other researchers to look into modality from this perspective and the implications these lexical modals may have when expressing modality.

Contribution of the Authors

The present paper is the outcome of the coordinated and collaborative work by the two authors. Author 1 was in charge of the theoretical part of the work, while Author 2 was responsible for compiling the corpus as well as quantitative analysis and processing. Both authors actively participated in the study planning, manuscript writing, and qualitative analysis, as well as reviewing and revising the entire work.

Notes

1. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results

2. In the literature (Palmer 2001; Nuyts 2016), a third type associated with ability is distinguished: dynamic modality; however, since it is not related to the speaker's attitude to a given situation or event (Huddleston and Pullum 2002; Gisborne 2007), this type of modality lies beyond the scope of this study.

3. We used the script by Fradejas Rueda (2019) that can be accessed at: https://www.aic.uva.es/cuentapalabras/cosechar-textos.html

4. Accessible at: https://www.gov.uk/

5. Accessible at: https://labour.org.uk/

6. Accessible at: http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html

7. For more information see: https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/claws6tags.html

8. Corbyn announced his plans to resign as leader of the Labour Party on December 12, after the 2019 election results.

https://www.businessinsider.com/jeremy-corbyn-resigns-as-labour-party-leader-after-election-defeat-2019-12

9. Results in the tables are ordered according to Johnson's result in the likelihood test.

10. Items which did not retrieve any hits in the corpora have not been included in the tables due to space limitations.

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Received: 02/11/2023
Accepted: 27/05/2024

VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL REALIZATIONS OF PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES IN VIDEO RESUMES

FORMAS VERBALES Y NO VERBALES DE ESTRATEGIAS PERSUASIVAS EN LOS VIDEOCURRÍCULUMS

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.20249817

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Abstract

With the rapid shift from print to digital modes of communication, new genres have emerged. One example is the video resume (VR). This novel professional digital genre enables job seekers to enhance their visibility and connect with broader audiences through various semiotic modes. The VR has a clear communicative aim based on a strong persuasive component: to secure a job by convincing the audience of their qualities. The premise of this paper is that VRs are not only informative but also inherently persuasive. Accordingly, the study aim is to explore the use of multimodal semiotic modes as a way of realizing persuasive strategies (i.e. attention-getting, anticipation and control of responses, rapport, emphasis and processing aids). The methodological approach uses video-based analysis and computer-aided Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to analyze a dataset of 8 VRs from the online platform YouTube, considering the following criteria: limited duration, impact, year uploaded and editing. The results suggest that verbal and non-verbal realizations of persuasive strategies are present in the fragments analyzed, and such strategies are encoded by heterogeneous combinations of semiotic modes. Although the strategies and modes are not always consistent, they contribute to achieving the communicative purpose of the genre. As for pedagogical implications, this genre and its features can be incorporated into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching materials,

enhancing learners' persuasive strategies and developing their multimodal communicative competence.

Keywords: digital genres, video resumes, persuasion, multimodality, MDA (Multimodal Discourse Analysis), ESP (English for Specific Purposes).

Resumen

Con la rápida evolución de los modos de comunicación de impresos a digitales, han surgido nuevos géneros. Un ejemplo es el videocurrículum (en adelante VC). Su aparición como género digital profesional ha permitido a los profesionales aumentar su visibilidad y relacionarse con un público más amplio utilizando una gran variedad de modos semióticos. Conlleva un claro objetivo comunicativo basado en un fuerte componente persuasivo: convencer a un público concreto para obtener un puesto de trabajo. Este artículo parte de la idea de que los VCs no sólo son informativos, sino también intrínsecamente persuasivos. En consecuencia, el objetivo es explorar el uso de modos semióticos multimodales como forma de implementar algunas estrategias persuasivas (captación de la atención, anticipación y control de las respuestas, compenetración, énfasis y ayudas al procesamiento). El proceso metodológico se centra en un análisis basado en vídeo y en un enfoque de Análisis del Discurso Multimodal (ADM) asistido por ordenador con un conjunto de datos de 8 videocurrículums tomados de la plataforma en línea YouTube, teniendo en cuenta los siguientes criterios: duración, impacto, año de publicación y edición. Los resultados sugieren que las realizaciones verbales y no verbales de estrategias persuasivas están presentes en los fragmentos de los vídeos analizados, y que van acompañadas de combinaciones heterogéneas de modos semióticos. Aunque las estrategias persuasivas y los modos no siempre actúan de forma coherente entre sí, sí contribuyen a alcanzar el propósito comunicativo del género. En cuanto a las implicaciones pedagógicas, este género y sus características pueden incorporarse a los materiales de enseñanza del Inglés con Fines Específicos (IFE), mejorando las estrategias persuasivas de los alumnos y desarrollando su competencia comunicativa multimodal.

Palabras clave: géneros digitales, videocurrículums, persuasión, multimodalidad, ADM (Análisis del Discurso Multimodal), IFE (Inglés con Fines Específicos).

1. Introduction

1.1. Professional Genres in the Digital Era

In the digital age, professional genres have undergone significant transformation, shaped by the influence of technology and the internet (Luzón and Peréz-Llantada

2022). One of the key aspects of digitalization in professional genres is the shift from traditional, paper-based formats to electronic ones (Hafner 2018).

In today's highly competitive job market, the traditional curriculum vitae (CV) is no longer the sole means for individuals to showcase their skills and qualifications (Teixeira da Silva et al. 2020). As technological advances take root globally and digital tools become increasingly integrated in the professional sphere, novel digital genres have appeared and are now employed. A new professional digital genre has emerged —the video resume (VR). The present study understands the VR as a clear example of a remediated genre, which means that there is a deep transformation of the medium from printed to electronic formats (Brooks et al. 2004). Hiemstra et al. describe a VR as "a short video-taped message in which applicants present themselves to potential employers on requested knowledge, skills, abilities, motivation, and career objectives" (2012: 11). Nonetheless, research into this genre is rather scarce and has mostly focused on paper-based genres in professional contexts (Hiemstra and Derous 2015). A search conducted of the Web of Science database and conference proceedings (February, 2017) revealed a scant number of studies addressing the topic of VRs since 2010. Half of these studies emerged within the digital era, suggesting a growing interest among researchers. Yet, this growth is still modest, and VR is not as widely present in academia as in professional settings. For instance, data from a survey conducted in June 2011 produced 174,000 hits for the term "video resume" on YouTube (Gissel et al. 2013), and by February 2017 that figure had risen to 5.53 million. Although several studies (Hiemstra et al. 2012; Hiemstra and Derous 2015; Waung et al. 2015; Nguyen and Gatica-Perez 2016) suggested its popularity among job seekers, scholarly exploration of VRs remains limited (Ryan and Derous 2016). However, VRs come with a set of challenges since they require a certain degree of digital literacy and essential communicative skills. Applicants who use the genre to search for employment need to demonstrate creativity and incorporate technical elements, such as lighting, sound quality and video editing, with the aim of creating engaging and persuasive presentations and set themselves apart from other applicants. This is the reason why job seekers must strike a balance between professionalism and creativity, ensuring that their videos reflect their competence while maintaining conciseness and adherence to a standardized format.

As technology continues to evolve, the VR is likely to become even more prevalent, reshaping the way candidates market themselves and how employers evaluate talent. The VR is not only conceived as a digitized version of the paper-based CV or resume, but also as an opportunity to present the candidate in a dynamic, authentic and creative manner, capturing the attention of potential

employers and standing out among competitors. Even though paper- and video-based resumes have the same communicative aim (i.e. to persuade the audience to offer them a job), the two ways in which the two genres pursue this end differs significantly in the use of added semiotic modes intertwined with linguistic elements.

1.2. Multimodality and Persuasion in Digital Genres

The integration of digitality in genre studies is inherently connected to the use of multimodal and persuasive elements. Specifically, present-day professional communication is regarded by the field as multimodal, meaning that speakers call on a wide range of semiotic modes, including image, animations, gestures, or even language (among others) orchestrated by speakers to make meaning (Jewitt and Kress 2010).

A salient feature of VRs is their multimodal nature, given the fact that speakers need to employ a variety of semiotic modes to convey meaning. In this context, *modes* are understood as semiotic systems with rules and regularities —such as images, gestures, speech, music, layout, writing, proxemics, and posture (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). Norris (2004) categorizes the use of modes as *embodied* and *disembodied*. The former consists of resources produced by the human body (e.g. facial expressions), and the latter refers to external elements that cause an impact on the audience (e.g. clothing). This paper considers an additional mode, called *filmic*, as a subset of the disembodied mode and one that is only possible in the digital medium (e.g. music). It refers to significant elements added in the postproduction process (Valeiras-Jurado and Bernad-Mechó 2022).

Multimodal studies allow analysts to view communication holistically, since every single semiotic mode, verbal and non-verbal, is intentional to the same degree (Jewitt and Kress 2010). In particular, the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach conceptualizes language as the result of a combination of semiotic resources to convey meaning (O'Halloran 2011; Ruiz-Madrid and Fortanet-Gómez 2016). Within this approach, every verbal and non-verbal mode is considered on equal footing, aiming at fully understanding any communicative process. As a result, language becomes part of a multimodal ensemble (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). Ruiz-Madrid and Valeiras-Jurado define multimodal ensemble as "the orchestration of different modes to produce a specific meaning that is inferred based on the interrelation among them" (2020: 30). Moreover, this orchestration of modes can be used consistently, although the individual modes do not always interact logically. This interrelationship among modes is defined as modal coherence (Valeiras-Jurado 2019).

The aforementioned multimodal ensembles can be especially decisive in achieving persuasive oral communication (Valeiras-Jurado et al. 2018). Persuasion research has typically focused on linguistic aspects; nonetheless, studies on persuasion are becoming broader, deeper, and more complex since nonlinguistic elements may also contribute substantially to any persuasive message (O'Keefe 2004).

Previous studies on persuasion (O'Keefe 2015; Perloff 2020) pointed out that persuasive messages tend to be more effective when i) speakers have credibility, ii) the audience can identify with speakers, iii) the message is made memorable, easy to understand, innovative, and surprising and iv) it is perceived as not imposed, but inferred. Additionally, particular attention is also paid to the fact that persuasion has non-verbal realizations, which supports the multimodal connection. Taking into consideration previous studies on persuasion in digital professional and academic genres, such as TED talks (Valeiras-Jurado 2019), YouTube videos (Luzón 2019), research dissemination talks (Ruiz-Garrido and Palmer-Silveira 2023) and research pitches (Ruiz-Madrid 2021), it can be hypothesized that the combination of modes and persuasive strategies may influence the extent to which these genres achieve their communicative aims. Therefore, the concept of persuasion is a defining trait in oral academic and professional genres and the orchestration of different modes brought together through persuasive strategies can be decisive in oral communication.

Taking into consideration that persuasion is inherently multimodal, the research questions (RQs) guiding the present paper are as follows: RQ1. What verbal and non-verbal realizations of persuasive strategies are identified in VRs? RQ2. How do multimodal ensembles and persuasive strategies cohere with each other?

2. Methodology

2.1. Dataset

The analysis in the present study is based on a detailed examination of short excerpts of audiovisuals to understand how semiotic resources and persuasive strategies are employed coherently to deliver a message. Previous studies (Bernad-Mechó 2022) have already explored videos which easily deploy multimodal content.

The dataset consists of a total of 8 VRs, all of them in English, taken from the online platform YouTube.[1] In the initial stage, I established a set of criteria to collect the data of the study, that is, duration, professional or academic activity, gender, impact, year of publication, editing, type of camera shots (see Appendix 1

for a description of the data). The dataset was then restricted to videos that complied with the following guidelines: limited duration (less than 3 minutes), impact as expressed by number of views (although the number of views is irrelevant for the purpose of the present study), year of publication (all between 2010 and 2020), and, to enrich the multimodal analysis, whether or not the videos used editing strategies as indicated by camera shots.

Once the eight videos were selected, I opted to extract one excerpt from each, the function of which was to urge the addressee to take action. The combined length of these clips was 179 seconds. Table 1 shows the exact time intervals and excerpts in which the speaker emphasizes their strengths and potential aptitudes as evidence that they are the most suitable candidate for the position. Therefore, the selection of the segments was made on the basis of their persuasive communicative aim and their multimodal nature. I hypothesized that these fragments, interpreted as using pressure tactics, would be modally dense (Norris 2004), since they would use a greater variety of semiotic modes and more complex interrelations among them.

8 VRs	Time interval	Length in seconds	Excerpts
VR19	from 1'27'' to 1'56''	29 sec	"Why should you pick me out of seven billion people living on this planet? Well, as a strong communicator and negotiator who can build effective relationships, I specialize in finding creative and innovative solutions to the toughest problems. I also happen to speak English, French and Spanish and have been involved in very exciting stuff for the last few years. I truly believe that I can bring a real and positive impact to the organization from day one. I'd love to join a creative agency, working to put my skills and experience to good use and apply my entrepreneurial principles to foster social transformation".
VR20	from 1'46'' to 2'12''	66 sec	"Why should you pick me? Well, I'm very interested in digital trends, new ways to sell products and services and how to build strong marketing strategies for companies around the world. I'm also able to speak English, French, Arabic and Spanish. I'm a fully creative, strong communicator and extremely motivated to build effective relationships with the ability to fit in with any group, any service, any company. I'm sure I can bring a really positive energy to the organization from day one".
VR21	from 1'18 to 1'32''	14 sec	"As a recent graduate from the Iron Yard, I'm an excellent candidate for a company or team looking to capitalize a lot and blow me into what they specifically need. I'm always up for a challenge, and I'm looking for a place where I can continue to grow and learn".

8 VRs	Time interval	Length in seconds	Excerpts
VR22	from 1'21'' to 1'29''	08 sec	"I believe I am your perfect candidate for your company and will become a great future employee".
VR23	from 2'18'' to 2'35''	17 sec	"I'm looking for a company that believes in getting stuff done, low bureaucracy, and empowering the staff to use their skills and talents for the better at a business. I'd prefer to be used for my brainpower and skills, but I'm willing to crush whatever is put in front of me. I hope that this is interesting to you or someone that you might know".
VR24	from 2'34'' to 2'44''	10 sec	"I am convinced that you are looking for a young, creative, hard-working, reliable and committed employee who will do their best. I'm one of those!"
VR25	from 1'26'' to 1'56''	30 sec	"Why should a company employ me? I have all these skills that I feel are very transferable: soft skills that are necessary in job roles when I apply for jobs. I feel like companies are looking for this. Alongside being very good at communicating, a good problem solver. I find that I've learned from my Project Management how to be very organized, how to plan better, and I'm just good at time management as well, and I think this works in the role I'm looking for".
VR26	from 0'41'' to 0'46''	05 sec	"If you're looking to increase sales production, develop your employees and retain them, I'm the person for the job".

Table 1. Time intervals and excerpts from the dataset

2.2. Annotation and Analysis

The analytic strategy employed in this paper relies on a specialized software package designed to carry out computer-assisted multimodal analysis complemented by manual analysis. This application is known as Multimodal Analysis-Video (MAV) (O'Halloran et al. 2012), and it "provides the necessary tools for investigating the use of semiotic resources and the ways in which semiotic choices interact to fulfill particular objectives in a multimodal video" (O'Halloran et al. 2017: 22). Appendix 2 contains an image of the interface and further explanation of the tool.

Other linguists have also found the support of the software to be useful, arguing that "an MDA approach requires the use of different specialized software packages to look into the data" (Valeiras-Jurado et al. 2018: 99). According to Ruiz-Madrid and Valeiras-Jurado, "an MDA offers a comprehensive approach for the fully [sic] understanding of the multimodal nature of genres" (2020: 28). Therefore, to explore the connection between the semiotic modes and the persuasive strategies,

following an MDA approach, a fine-grained framework for the multimodal annotation has been adapted from prior studies on multimodal analysis (Bernad-Mechó 2022), as Table 2 below shows.

SEMIOTIC MODES		
EMBODIED	DISEMBODIED	FILMIC
1. Gestures	1. Clothing	1. Image
1a. Iconic 1b. Metaphoric 1c. Deictic 1d. Beat	2. Background	2. Music
	3. Objects	3. Writing (words)
		4. Proxemics (disposition)
2. Head movements		4a. Lateral 4b. Frontal
2a. Iconic 2b. Novel 2c. Deictic 2d. Beat		5. Camera shot
3. Facial expressions		5a. Frontal 5b. Lateral 5c. Close-up 5d. Middle 5e. Foot
3a. Eyebrow-raising 3b. Frowning 3c. Laughter 3d. Smile 3e. Swallowing 3f. Lip-licking		6. Sound effect
4. Posture		7. Moving image
4a. Standing upright 4b. Standing by a table 4c. Sitting on table/chair (cross-legged) 4d. Sitting on table/chair (legs stretched) 4e. Swaying		
5. Speech (spoken language)		

Table 2. Framework for the multimodal analysis of VRs (based on Bernad-Mechó 2022)

For the purpose of the current study, I built upon preceding investigations into the use of semiotic modes and persuasion in alternative formats (Valeiras-Jurado 2019), and I focused on five salient persuasive strategies, which are explained in the following paragraphs and briefly presented in Figure 1. Both the persuasive strategies and the semiotic modes contribute to achieving the communicative aim of the VR (Figure 2).

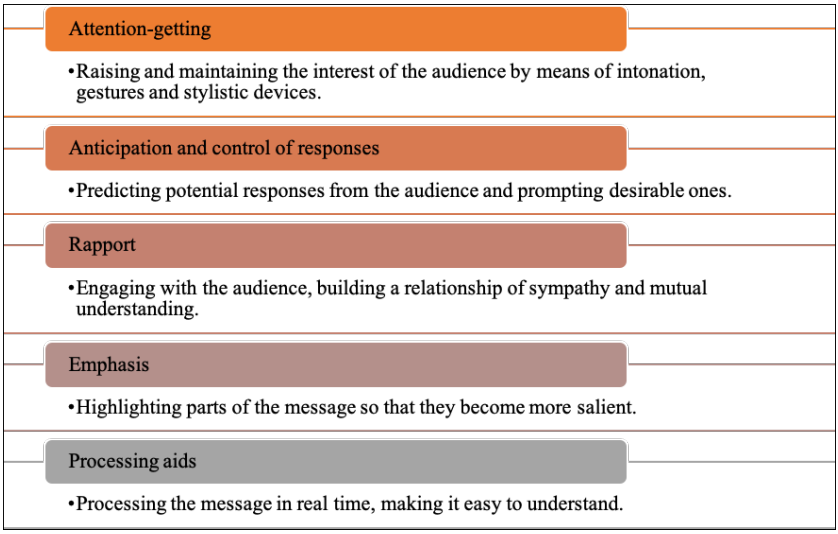

Figure 1. Taxonomy of persuasive strategies (Valeiras-Jurado 2019: 92-93)

The first strategy, 'attention-getting', is employed to establish and maintain contact with the audience. It is mostly based on attracting the interest of the audience so as to make them listen and invite the speaker for a job interview. 'Anticipation and control of responses' consists of the way the speaker adapts their speech and the way they deliver the message, taking into consideration the audience's anticipated reactions, with the aim of obtaining a desirable response (Brazil 1997; Carter 1997; Kendon 2004). Additionally, the speaker intentionally heads off certain responses, redirecting communicative intent according to their own aims. Valeiras-Jurado and Bernad-Mechó (2022) determined in their study that certain embodied modes (i.e. speech, intonation, gestures) and filmic modes can elicit certain reactions in the audience. The third strategy, 'rapport', refers to moments of mutual understanding and empathy with the audience. This strategy can also be expressed verbally (i.e. use of inclusive pronouns) and non-verbally (e.g. bodily postures, smiling, nodding). 'Emphasis', as the name implies, occurs when the speaker highlights parts of the message to make them more salient. For example, rhetorical devices (i.e. three-part lists, parallel structures, among others, in combination with intonation, gestures, head movements or filmic modes) are commonly used to cause a long-lasting effect and make the text more memorable. The last strategy, 'processing aids', refers to resources used to facilitate the

understanding of the message in real time. Specific embodied modes, such as gestures or intonation, are prominent to clarify aspects or structures of a message.

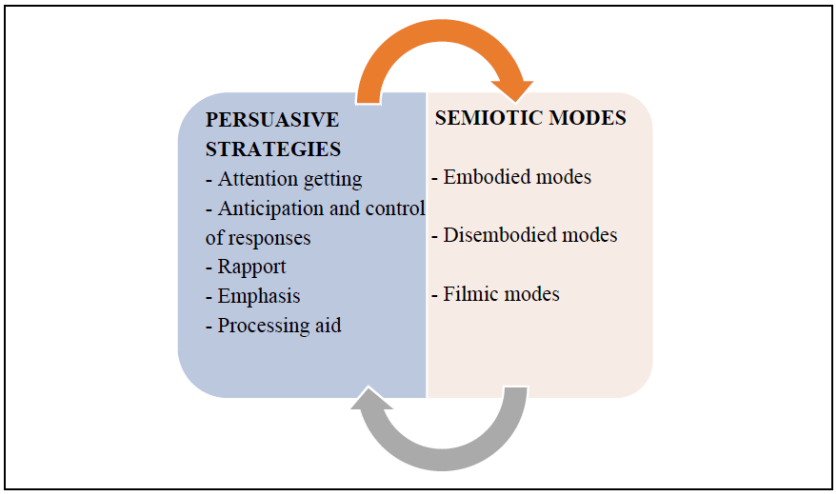

Figure 2. Persuasive strategies and semiotic modes in VRs

The 8 VRs were viewed several times, during which initial observations were made regarding the sort of embodied, disembodied, and filmic modes employed, and observing how the nature of multimodal ensembles configured through the use of persuasive strategies contribute to achieving the communicative aim of the VR. For the present research, the dataset was constructed to be gender-balanced (4 female and 4 male candidates) and two more scholars in a related research field were consulted until a consensus was reached regarding which multimodal semiotic modes were employed to realize persuasive strategies, thus ensuring interrater reliability.

3. Results and Discussion

The main aim of the present study is to identify the verbal and non-verbal realizations of persuasive strategies speakers use in VRs (RQ1). Additionally, this article accounts for the notion of coherence among multimodal ensembles and persuasive strategies to achieve the persuasive effect in VRs (RQ2).

Out of the eight excerpts shown in Table 1, 6 figures are supplied below (Figures 3-8) to show a precise explanation of the most noteworthy verbal and non-verbal realizations of persuasive strategies by the presenters in their videos. Each of these videos makes use, in most instances, of a coherent multimodal ensemble that effectively interacts with the most frequent persuasive strategies.

Figure 3. Multimodal and persuasive resources from VR19

Figure 3 provides an example of a coherent multimodal ensemble, enabling the speaker to capture the audience's attention and present himself as a strong candidate for the job. Through a blend of verbal and non-verbal multimodal cues, he introduces the section interpreted as using pressure tactics with a direct question aimed at steering the audience's interpretation toward his desired outcome. For instance, he poses the direct question, "Why should you pick me out of seven billion people living on this planet?" [VR19], a persuasive tactic intended to anticipate and control the audience's response. This strategy is accompanied by a metaphoric gesture (i.e. an open hand facing upward) conveying candor and truthfulness, and seeking rapport. These persuasive strategies are depicted in the upper images of the ensemble.

Furthermore, the applicant appears to purposefully use different embodied modes in order to captivate the audience's attention, employing them as a persuasive

tactic. For example, he often incorporates head movements, such as bobbing of the head when shifting his gaze to the left side of the frame, along with a range of facial expressions to emphasize his points. Particularly notable is the use of an eyebrow-raising gesture in conjunction with the sentence "I truly believe that I can bring a real and positive impact to the organization from day one" (lower right image). These resources, combined with different filmic modes, enhance the effectiveness of the candidate's message and the way it is delivered. For instance, the excerpted footage opens with the speaker in frontal orientation (i.e. proxemics) and shifts to a lateral orientation to introduce a new topic (lower left image). Additionally, there is a shift in camera angle, starting with a medium shot of the speaker and then transitioning to a close-up shot to highlight his message and establish rapport as a persuasive strategy.

In short, this speaker utilizes semiotic resources such as speech, head movement, facial expressions, proxemics and camera shots to emphasize, capture attention, anticipate a response from the audience, and seek rapport with them as persuasive tactics.

The message delivered by the speaker in Figure 4 is, to some extent, coherent from a multimodal perspective, and his presentation predominantly relies on embodied modes to accomplish the communicative aim of the genre. There is a noticeable variation in the way gestures are performed, for example, when the speaker uses his fingers to enumerate points: his intention seems to be to emphasize information he considers significant (persuasive strategy) and at the same time he is making the message easy to understand (processing aids as a persuasive strategy in the lower right image) by visually showing with a gesture the number one, since the speaker later remarks, "I'm sure I can bring a really positive energy to the organization from day one" [VR20].

Regarding posture, throughout the excerpt, he remains seated in a stretched-out position, employing the persuasive strategies of attention-getting and rapport to create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Moreover, the camera captures frontal shots from a medium distance to build further rapport. However, at some points his posture, for example, in the upper right image with his arms inward and directing his body to the side does not project the message in the same way and rather minimizes his physical presence. Therefore, there is an incoherence between both embodied modes (speech and posture) in this case.

In sum, this example shows the orchestration of gestures, posture and camera shots, mainly contributing to developing the following persuasive strategies: emphasis, processing aids, attention-getting and rapport. However, it should be noted that they do not act in isolation. Instead, they are interconnected to fulfill the communicative purpose of the genre.

Figure 4. Multimodal and persuasive resources from VR20

Observing the performance of the speaker in VR20 (Figure 4) alongside that of the speaker in VR23 (Figure 5), certain similarities can be noted, particularly in the frequent use of embodied modes. Specifically, both speakers employ the iconic gesture of enumerating with their fingers, along with the eyebrow raise (observed in the facial expression in the upper left image), enacting the persuasive strategy of attention-getting (i.e. when the speaker raises his eyebrows, he conveys surprise or extreme attention and expects the audience to align with this feeling and be surprised and attentive as well). However, the speaker in Figure 5 closes his eyes momentarily to pause and consider his next words. This action can be interpreted as a metaphoric representation of silence and a sign that he is now concentrating on remembering the message rather than on the audience (lower right image).

In this sense, the embodied mode does not contribute to the persuasive message he aims to deliver, or, in other words, gaze is not part of the persuasive multimodal orchestration in this specific example. Nevertheless, the speaker uses the persuasive strategy of attention-getting, realized through gestures, facial expression and speech, which act as a whole.

Figure 5. Multimodal and persuasive resources from VR23

Three speakers [VR19, VR20 and VR23] in Figures 3, 4 and 5 are observed wearing light-colored shirts, interpreted as a disembodied mode to deliberately convey reliability and politeness. Indeed, in any online performance, the selection of an appropriate outfit is crucial for making a strong impression and signaling personality (Ruiz-Garrido and Palmer-Silveira 2023). Nonetheless, a particularly notable instance of a disembodied mode is the T-shirt of a technology-education company (i.e. clothing) worn by the speaker in VR21 (Figure 6), seemingly chosen intentionally to demonstrate pride in the training in technology she received at the institution (upper right image). This coincides with the statement "As a recent graduate from the Iron Yard, I'm an excellent candidate for a company". Moreover, she shows expressiveness by using facial expressions, with eyebrow raises aimed at capturing attention (lower left image) and smiles, fostering rapport as a persuasive strategy.

A similar example is found in VR24 (Figure 7), where the speaker opts for a 'bow tie' as a means of setting herself apart from the other candidates (attention-getting strategy). She maintains an eloquent manner, employing facial expressions throughout the video, including eyebrow raises and smiles (lower right image), to establish rapport as a persuasive tactic. Additionally, she strategically emphasizes certain aspects of her message over others, employing embodied modes through gestures (iconic and beat) and speech ("I'm one of those"). She employs her

fingers coherently as well as a persuasive strategy (processing aids in the upper and lower left images), orchestrating the presentation of concepts in a specific sequence while listing her strengths ("I am convinced that you are looking for a young, creative, hard-working, reliable, and committed employee who will do their best").

It should be highlighted that, despite the fact that both speakers use their fingers to point to themselves for attention-getting (persuasive strategy), they do so in different ways and achieve different effects. The first speaker is pointing to herself with her thumb (upper left image in VR21 in Figure 6), which is a more specific way of pointing, which makes the gesture more aggressive. With this gesture, the speaker controls the response of the audience (persuasive strategy) by explicitly directing their gaze to her. On the other hand, the second speaker touches her shoulders with her open hands to point to herself in a subtler and more affectionate way, building rapport (upper left image in VR24 in Figure 7).

To conclude, in both examples, the multimodal ensemble is established by disembodied modes (i.e. clothing) and embodied modes (i.e. facial expression, gestures, speech). The verbal and non-verbal realizations of persuasive strategies that contribute most to both excerpts are attention-getting, rapport, emphasis, processing aids and controlling the response of the audience.

Figure 6. Multimodal and persuasive resources from VR21

Figure 7. Multimodal and persuasive resources from VR24

In VR25 (Figure 8), the speaker makes use of the text overlaid onto video (upper left image) as filmic modes. In this specific example, the speaker employs the direct question "Why should a company employ me?" to support her speech (emphasis). Additionally, she provides the audience with visual support (processing aid) to anticipate and control responses, since the audience is prompted to interpret her speech as the answer to her question when they read it. She presents her speech in a somewhat emotionless way, although certain facial expressions, such as eyebrow raises (upper right image), a subtle smile (lower right image) and closed eyes during pauses (lower left image), can also be discerned. Once again, the pause in her speech while she closes her eyes may suggest that she needs time to think about her message and, in turn, seems not to contribute to the multimodal coherence.

In sum, the ensemble is orchestrated by the combined use of filmic (i.e. written words) as well as embodied modes, such as facial expressions, which lead to the realization of different persuasive strategies (i.e. emphasis, processing aid, control of responses) but in an apparently insufficient way.

To conclude, all the multimodal ensembles orchestrated by the speakers produce a suitable and comprehensible message, fostering persuasion through a variety of embodied, disembodied and filmic modes (e.g. facial expression, gestures, head movements and clothing as the most salient ones). The eight excerpts use a similar choice of persuasive strategies (rapport, emphasis and processing aids) realized

Figure 8. Multimodal and persuasive resources from VR25

through several modes (mainly gestures, facial expressions, head movements and speech). However, when there is a lack of coherence across modes (i.e. modes do not cohere with each other), the persuasive effect can be diminished. Three excerpts (VR20, VR23 and VR25 in Figures 4, 5 and 8) seem incoherent in their use of modes. Their speech as well as their facial expression is flat at certain points, showing no emotion, and it may reveal disengagement from the communicative situation, which is to persuade the audience. As a result, the use of modes becomes less coherent and, consequently, less effective with regard to the communicative aim of the genre. The rest of the excerpts (VR19, VR21 and VR24 in Figures 3, 6 and 7) orchestrated the multimodal ensemble in a more coherent way. The persuasive strategies in the excerpts are deployed through a series of semiotic modes, which consistently contribute to achieving the communicative intention of the genre.

In order to visually show the observed features that foster the persuasive nature in VRs, a summary table (Table 3) is presented as follows:

PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES	VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL REALIZATIONS
Attention-getting	Head movement (i.e. beat) [VR19] Gesture (i.e. iconic) [VR20] + [VR23] Facial expression (i.e. eyebrow-raising) [VR20] + [VR23] Clothing + speech [VR21] Clothing [VR24] Gesture (i.e. iconic) [VR21] + [VR24]
Anticipation and control of response	Speech (i.e. direct question) [VR19] Speech (i.e. direct question) [VR25]
Rapport	Gesture (i.e. metaphoric) [VR19] Proxemics (i.e. lateral and frontal) [VR19] Camera shot (i.e. middle and close-up) [VR19] Proxemics (i.e. lateral and frontal) [VR20] Camera shot (i.e. middle and frontal) [VR20] Facial expression (i.e. eyebrow-raising) [VR21] Facial expression (i.e. eyebrow-raising and smile) [VR24]
Emphasis	Facial expressions (i.e. eyebrow-raising) + speech [VR19] Gesture (i.e. iconic and beat) + speech [VR24] Facial expressions (i.e. eyebrow-raising and smile) [VR25]
Processing aids	Gesture (i.e. iconic) + speech [VR20] Gesture (i.e. iconic) + speech [VR24] Writing (i.e. visual support) [VR25]

Table 3. Features that foster persuasiveness in VRs

4. Conclusion

This study has explored the presence of persuasive strategies via the interplay of multimodal realizations in VRs. In professional settings, multimodality has become essential due to the need to effectively transmit information as well as convince audiences across a range of digital platforms (Jewitt and Kress 2010). Digitality has also developed into a pervasive force in professional genres, influencing how individuals present themselves, connect with others, communicate and conduct business (Hafner 2018). Embracing digital elements and practices is now fundamental for professionals to stay competitive in today's evolving landscape.

To answer the research questions posed, I closely examined the verbal and non-verbal realizations of persuasive strategies in VRs from a multimodal perspective using the software MAV. Considering that the fragments selected for analysis are part of a section that uses pressure tactics to convince the audience to take action, a wide range of verbal and non-verbal realizations of the five persuasive strategies identified are explored in the digital genre of the VR. For instance, raising and

maintaining the interest of the audience, as a persuasive strategy, is mainly realized by gestures, head movement and facial expressions (e.g. embodied modes), and clothing is the only element identified as disembodied mode. In addition, in order to prompt desirable responses from the audience, it is noteworthy how the speaker poses a direct question (e.g. disembodied mode). The findings of this research reveal that the attempt to engage with the audience and build a relationship of empathy and mutual understanding as a persuasive strategy requires a substantial number of embodied modes (i.e. gestures and facial expressions) and filmic modes (i.e. lateral, frontal proxemics and middle and close-up camera shots). To highlight parts of the message so that they become more salient, most of the speakers employ the eyebrow-raising gesture, smile, gestures and speech. Lastly, speakers process the message in real time to make it easy to understand by employing a significant element added in the postproduction process (i.e. text overlaid onto the video for visual support). This filmic mode is supported by the embodied one, mainly through gestures and speech.

Interestingly, the embodied modes play a relevant role concerning the communicative intention of the speaker since they are present in all the fragments selected. Furthermore, the most prevalent embodied modes are gestures, facial expressions and speech. Nonetheless, even though the disembodied modes are not always present in all the excerpts, the most frequent one is clothing. External elements such as background and objects do not seem decisive to achieve the communicative aim of the fragments analyzed. The most prominent filmic modes are proxemics, camera shots and visual support. Likewise, images, music and sound effects are missing in these fragments.

The findings of the current study indicate that VRs have marked persuasive function, which is enhanced by the use of multimodal ensembles considering the excerpts analyzed. Waung et al. (2014) claim that VRs constitute a rich medium because multiple verbal and non-verbal cues are employed. Nonetheless, in certain instances (e.g. VR20 and VR25) multimodal ensembles do not cohere with persuasive strategies and, as a consequence, the communicative intention may be altered. In both fragments, the pause in their speech while they close their eyes can be interpreted as time needed to think about their message; as a result, these VRs may not be fully persuasive. In turn, coherence in the use of semiotic modes and persuasive realizations is paramount to this purpose.

As a conclusion, the interrelation between the various semiotic modes identified in the MDA approach presented in this paper along with the persuasive strategies introduced in the methodology section can pave the ground for further genre studies. Due to their potential impact on both the professional community and the general audience, individuals can take advantage of the

power of audiovisual communication to convey their professional achievements, non-verbal communicative skills and overall suitability for a desired position (Flannery et al. 2014).

As for pedagogical implications, the analysis presented in this paper provides valuable insights applicable to the creation of teaching materials for English for Specific Purposes courses. Here, the VR could serve as a teaching resource for honing multimodal skills and mastering essential persuasive strategies for effective communication in professional settings. The teaching of VRs appears to be pedagogically beneficial, as it can help refine the inclusion of oral and digital genres in higher education curricula (O'Halloran et al. 2017).

Given the limited size of the dataset, further analysis is required to enlarge and refine the methodological framework of multimodal realizations and persuasive strategies, especially by including other types of remediated digital genres. In addition, it should be noted that there has been no real check of the candidates' effectiveness, that is, no information is provided about whether they were ultimately hired. However, it is my hope that this paper provides a flexible and easily adaptable analytical framework for future digital genre studies in video formats.

Notes

1. The present article is part of a wider study approved by the Ethics Committee of Universitat Jaume I, with the file number "CD/41/2022", which allows the use of the videos and images extracted for academic purposes.

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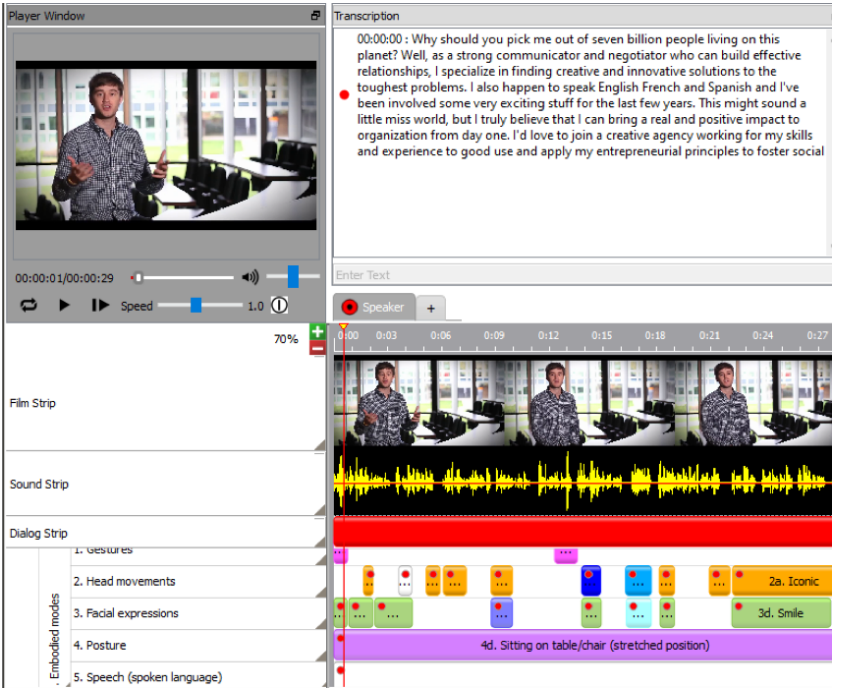
Received: 02/11/2023
Accepted: 27/05/2024

Appendix . Description of the dataset

VRs	Duration	Professional/ academic activity	Gender	Impact (Views)	Year of publication	Video type (Edited video)	Camera shot
VR19	2' 10''	Publicist	M	977,826	2012	person + audio	face, half, full body
VR20	2' 34''	Salesman	M	16,652	2019	image + music + audio + person	half body
VR21	1' 52''	Web developer	F	124,584	2016	image + music + audio + person	half body
VR22	1' 38''	Student	M	22,871	2020	image + music + audio + person	half body
VR23	2' 50''	Travel manager	M	5,655	2020	image + music + audio + person	half body
VR24	2' 57''	Student	F	293,152	2014	image + music + audio + person	half body
VR25	2' 02''	Project manager	F	865	2019	person + audio	half body
VR26	0' 46''	Sales manager	F	202,454	2010	person + audio	half body

Appendix 2. MAV interface for multimodal and persuasive annotations

The left corner contains a video window where the clips can be played; the right corner of the interface leaves space for verbal transcriptions as well as a list of strips. These strips are divided into the sound strip, which displays a waveform of the audio in the clip, and supplemental strips, created manually with the aim of annotating all relevant semiotic modes employed in the excerpts selected (Bernad-Mechó 2022).



SPACES OF S(H)ELF-CARE: THERAPEUTIC NARRATIVE READINGS IN ANOREXIA

ESPACIOS DE AUTO(FICCIÓN)-CUIDADO: LECTURAS NARRATIVAS TERAPÉUTICAS EN LA ANOREXIA

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.20249736

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Abstract

This paper delves into the realm of art therapy, offering tentative evidence of the effectiveness of reading in anorexia nervosa (AN) recovery based on an analysis rooted in three theoretical frameworks: cognitive literary criticism, space studies and the perspective of care. In the first part, AN is discussed as a spatial disorder and one which compromises practices of care. The second part of the paper explores narrative transportation theory, a cognitive literary studies paradigm that explores the various psychological effects of reading, and on mental imagery, a concept that focuses on the mental effects of descriptions and imagery in books. By drawing on research from these spheres, this theoretical framework serves as a valuable lens to frame the third part of the paper, which addresses the pivotal role played by reading in Laura Freeman's journey toward overcoming anorexia, as depicted in her autobiographical work *The Reading Cure: How Books Restored my Appetite* (2018). In particular, the study offers a close reading of some of the narratives Freeman addresses in her work, meaning the fiction and non-fiction texts she found inspiring, which exclude poetry and drama, and which stimulated her appetite through vivid descriptions of food.

Keywords: British autobiography, anorexia, space, bibliotherapy, care.

Resumen

Este artículo se adentra en el ámbito de las terapias artísticas ofreciendo evidencia de la potencialidad de la lectura en la recuperación de la anorexia, abriendo paso a un enfoque novedoso enraizado en tres marcos teóricos principales: los estudios literarios cognitivos, los estudios del espacio y la perspectiva del cuidado. En la primera parte del artículo, se discute la anorexia como un trastorno del espacio y como una condición que compromete las prácticas de cuidado. La segunda parte del artículo se adentra en la teoría narrativa del transporte, un paradigma de los estudios literarios cognitivos que explora los efectos psicológicos de la lectura, así como en la imaginación mental, un concepto que se centra en los efectos mentales de las descripciones e imágenes en los libros. A partir de investigación proveniente de estos campos, este marco teórico da paso a la tercera parte del artículo, que aborda el papel crucial que desempeña la lectura en el viaje de Laura Freeman hacia la superación de la anorexia, tal como se describe en su obra autobiográfica *The Reading Cure: How Books Restored My Appetite* (2018). En concreto, este estudio hace una lectura atenta de algunas de las narrativas que Freeman aborda en su obra; es decir, los textos de ficción y no ficción que la inspiraron, y que excluyen poesía y teatro, a estimular su apetito a través de imaginativas descripciones de alimentos.

Palabras clave: Autobiografía británica, anorexia, espacio, biblioterapia, cuidado.

1. Introduction

Individuals with anorexia nervosa (AN) think obsessively and negatively about food. Time is spent ruminating about food or meal times (Vitousek and Brown 2015: 224), and relationships are constituted by people with whom to go out and avoid eating (Warin 2010: 54-59). Similarly, the experience of space is mediated by a constant threat of food encounters. Centering the attention on space, when a person with AN perceives places in relation to eating, she experiences the process as incredibly threatening and anxiety-causing, which mediates her motivations to eat or not (Augustynowicz 2015).

Motivations to eat in AN are related to the question of care (Lavis 2015). To eat and to be fed have to do with basic self-care and other care practices. But in AN, people display extreme reluctance to eat and, as a result, to recover from their illness. Resistance to treatment is sustained by ego-syntonic symptoms, that is, by a frequent wish to maintain their eating disorder (ED) (Fassino and Abbate-Daga 2013). As a result of ego-syntonic features, motivation to change the behaviors associated with the condition diminish. This is one reason why AN is a uniquely

treatment-resistant condition, and one in which people are highly prone to relapse. Nevertheless, the question of what constitutes full recovery from AN is elusive, as systematic criteria are not universally agreed upon.

Modifying the negative perception of space in relation to eating can contribute to the decision to engage in practices of (self-)care, and therefore, to recover from AN. Reading could promote this change in perception thanks to the inclusion of descriptions of spaces that evoke positive connotations of food and the act of eating. In the first part of this article, I will examine AN as a spatial condition, then I will analyse the idea of "s(h)elf-care", a concept that will relate narrative reading to therapeutic effects. In the subsequent sections of this study, I will examine evidence and discuss certain limitations derived from the experience of Laura Freeman, a writer formerly diagnosed with AN who insists that it was through reading "wonderful descriptions of food in books" that she had her "appetite stirred" and thus began to "eat again" (2018a).

2. AN as a Spatial Condition

1.1. Physical Spaces of AN

The space that our bodies occupy influences our sense of body perception (Espeset et al. 2012). A balanced bodily perception is one in which the person is, overall, satisfied with the way her body looks and how she imagines others perceive it. But several conditions can alter a person's perception of their body. A person with a restrictive ED may believe they are too fat, either temporarily or sustainedly in time. In AN specifically, public displays of the body (at a swimming pool or a changing room, for example) create a context-dependent sense of being fat, while looking at themselves in a mirror can make the individual see their emaciated state (Espeset et al. 2012).

From a phenomenological perspective, AN may be understood as a spatial disorder. This ED was in fact defined by Orbach as "an expression of a woman's confusion about how much space she may take up in the world" (1986: 14). Refraining from eating is the most evident behavior in AN. It is a direct attempt to lose weight, but it is also related to subtler components of the condition, such as the sense of disgust prompted by the act of eating or the fear of contaminating the purity of the body via food intake (Warin 2010).

In AN, motivations to avoid eating and lose weight can also be seen as an attempt to minimize "the consumption of space in an attempt to appear physically smaller and disappear" (Warin 2005: 104). Thus, refraining from eating is self-reinforcing as a consequence of its correlation with weight loss and dis-occupation of space.

Interviews with people with AN support this view of the condition as one sustained by a desire to have a body that increasingly takes up less and less space in the world. The medical anthropologist Lavis found that for the group that she interviewed, AN was seen as "a space to zone into" (2015: 11). For example, she highlights that, for one participant, AN was described as "my space" and for another as "my little bubble" or even as "a safety net" (2015: 11-12). In her spatial analysis of AN, anthropologist Warin showed how the participants she interviewed repeatedly spoke of a need to "fade away", "dissolve into thin air" or "fit into a matchbox" (2005: 103).

1.2. Social Spaces and Careful Eating in AN

Central to the relationship between eating and space is the understanding that places need not only be understood as geographical spaces, but as "spaces of relatedness" (Warin 2006). Although eating is an act that can be performed alone or in groups, eating in the company of others is certainly a popular social activity. When there is no pathology involved, group eating normally involves a higher consumption of food in comparison to when the person eats on her own. Furthermore, we also tend to eat more when we go out, merely because there are more choices to select from than normal. This phenomenon is known as "sensory-specific satiety".

In AN, eating in the company of others poses two difficulties. For one, eating is problematic in itself, because AN is characterized by an aversion to food and weight gain, and therefore to the act of eating. On the other hand, AN is usually isolating, since social occasions and contact with people are often avoided. Lavis remarks how one of her participants described AN as "a world that you live in, that's separate from everybody else" (2015: 11). People with AN can find it difficult to engage in intimate romantic or intimate friendship relationships despite having a desire to have such connections (Warin 2010: 82-83). Moreover, individuals with AN may also keep away from family members. One major reason to avoid social contact in AN is precisely that meetings with people are frequently centered around food. As Warin notes, "social gatherings around food such as meal times, drinks with friends or any social event present a level of anxiety that can only be circumnavigated by withdrawal" (2005: 9).

Someone with AN will therefore commonly try to eat alone. This allows them to control the act of eating, letting them choose what and how much to eat. In order to eat alone, people with this ED adopt various strategies. For example, they might lie about having already eaten when it is not the case. Furtive eating is a classic feature of binge ED, bulimia or obesity, but people with AN also eat secretively (Warin 2010: 87), for instance, at night.

Warin discusses interesting findings about how her participants negotiated space in order to maintain eating-withdrawal behaviors. For example, she points to the fact that participants decided to only share food time with a few "privileged" acquaintances and that "negotiating the commensality around food was a constant dilemma for participants" (2010: 59). As such, she could only share a "coffee or a diet Coke" (2010: 59) with them, but never a full meal. When talking about the family home, participants in Warin's observation referred to how they "retreated to bedrooms, toilets (water closets) and bathrooms" (2005: 19) to eat on their own. Warin's research sheds light on the ways in which individuals who engage in eating-withdrawal behaviors negotiate and maintain their habits. Overall, Warin's findings highlight the deliberate actions taken by individuals to uphold their withdrawal behaviors and the impact it has on their social interactions within and outside of the home.

The above only applies to individuals in outpatient care, which is the preferred treatment modality in AN (NICE 2004). However, there is still a substantial minority who receive inpatient care, where eating behaviors are monitored. Health regulations determine that "patients may require inpatient care if they are suicidal or have life-threatening medical complications […] or weight below 85 percent of their healthy body weight" (Williams et al. 2008: 187). Given the clinical risks of severe emaciation, inpatient treatments focus on refeeding the patient. For Lavis, this makes food "a central vector of care" (2015: 5).

Feeding in the context of in-hospital AN treatment is, however, a highly controversial issue as well as a problematic imposition for patients. Feeding patients is considered the main practice of care in AN treatment, but ego-syntonic symptoms may mean that patients need to be compelled to eat (or even force-fed via tube-feeding). Despite being "only one outcome of interest" (NICE 2004), AN treatment is focused on weight gain but not on learning to eat more autonomously. Thus, a hospital experience does not prepare someone with AN to care for herself and continue eating after being discharged.

Another problem about inpatient care in AN is that hospital rooms "conflate all spaces" (Warin 2005: 111), since they function simultaneously as bedroom, bathroom and the place where patients eat, alone. The result of being confined to a hospital bed is the reinforcement of maladaptive "closeted" behaviors in AN. The hospital room becomes the space where patients avoid social networks and the relatedness of eating, which is precisely one of the factors sustaining the ED. Even more, the re-configuration of private spaces in hospital treatment might allow patients to outwit personnel and avoid food consumption, since patients spend most of their time alone.

1.3. The Mental Space of AN

For someone with AN, food does not only take up physical space in the literal sense of the word; rather, food, eating and weight dominate patients' train of thought. This creates attentional and memory biases: people with AN pay more attention to and evoke more memories about food-related stimuli than cohorts without the ED (Vitousek and Brown 2015).

To constantly think about food may seem contradictory for someone who arranges her life around food avoidance. The short explanation is that people with AN experience a rebound effect, and the more they try not to eat and think about food, the more they will experience invasive thoughts and the urge to eat. These ruminations are, however, perceived as consistent with the individual's aims, since such level of preoccupation with food is necessary to achieve precisely the "right" amount of intake.

From a discourse perspective, the disorder is described by patients as an illness which literally occupies mental space. As Maddy, a recovered AN patient who took part in Warin's study, stated, "[t]he place where anorexia is, it's a very narrow space, and there is little room for anything else" (2010: 7). Laura Freeman, the author whose work is the focus of this article, complains that AN made her feel "trapped" and that she "needed to find something that would take me *out of my thoughts*" (2018b: 145, emphasis added).

To fully understand the disorder, it is then essential to examine it from a cognitive perspective, which offers evidence not only with regard to what a person with AN thinks about but also how they think. In short, a framework of AN needs to explain how people with AN think and feel about food. On a general level, AN reduces cognitive flexibility, which means that it is difficult for them to change their thoughts (Vitousek and Brown 2015). Some of the emotions that food and eating conjure in AN are fear, disgust, shame or guilt, whereas food avoidance generates pleasure, a sense of control or feelings associated with purity and cleanliness. However, people with AN often find it difficult to assess and express their emotions (Esplen 2013), which in psychology is known as "alexythimia".

A comprehensive model for understanding AN could be based on Fairburn and Beglin's famous Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q), a structured clinical interview that assesses the main features and associated psychopathology of EDs. The EDE-Q has shown high reliability, internal consistency and validity across multiple studies (Lev-Ari et al. 2021). The questionnaire comprises questions related to restraint, eating concerns, weight concerns and shape concerns. Below I illustrate the questionnaire items that are relevant for AN from a cognitive-affective perspective, specifically.

In AN, restraint concerns appear in the form of thoughts related to a wish to limit or avoid intake of specific foods to influence shape or weight, as well as strict eating rules and a desire to have an empty stomach. Purgative behaviors are also adopted, such as spitting out or throwing away food, vomiting or evacuating meals through the abuse of laxatives. Eating concerns cause thoughts to be focused on foods, eating or calories as well as fearful thoughts of losing control over one's eating or being seen eating by others. Weight concerns include feeling fat and the desire to lose weight, and thoughts of dissatisfaction with current weight. Finally, shape concerns have to do with equivalent trains of thought and emotions, but focused more specifically on shape, for example experiencing fear about the stomach's outline after eating.

It can be said that AN literally constricts the mind of the those with the illness, limiting their psychological horizons and life possibilities: preoccupations with food, eating, and weight permeate thoughts and mental processes, creating attentional and memory biases toward food-related stimuli. Conceptualizing this model through the concept of the "mental space of AN" enhances comprehension of its phenomenology, since the idea aids in linking the cognitive overload induced by AN to the corresponding rigidity of behavior and emotions related to food and eating that characterize the disorder.

2. Spatial Reading and Caring

Fiction organizes a sequence of events according to different dimensions which essentially include time, space and causality. Descriptions serve to capture the spatial dimension, and when we read a description of a place in a story, this information activates representations of mental spaces in our imagination (Speer et al. 2009). One way to approach the representation of spaces in literature is to examine narrative transportation theory, where the term "transportation" is defined as the "feeling of being lost in a story", that is to say, the moment when readers get "immersed" in a narrative world (Green 2021: 87). This process can arouse pleasant or unpleasant feelings, exactly because spaces can be positively or negatively perceived and pictured. The theory of therapeutic landscapes explores the beneficial properties of being and imagining oneself in certain spaces. Both narrative transportation theory and the theory of therapeutic landscapes are useful to understand how narratives can lead to therapeutic appraisals of space, and, uniquely, to therapeutic readings of eating spaces in AN.

2.1. Therapeutic Spaces

People with AN may benefit from modifying their perceptions of eating contexts, causing these to evolve from sources of dread to safe spaces. In AN cognitive behavioral therapy, patients are helped to change their behaviors and negative concept of food and eating so that they can start feeding again (Vitousek and Brown 2015: 225-226). However, no AN therapy program has ever specifically focused on the therapeutic possibilities that spaces, landscapes or geography have to offer despite their potential to alter eating behavior and food perceptions.

Since the 1990s, the idea of therapeutic spaces has been gaining momentum. Particularly, the publication of Gesler's article on therapeutic landscapes in 1992 established medical geography as a discipline of inquiry. Gesler argued that it was crucial to "explore why certain places or situations are perceived to be therapeutic" (1992: 735). In his theory, Gesler employed the notion of therapeutic landscapes as a geographical metaphor to facilitate the exploration of the beneficial properties of space.

Early publications in this area focused on the idea of health geographies as referring to physical spaces, despite Gesler's figurative theorization of the notion of landscape. At the beginning, scholars mostly researched people's spatial perceptions of sites considered sacred, such as Lourdes, or health facilities like hospitals and clinics. Health geographers later expanded their conceptualization of healing spaces to incorporate therapeutic "networks"; that is, informal social systems through which people gain support and establish practices of care. For Smyth, therapeutic networks include "kinship groups and networks of care provided by family, friends, therapists and other agents of support" (2005: 490). In therapeutic networks, practices of care are enacted in settings that are more casual than clinical care, including care delivered in the home, the community as well as "bookstores" (Smyth 2005: 493).

Andrews adds another layer of complexity to the notion of therapeutic space, insisting that the concept should account for the idea that "therapeutic associations and effects may be experienced somewhere other than in physical locations and, specifically, in spaces and places created by the mind" (2004: 304). "Mental imagery of place" is the area of psychological research that explores this phenomenon. Psychoanalytic therapists (Philo and Parr 2003; Callard 2003) are early proponents of the therapeutic potential of a mental imagery of place. In a nutshell, they suggest that instructing patients to evoke pleasant spaces in their imagination can be beneficial in the processing and treatment of phobias and trauma.

A problem Andrews identifies in psychoanalytic analyses of therapeutic landscapes is that "imagination can be an elusive and slippery human capacity to access and

manipulate, even for experienced therapists" (2004: 308). Moreover, in the context of current research into mental imagery, it remains difficult to measure the overall contribution that mental imagery therapy has with regard to health. Methodological difficulties of this kind are in fact the main reason why psychoanalytic theories have become largely discredited. Despite these drawbacks, evoking unpleasant simulations of space constitutes a distressing experience, but the opposite remains true as well. Andrews concludes that "the current lesson learned from psychoanalytic geographies is straightforward; a recognition that therapeutic places may not necessarily exist in 'real' (linear) time and in physical space. Rather, they could exist as spaces and places created by, and located in, the mind" (2004: 309).

I suggest that medical geography could open up the research field to include not only physical or even self-imagined spaces, but also therapeutic spaces created by reading fiction. After all, when we engage with a story, we have to create an imagined space in which the narrative events take place. In other words, fiction causes readers to evoke mental imagery, including powerful spatial imagery (Speer et al. 2009). This effect of reading works of fiction is more natural than the artificial manipulation of imagination by psychotherapists, and it also opens up the possibility of controllably measuring mental imagery, as it becomes elicited by an input stimulus. In particular, mental imagery effects and, more specifically, spatial imagery, have been assessed in narrative transportation theory, the field which examines the psychological feeling of losing oneself in a story.

2.2. Narrative Transportation Theory

Using a metaphor of traveling, transportation theory postulates "that experiences of narrative […] create a mental state in which the experiencing subjects […] 'lose themselves' in the story they encounter" (Schleifer and Vannatta 2019: 5). The process of narrative transportation can occur across different types of media, including books, cinema, drama or videogames. Both factual and fictive stories create transportation effects. In the case of fiction, events need not be real, but consistent in the storyworld created. Researchers have identified four major effects constituting the phenomenon of narrative transportation that result from reading fiction: identification, reduced counterarguing, emotional engagement and mental imagery.

Identification and transportation are related but separate concepts. Identification has to do with character, whereas transportation has more to do with the dimensions of time and space. Identification takes place when readers see their values aligned with those of a character in the story, usually the protagonist. Succinctly, it refers to the process by which readers project themselves into the

experiences and emotions of characters, often those with whom they share similarities, to create a sense of connection. This phenomenon is crucial in shaping reader response and engagement with a text (Tukachinsky 2021). Transportation, on the other hand, refers to "the feeling of being immersed in a narrative, a state of cognitive, affective, and mental imagery engagement" (Fitzgerald and Green 2017: 49). It involves a combination of attention, imagery, and the feeling of becoming immersed in the narrative world. The potential of narratives to effectively make audiences feel "absorbed" is proposed as the main mechanism through which readers identify with characters, making them more likely to adopt the beliefs, attitudes and, ultimately, the behaviors expressed in the story (Murphy et al. 2013).

Reduced counterarguing is explained by the fact that fiction is not intentionally persuasive. As a result, readers spend less time and effort establishing counterfactuals to the narrative. If they identify with a character, it is likely that they will be persuaded by her values, as the effect is not perceived as being externally imposed. This effect, which is particular to fictional narratives, has been found to increase over time, because the ideas become integrated into real-life knowledge, a circumstance known as "absolute sleeper effect" (Appel and Richter 2007: 113). Therefore, reduced counterarguing is useful to self-generate motivation to change behaviors in the long-term (Murphy et al. 2013). Lastly, emotional engagement is the evocation of feelings and affect that takes place when readers are immersed in a story. The stronger the emotions the story conjures, the easier it is for a reader to feel moved by it (Green and Brock 2002).

2.2.1. *Mental Imagery and Mental Health*

As argued above, narratives inspire the formation of mental images. These can be presented to subjects in the form of drawings or moving images if we think about comics or cinema, respectively. But mental images can also be created by descriptions in the text that readers need to visualize on their own. In *Healing Images: The Role of Imagination in Health* (2013), Sheikh, a Professor of psychology, reviews the state of knowledge concerning the health consequences of using imagery in a range of fields, including pain management, trauma or emergency department care, among others. One of the most compelling forms of evidence is derived from the physiological impacts of using imagery within clinical environments. Mental images, in particular, have been shown to regulate physiological arousal in patients dealing with various health conditions, increasing their capacity for affective regulation.

From the point of view of narrative persuasion studies, Green and Brock's transportation-imagery model (2002) highlights the role of visual imagery in

transportation-based belief change. The authors demonstrate how narratives that evoke rich mental imagery are highly persuasive. Using a short story rich in descriptive imagery, they showed that this narrative produced high transportability and that this effect mediated belief change, positive evaluation of protagonists and persuasiveness of story content, concluding that transportation imagery is a key mechanism in narrative-based belief change (2002: 319). Mental imagery of space can be assessed through the notion of "spatial presence", defined as the feeling of having moved to "an alternative space" in the context of narrative engagement (Lyons, Tate and Ward 2013: 2). This concept of spatial presence is useful to explore how reading elicits spatial mental imagery with relevant therapeutic effects for readers.

From a psychosocial intervention perspective, Glavin and Montgomery emphasize the role that spatial presence effects plays in mental health, when they argue that stories allow patients to distance themselves from psychological disorder or trauma (2017: 98). They propose that this kind of transportation into fictive worlds mediates some of the beneficial effects that reading has for war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

In AN, this distancing effect of narrative reading can be overshadowed by ego-syntonic symptoms. Individuals with AN are commonly motivated to aggravate their disorder, and it has been shown that they purposefully seek to immerse themselves in the fictive worlds of characters with EDs. For instance, AN memoirs have been shown to be abused by patients "to exacerbate their anorexic thoughts and behaviours" (Seaber 2016: 488). Troscianko provides additional evidence of this phenomenon from the perspective of cognitive literary studies. In her survey, Troscianko showed how literature on EDs is often used to "deliberately exacerbate an eating disorder" (2018: 1).

Obtaining a distancing effect such as that provoked by narrative mental imagery could be therapeutic in AN. People with the condition could benefit from transporting themselves to story worlds that are unrelated to the ED framework. In fact, a few controlled studies show modest to significant improvements in AN using guided mental imagery. For instance, imagery has been used to improve body image distortions or to identify stimuli precipitating disordered behaviors (Esplen 2013: 281-282). It would be useful if readers with EDs became absorbed in narratives rich in descriptions of characters eating and set in positive scenarios. Transportation to this kind of scenes seems even more relevant in the case of AN given that readers with the disorder might think that characters do not eat unless mealtimes are specified in books (Troscianko 2018). By exposing themselves to such explicit descriptions, people with AN may begin to challenge their belief that not eating is conventional or a practice to align with.

2.3. Practices of Care and Reading Therapy

Care can be provided to people or it can be practiced in the form of self-care. In effect, care has been ideally defined as a "voluntary" practice. If we focus on self-care, understood as "the provision of daily, socio-psychological, emotional, and physical attention" (Kremer 2007: 17) we deliver to ourselves, it is not difficult to imagine why illness compromises practices of self-care. In depression, patients can be very lethargic, disabling them from getting out of bed, cleaning and dressing themselves. In AN, social withdrawal, depressive symptoms and food avoidance make it impossible to comply with basic forms of self-care.

Focusing on the question of eating in AN, there are different conceptualizations of the relationships between feeding and caring. "Caring through food", "caring-as-feeding" or "food as care" (Lavis 2015) are some of the ways in which food can be approached as a central vector of care. In AN, "refusal to eat […] comes to be seen as a refusal of their care" (Lavis 2015: 6). Given that most people with AN struggle with ego-syntonic symptoms but are treated on an outpatient basis, recovery can thus be articulated as the capacity to engage in acts of self-care.

Periods of AN care (and therefore AN recovery) can be reduced when patients receive complementary therapies, including reading therapy, which can be prescribed in the form of self-help books. In self-therapy, which is one of the main branches of bibliotherapy, patients are given self-help books normally to complement psychological assistance. Self-help works normally used in bibliotherapy interventions are non-fiction books written by psychologists and trained psychotherapists that focus on motivating patients to change their maladaptive behaviors and substitute them with more adaptive ones.

In AN, self-help books have been the norm in bibliotherapeutic interventions (Troscianko 2017). Freeman, however, is skeptical of their usefulness when she complains that "[t]here are too many self-help guides that say: get fit, lose weight, make friends, find a hobby, revamp your wardrobe. […] Eat right —and right is always avocado, chia and other whatnot" (2018b: 188-189). There is also some evidence of the potential of memoirs about EDs in AN self-help therapy. In particular, there is qualitative evidence of a recovery continuum whereby the influence an ED memoir has on an individual depends on their recovery stage and will to recover (Shaw and Homewood 2015). Given the results of this study, ED memoirs might be therapeutic only when people with AN are already willing to attempt recovery. This notion is consistent with the fact that AN is an ego-syntonic condition.

Fictional works remain an untapped resource in bibliotherapy, while they are convenient and quite accessible candidates. According to Ellmann's study, reading is a common favorite pastime in AN (1995: 58). It has already been mentioned

that people with AN deliberately read literature about EDs to exacerbate their condition. But just as they read to worsen their state, reading could also be a form of therapy. I have coined the expression "shelf-care" to refer to this idea of reading books as a part of a self-care routine.

According to Cook-Cottone, self-care "is a set of active, daily behaviors that operationalize what it means to take care of and appreciate the self" (2015: 102), covering both the internal and external dimensions of the self. Practices that focus on the internal experience include self-awareness, self-compassion as well as four basic physical practices: eating, hydrating, moderate exercise and rest. In turn, self-care practices that focus on the internal dimension of the self include the cultivation of supportive relationships, the creation of "a body positive environment" and "setting personal boundaries" (2015: 4).

Although the use of complementary therapies has been the subject of debate, self-help books, dramatherapy or poetry therapy, among others, have also been shown to play a role in AN care and recovery (for a review, see Riestra-Camacho et al. 2023). On the other hand, narrative reading has been scarcely used in AN therapy, although this genre has untapped potential as a valuable resource in bibliotherapy and as part of a self-care routine.

3. A Spatial Reading of Freeman's AN Recovery Memoir

We shall now turn our attention to Freeman's memoir and the notion of "spaces of shelf-care". The concept can be defined as the process by which reading may broaden the spaces in which one can imagine oneself, resulting in therapeutic outcomes. With this concept, I will focus on the role that fictional spatiality played in Laura Freeman's attempts to recover from her ED, which should not be regarded as a straightforwardly successful or complete experience. Thus defined and with this caveat in mind, the following section will examine selected extracts from Freeman's AN recovery memoir *The Reading Cure: How Books Restored my Appetite* (2018). This book was chosen because it illustrates the role of narrative transportation to potentially therapeutic eating spaces. I have divided the analysis into three sections, each dedicated to a figurative type of space, rather than structuring the sections according to literary genre, as Laura Freeman simultaneously engaged with fiction books alongside other works.

3.1. Rural Spaces

A recurring motif in *The Reading Cure* is the idealized portrayal of natural eating spaces. Andrews argues that in mental imagery therapy, "connecting with nature

plays a significant part" (2004: 313). As Esplen has noted, nature imagery is used in AN guided imagery therapy to attain relaxation and soothing (2013: 282). This feature can be seen at the beginning of Freeman's attempt at recovery, which was sparked by reading descriptions of breakfast in the memoirs of the English war poet Siegfried Sassoon. As the author notes, "[i]t began with Sassoon's eggs. His ham sandwiches eaten perched on a country gate. His slice of cherry tart at a very good cricket area. My curiosity was piqued. Dare I say my stomach rumbled?" (2018b: 14). This quote focuses on the description of food eaten in the countryside. The foods are presented as tempting precisely because they are part of a picnic context, with the "country gate" and "cricket area" evoking expansive fields of grass in a romanticized English countryside.

As Freeman relates in the book, the solitude of her house was making it difficult for the author to feel encouraged enough by Sassoon's descriptions to move herself to eat. This block gradually improved when Freeman started reading about more fictional characters eating al fresco, like Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn's berries "over a campfire" and Kenneth Grahame's "riverbank picnic" of cold tongue and sandwiches in *The Wind in the Willows* (2018b: 171). As a result of reading passages focusing on food and food baskets, Freeman herself tried eating outdoors during visits to different villages. One of the most blissful moments in the memoir is when she describes eating "on a boulder high on the cliffs" at St. Ives and how, together with her partner, they "shared out the crumbling, saffron dyed buns" (81).

Freeman describes how she overcame her fear of dairy products in the bucolic descriptions of milk in Thomas Hardy's *Tess*: "He painted milk in the sweetest, palest, colours, made it something quite lovely, a cool, marble-white balm for a dairymaid's soul", and, as a result, "I could see the dairy cows in my mind's eye" (2018b: 59). Thanks to this idealized spatial imagery, "the dairy papers in Tess finally weaned me off soya", assures Freeman, making her feel "not that I ought to drink true, court-beauty milk, but that I wanted to" (60).

Adopting a medical humanities perspective, Bates states that "therapeutic landscapes always operate in relation to another imagined place and —even more powerfully— an imagined self who exists outside of the hospital" (2019: 15). For Freeman, it was not the hospital but her own family house that was blocking her willingness to eat. In this regard, Paddy's meals "in the hollow of a willow trunk" or "on top of a hayrick" and "a pebble beach near Varna" in Patrick Leigh Fermor's *The Broken Road* led Freeman to believe that it was possible to conceptualize eating beyond "the awful sense of confinement at a table" and its "captive ways: supervised at dinner, following a meal plan, compelled to stay at the table until I had at least tried what was on the plate" (2018b: 84).

Freeman insists that learning that meals could be enjoyable was made possible by reading fictionalized acts of eating outside of walled spaces, a reading experience not entirely valued because of the "contents" described, but because food descriptions "taste[d] of new liberty" (2018b: 172). Freeman's "sense of confinement" should not be understood in a metaphorical sense. In her narrative, the author draws a connection between starting to eat and becoming able to walk. Specifically, she refers to the following experience: "I remembered what it had been like, at fifteen, to be too thin to walk" (35). This recollection emphasizes the significance of finding the necessary energy to regain mobility, which served as a driving force for her ongoing efforts to recover, along with her growing interest in rural aspects of life. This desire to escape those feelings of confinement played a significant role in her motivation to persist in her journey toward recovery, which she further strengthens as she struggled to find a new sense of "home".

3.2. Home, Sweet Home

The preceding section analyses Freeman's perspective on her family household as a hostile environment. The feelings of confinement within this space can be largely attributed to the negative social dynamics she associated with it. Specifically, it was her family members who strictly controlled her meals ("supervised", "compelled to stay at the table"), which resulted in her dreading this physical space. This rationale is consistent with the explanation of withdrawal behaviors in AN, which influence behaviors of eating away from friends or even relatives as a way to obtain calorie and intake control (see section 1.2).

However, therapeutic environments often develop in the imagination of readers in connection with a "feeling of homeliness". Homeliness, specifically, "symbolises leaving illness behind, and an imagined healthy self" (Bates 2019: 19). The function of an imagined "home" is to provide a distancing effect similar to that implied by spatial presence (Glavin and Montgomery 2017), so that it becomes easier "to forget the illness" (Bates 2019: 19). Returning to the memoirs and letters of the war poet, Laura Freeman was inspired to feed herself more based on the "friendliness of food […] for men at the front", because eating signified "comfort, warmth, a taste of home, a reminder that you were still alive when the batman returned from Givenchy with beer and chocolate" (2018b: 44). This new sense of homeliness differs from Freeman's negative perception of her family house, as from here on she is able to envision new connotations for the word "home" as a place of relief and solace.

Reading English children's books further strengthened Freeman's associations between food and homeliness. The author stops carefully to review more effects that Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* had on her. She in particular describes

the sardines that Toad takes after a long trip home, noting "that is why the sardines were worth remembering. Not because they are sardines, but because of what they signify: home, comfort, the beginnings of a brightening, beaming winter supper" (2018b: 173). Further on, the author elaborates on the idea of home as a place of companionship when she re-read Dickens' *Pickwick Club* series (1837), describing her increased motivation to start eating meals next to others, even envisioning the possibility of feeling festive about it: "I liked the club […] I was so much better in my mind, so much more tolerant of food and festivity" (Freeman 2018b: 228).

By transporting herself to the houses of fictional characters who eat in the company of loved ones, Laura Freeman was able to envisage herself eating those dishes in her own place. Halfway through her book, she describes visualizing herself "in imagination at least, putting the fish in the pan to warm, turning the pepper mill, lifting the capers from the jar and tipping the fillets onto rye crackers to be eaten at my own table in my own home-sweet kitchen" (2018b: 173). In narrative transportation theory, this is known as "simulation", defined as a reading-induced mechanism by which readers mentally rehearse the actions in the narrative. Simulation has been identified as a major factor in improving health-related behavior in different interventions (Lyons, Tate and Ward 2013). Simulating characters eating homemade food influenced Freeman to herself try those foods: "thanks to Mole I am now never without a tin [of sardines] in the cupboard" (2018b: 174), although the hedging ("in imagination at least") calls for caution in interpreting this too optimistically.

In J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, the author learned that food could mean "company, home, and warmth" (2018b: 44), and further on she reflects on the idea of eating food as a practice of care and relatedness, in particular: food, in "children's books", she declares, "is given not just to build bones or put hair on chests", because "it is care and kindness […] a loving, motherly, fatherly, sisterly thing to do" (174). Imagining food in connection to the idea of home probably strengthened the author's associations of the relatedness of homemade food prepared by family members and close friends as a practice of care.

3.3. Gendered Spaces

Gender is inherent to an understanding of AN. While this is not the place to offer a detailed account of AN from this perspective (for an overview, see for example Orbach 1986), it would be unwise to approach Laura Freeman's experience without taking this dimension into consideration. Gender-related factors in fact intersect with Freeman's experience of the ED, particularly in connection with questions of self-identity and societal expectations, as well as with the way she portrays space and femininity.

Medical anthropology studies have noted how the individual with AN might experiment pleasure as a result of preparing food for others (Jacobson 2007). This resonates with the stereotyped notion of women as providers, and specifically as those who shoulder the burden of cooking and housework. As Jacobson points out, women are expected to prepare meals for relatives and friends, but "when it comes to herself, she manipulates, parses, and rejects" the food "as if it were harmful or exotic material" (2007: 163). This could be explained by the fact that acute hunger and eating copious amounts in public has not been classically welcomed in women (Orbach 1986).

Laura Freeman was aware of these contradictions and addresses them explicitly when she notes that she "had been reading almost entirely about men. Men with uncomplicated, unashamed appetites" (2018b: 91). This realization led her to understand that she needed to model the appetites of women. Thanks to her zealous interest in many forms of narrative reading, she began to find solace in female authors, and writers of cookbooks in particular, who challenged conventional notions of femininity by displaying a hearty appetite and making a profession of it. In particular, Freeman understood that she had to learn to appreciate food preparation as part of the recovery process: "If I could enjoy all the parts that came before —the shopping and scrubbing and soup bowls— I stood a better chance with the meal itself" (2018b: 105). This can be interpreted as an embodied self-realization, to adapt Cook-Cottone's terminology, and as another example of food reappraisal.

Freeman acquired this awareness in the recipe books of two women, Elizabeth David, a writer from Sussex, and the Californian Mary Frances. However, anticipation around cooking and eating was facilitated by the ease of narrative transportation effects —although other potential mechanisms could also be at play. In this way, the author marks a distinction between the effects of reading the cookbooks by David and Frances. For her, the simplicity with which she could imagine David's dishes seems to have caused the book to have a stronger persuasive effect on her eating, in comparison with Mary Frances's book: "I knew Elizabeth David's England in a way I couldn't know Mary Frances's Californian beaches, ranches, vineyards, West Coast boarding schools and Hershey's bars" (2018b: 112).

The distinct provenance of Frances and David's dishes caused their recipes to be perceived with varying accessibility. Familiarity with David's place of origin made Freeman more easily convinced by her descriptions. She further reflects on this idea when she explains that "the England of Elizabeth David, though separated by seventy years from the one I grew up in, was recognisably my England: […] Scotch eggs for picnics; fish at school on Fridays with custard and tinned fruit cocktail" (2018b: 115). As a consequence of the narrative proximity to the recipes of Elizabeth David's, Freeman was able to start eating, in particular, the omelets

described in her books. She admits that her curiosity was piqued by the English author's descriptions of "a golden bolster of an omelet", admitting to having made "many […] since" (119). This stands as an example of a dish becoming a "safe food", a term commonly seen in experiences of AN that refers to a foodstuff that is not anxiogenic, which makes one wonder whether Freeman remained too fearful of incorporating other recipes so systematically.

One of the reasons why Freeman specifically started reading books written by women was because she sometimes found it hard to feel inspired by men's descriptions of food, men with "unashamed, uncomplicated appetites" (2018b: 91). Gender was especially relevant when Freeman faced relapse as she developed obsessions about healthy and "clean" eating, an ED known as "orthorexia". Orthorexia is a common form of AN relapse, though sometimes its predecessor. This moment in Freeman's narrative shows that AN recovery is not straightforwardly represented, nor that it should be, since recovery is a challenging process subject to many vicissitudes. In this regard, Merav Shohet has identified "sideshadowing" as a common feature of AN memoirs, where steps toward recovery are integrated into an erratic narrative of gains and losses, to present healing "as ambiguous, conflictual, unstable, subject to constant revision" (2018: 495).

During this phase of relapse, Freeman identified with Virginia Woolf's philosophy of eating. As Freeman is quick to spot, Woolf was an author who may have suffered from AN as well. Leonard Woolf, her husband, kept a journal of her eating habits, where he elaborated on the idea that Virginia regarded eating as a taboo act. In her diaries, she conceded that Leonard was "clearsighted" about this, as she admitted feeling "really frightened" of "a loss of control, a chink in the armour, a breaking of some unspoken rule" when it came to eating (in Freeman 2018b: 131).

This experience contributed to Freeman's identification with the author. As a result of identifying with her, Freeman notes that she found in Woolf's diaries and letters "a corrective to clean eating" (2018b: 136). Contrary to male authors, who described eating as an unproblematic habit, Freeman saw Virginia Woolf as someone who "struck a balance between not wanting to eat and knowing she must eat" (135). Thus, Woolf, a woman who struggled with fragile mental health and poor eating habits but who still made the effort to eat, convinced Freeman that she had to return to a recovery mindset.

4. Conclusion

In this article, I have examined AN from a spatial perspective in order to delve into the experience of what constitutes being anorexic from a physical, social and

cognitive-affective point of view. Articulating AN in this way has enabled a productive positioning of the condition along with the questions of recovery and care. It has allowed me to discuss AN in relation with practices of care, opening up the possibility of considering reading as a form of self-care.

Specifically, I have proposed that narrative reading could contribute to AN recovery, since descriptions about food in books have potential to reconfigure how somebody with AN thinks and feels about spaces associated with eating. The concept of shelf-care has been coined to focus on the role that fictional spatiality could play in narrative transportation and mental imagery, as well as in reconceptualizing recovery within the paradigm of self-care and art therapies that include self-help and bibliotherapy. A selection of passages from Laura Freeman's memoir *The Reading Cure: How Books Restored my Appetite* (2018) has been used to exemplify the therapeutic potential that narrative reading could have in AN. Some limitations of Freeman's experience have also been alluded to, in order to be faithful to the view presented of AN recovery as a non-linear phenomenon.

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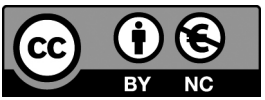
Received: 07/10/2023
Accepted: 17/06/2024



METEMPSYCHOSIS AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "THE BLACK CAT"

METEMPSICOSIS E IDENTIDAD INDIVIDUAL EN "EL GATO NEGRO", DE EDGAR ALLAN POE

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.20249739

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Abstract

Pythagoras and Empedocles are not generally believed to have left an indelible imprint on Edgar Allan Poe's oeuvre, despite the direct allusion to each of these Presocratic thinkers in the poet's writings. It is also quite remarkable that "The Black Cat" (1843) has not typically been considered a tale of metempsychosis, even though this motif is clearly present in the story. Moreover, the fact that Poe allows transference to occur from one cat to another hints at his acceptance of the contentious Pythagorean premise that the transmigration of souls is not restricted to the human body. In addition, while a number of scholars have acknowledged the ambivalent nature of the daemon in other works by Poe, most studies of "The Black Cat" portray it as an unequivocally dark and malevolent entity. In contrast, this article conceives of the daemon as an ambiguous being that reemerges in feline form to inflict punishment on the protagonist for his vile acts. In this disturbing narrative, Poe once again explores a question that haunted him throughout his life —namely, whether individual identity can survive bodily death.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, Pythagoras, Empedocles, metempsychosis, daemon.

Resumen

Pitágoras y Empédocles no suelen considerarse influencias indelebles en la obra de Edgar Allan Poe, a pesar de que el poeta alude directamente a ambos pensadores presocráticos. También resulta sorprendente que tradicionalmente "El gato negro" (1843) no se haya clasificado como un relato de metempsicosis, aun cuando la temática está claramente presente en dicha narración. Es más, el hecho de que Poe permita que la transferencia se produzca de un gato a otro, sugiere una aceptación de la controvertida premisa de Pitágoras de que la transmigración del alma no se circunscribe al cuerpo humano. Asimismo, aunque varios estudiosos han señalado la naturaleza ambivalente del daemon en otras creaciones de Poe, la mayoría de los escritos sobre "El gato negro" retratan a la criatura como inequívocamente oscura y maligna. El presente artículo la concibe en cambio como un ser ambiguo que, encarnado en un felino, resurge con el propósito de castigar al protagonista por sus viles actos. En la inquietante narrativa que nos ocupa, Poe explora de nuevo una de las cuestiones que más le obsesionó a lo largo de su vida, a saber, la posibilidad de que la identidad individual perdure tras la muerte física.

Palabras clave: Edgar Allan Poe, Pitágoras, Empédocles, metempsicosis, daemon.

You alone were born to judge
deeds obscure and conspicuous.
Holiest and illustrious ruler of all,
frenzied god,
you delight in the respect
and in the reverence of your worshippers.
I summon you […].
The Orphic Hymns, "To Plouton"

1. Introduction. Revisiting the Daemonic in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat"

The depth of Edgar Allan Poe's knowledge of early Greek philosophy cannot be ascertained and remains a subject of controversy. Nevertheless, there is no doubt as to the Hellenic influence on his writing. More specifically, a valuable source that has often been overlooked is that of the Presocratics. The theme of metempsychosis in such stories as "Metzengerstein" (1832), "Morella" (1835), "Ligeia" (1838) and "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" (1844) has been explored

by several critics (Quinn 1957; Fisher 1971; Rowe 2003). Rather surprisingly, however, "The Black Cat" (1843) has not traditionally been included in this group, although Thomas Ollive Mabbott does acknowledge that Poe used the idea of the transmigration of souls in the piece (1978: 15). Various authors have also rightly pointed to the ambiguity of the daemonic in Poe's writing (Ljungquist 1980; Andriano 1986), but it is particularly striking that the daemon in "The Black Cat" is often viewed as an exception and typically associated almost exclusively with sin and wickedness.

Poe is thought to have learned about daemonology through sources as varied as Plato (c. 427-347 BCE), British Romantic poetry, Jacob Bryant (1715-1804), Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813), the fairytale novella *Undine* by Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1777-1843), Gnostic philosophy and Near-Eastern lore, among others (Ljungquist 1980). The term δαίμων traditionally carried several meanings in ancient Greece. It often denotes a god, goddess, godlike power or fate (Beekes 2010: 297). Daemons can also take on the role of a guardian or tutelary deity and link humans to higher gods (Primavesi 2008: 259; Liddell and Scott 1846: 305-306). Plato's *Symposium*, from which the epigraph to Poe's "Morella" is taken, defines a δαίμων as an entity that is "intermediate between the divine and the mortal" (1920a: 328). In other contexts, it can also refer to the soul (Primavesi 2008: 275). Only in works by more recent authors does the daemon come to designate a departed soul, an evil spirit or the devil (Liddell and Scott 1846: 305-306). As Ljungquist aptly points out, the daemon takes on an ambiguous meaning in Poe's fiction (1980). In his writings, Poe transcends the myth of the fallen angel and, as in the Hebrew and Greek traditions, the daemonic and the angelic become intertwined. The Romantics echo the Greek notion that Socrates (c. 470-399 BCE) was guided by a personal daemon. They often conceive of daemons as half-mortal, half-divine intermediary spirits who do not necessarily possess evil qualities, and as guardians of humankind that are responsible for determining individual fate. Such theories appear to have informed Poe's characterization in several of his stories, some examples of which are "Morella", "Ligeia", "The Power of Words" and, of course, "The Black Cat". In the first three tales, these entities are endowed with extraordinary skill and vast knowledge, while the last narrative exemplifies Poe's fascination with the ancient tradition that associated human fate with daemonic force. For Poe and other Romantic writers, those who are possessed by daemons acquire inner strength and divine poetic inspiration. However, they also perceive the daemonic as a hidden and mysterious source of power, so possession can be both an elevating and a ghastly experience. This, in turn, is reminiscent of Gothic sublimity, a heightened feeling of fear and awe which defies measurement and representation (Ljungquist 1980).

In Ljungquist's view, the black cat in Poe's story symbolizes a supernatural daemonic force. Rather puzzlingly, however, he associates these feline creatures with dark powers alone, in accordance with medieval superstition. He speaks of "oppression or weight that could hamper human breathing", "a feeling of being frozen or paralyzed" and "daemonic dread" (1980: 34). Equating the cat in Poe's tale with a purely evil spirit is undoubtedly perfectly plausible. Still, the fact that this animal has a noble character renders an association with the less explicitly malignant Greek conception of the daemonic much more tenable. It is true that the protagonist refers to his wife's "frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise" (Poe 1978a: 850). Nonetheless, this remark appears to be an attempt to baffle the reader, as he immediately adds, "[n]ot that she was ever serious upon this point —and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered" (850). This is hardly surprising, as it is customary for Poe to be deliberately cryptic, to raise epistemological doubts by blurring the line between illusion and reality, or dreams and waking states. He frequently employs the trope of the unreliable narrator and displays a profound distrust of the senses, creating a physical world which is chaotic, ever-changing and insubstantial (Folks 2009: 58, 60-61). He also uses magical lore to enhance the mystery and sublimity of his stories, to create an alternate reality and to encourage a suspension of disbelief in the reader (Rowe 2003: 44-45). In his review of Robert Montgomery Bird's *Sheppard Lee*, published in *The Southern Literary Messenger* in September 1836, Poe states that the writer of a tale of metempsychosis should deploy certain techniques, such as "avoiding […] *directness* of expression" in order to leave "much to the imagination" and "the result as a wonder not to be accounted for" (1997: 286, emphasis in original).

Several academics have suggested that the narrator's cat Pluto is in fact the Greek god of the Underworld (Moreland and Rodriguez 2015; Tsokanos and Ibáñez 2018). Although this interpretation is logical and very convincing, most critical analyses of "The Black Cat" tend to focus on the negative aspects of the chthonian deity, who is almost entirely associated with wickedness, violence, rage and the diabolical (Moreland and Rodriguez 2015; Tsokanos and Ibáñez 2018). Admittedly, as the ominous god of the dead and even of death itself, Hades was to be greatly feared but, paradoxically, it was believed that he performed good deeds for mortals from his abode in the Underworld. Hades was described as hateful and malignant, but also as the renowned one and a god of good repute. Furthermore, Hades was alternately known as Pluton, which signified wealth. As a precaution, the living were reluctant to utter the name Hades, but this was not the case with Pluton, who responded to prayer and offerings. Pluton was therefore a more positive designation for Hades and became the divinity's most common moniker during the fifth century BCE,

both in myth and in cult (Hornblower et al. 2012: 640; Liddell and Scott 1846: 1198). Poe may well have taken this favorable association into consideration when choosing the name Pluto for the feline protagonist of his story. Perhaps it is no coincidence that, on the very night of the day the narrator mercilessly kills his cat Pluto, his house is completely destroyed by fire, and the man declares, "[m]y entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair" (Poe 1978a: 852).

2. "The Modified Παλιγγενεσια of the Pythagoreans" and the Principle of Individuation

Like the inner world of the feline protagonist in "The Black Cat", the life of Pythagoras of Samos (c. 570-c. 495 BCE) is shrouded in mystery. Adored and despised in equal measure, he left nothing in writing and, if he did, none of his original work survives. Nonetheless, it is generally accepted that he taught the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. Pythagoras's metempsychosis states that, since our soul's present and future are determined by our current choices, not all mortals share an equal fate. This, in turn, seems to suggest that we must assume full responsibility for our decisions. Indeed, already in Hesiod (c. 750-650 BCE) we find that a fortunate person is a eudaemon —εὐδαίμων, meaning one who has a good daemon. Another Greek term for this virtuous entity is agathos daemon —ἀγαθός δαίμων (Hornblower et al. 2012: 37, 410, 640; Beekes 2010: 484). The fact that Agathos is one of the blessed immortal spirits in Poe's "The Power of Words" (1845) indicates that, even though this prose poem was published two years after "The Black Cat", Poe may have been aware of this distinction before he wrote the latter. As Agathos himself proclaims in "The Power of Words", "no thought can perish, so no act is without infinite result" (Poe 1978a: 1213).

Poe's direct allusion to Pythagoras in "Morella" (1835) corroborates that he knew of this enigmatic polymath's theory of the soul, and that same paragraph in Poe's tale evidences that he had also come into contact with at least some of the metaphysical principles upheld by Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) and John Locke (1632-1704):

> The wild Pantheism of Fichte; the modified Παλιγγενεσια [Palingenesia] of the Pythagoreans; and, above all, the doctrines of *Identity* as urged by Schelling, were generally the points of discussion presenting the most of beauty to the imaginative Morella. That identity which is termed personal, Mr. Locke, I think, truly defines to consist in the sameness of a rational being. (Poe 1978b: 230-231, emphasis in original)

Although the terms palingenesia and metempsychosis do not carry the same meaning, they are sometimes used interchangeably to denote the transfer of life or the soul from one body to another, that is, the transmigration of souls. Pythagoras believed that metempsychosis could occur from a human being, an animal or a plant into a new body belonging to any of these three groups. It is important to note that he did not explicitly define the soul as immaterial or make a clear distinction between the corporeal and incorporeal. He thus took all that exists to be of a material nature (Burkert 1972: 32). Poe shares with metaphysical idealists like Schelling and Fichte the belief that physical and chemical laws do not suffice to explain all natural phenomena. However, the influence of Greek materialism can also be felt in his work. In fact, like Pythagoras, Poe does not conceive of the soul as a spiritual entity. For instance, in "Mesmeric Revelation" (1844), he writes: "[t]here is no immateriality […]. That which is not matter, is not at all" (1978a: 1033). Later on in this tale, he refers to God as matter so infinitely minute that it becomes "[t]he ultimate, or unparticled matter", which "not only permeates all things but impels all things —and thus *is* all things within itself" (1033, emphasis in original). Nevertheless, it must be noted that for Poe, the line that separates matter and spirit is blurred, and his views with regard to the nature of the universe are not unequivocal. Revealingly, to Schelling and other Romantics, matter is not perceived as solid or impenetrable, but instead as the product of dynamic forces. Moreover, Schelling upholds that the manifestations of nature and the structures of the human mind are governed by a metaphysical principle he refers to as the world soul (Sha 2018: 34; Barkhoff 2009: 210). Poe himself argues that Matter contains so-called "spiritual Ether" that imbues it with life and consciousness. Indeed, the fusion of the physical and psychic realms is a recurring theme in Poe's work. In his prose poem *Eureka*, which he wrote towards the end of his life, Poe speaks of "true Epicurean atoms" (1984: 1322) but also describes God as both a material *and* spiritual being that will ultimately revert to its incorporeal essence. When the cosmos eventually sinks into One and all heterogeneity is lost, Matter will expel the Ether that has kept atoms apart. Matter will hence become "Matter without Matter" or "*Matter no more*" (1355, emphasis in original).

The fact that Poe brings together such disparate philosophers as Fichte, Schelling and Locke in the aforementioned fragment of "Morella" is surprising and disconcerting, given that the idealism of the former two thinkers stands in stark contrast to the empiricism of the latter. Admittedly, Poe is not usually considered a philosopher. As he wrote in a letter to Charles F. Hoffman in 1848, "there is no absolute *certainty* either in the Aristotelian or Baconian process —[…] for this reason, neither Philosophy is so profound as it fancies itself— and […] neither has a right to sneer at that seemingly imaginative process called Intuition" (Poe 2008: 688, emphasis in original). Nevertheless, it is also true that Poe was well-versed in

the field of natural philosophy, which only began to be considered as separate from science at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Fichte, Schelling and Locke share a deep preoccupation with moral order. More to the point, all three explore the principle of individuation. Poe was drawn to them as a result of his obsession with the question of whether consciousness and individual identity could survive physical death, as is evidenced by the excerpt in "Morella" which immediately follows his allusion to the aforementioned philosophers:

> And since by person we understand an intelligent essence having reason, and since there is a consciousness which always accompanies thinking, it is this which makes us all to be that which we call *ourselves* —thereby distinguishing us from other beings that think, and giving us our personal identity. But the *principium individuationis*, the notion of that identity *which at death is or is not lost forever*, was to me, at all times, a consideration of intense interest […]. (Poe 1978b: 231, emphasis in original)

One of the most fascinating aspects of Pythagoras's metempsychosis is precisely its affirmation that individual identity survives bodily death when it takes on a new form or appearance. Neither Fichte, Schelling nor Locke endorsed this view. However, as we have seen, the fact that Poe mentions them in conjunction with Pythagoras points to the poet's preoccupation with personal identity and more specifically with the possible survival of some form of consciousness after death. In what Poe refers to as Fichte's "wild Pantheism" (1978b: 230), even Nature is regarded as thought, since all reality is contained in consciousness. Fichte identifies God with the unattainable Absolute, which the Self must strive for *ad infinitum*, resulting in a constant decay of individuality. As a consequence, a hypothetical fusion of a human being with the ideal would require the complete disintegration of individual identity (Fichte 1970: 109, 113-114). Unlike Fichte, Schelling does not contend that self-consciousness can explain the objective realm and instead argues that subjectivity and objectivity both emerge from the primordial identity of the Absolute (Moreland and Shaw 2012: 60). Death for Schelling is but a *reductio ad essentiam*, whereby the soul is stripped of all that is accessory and extrinsic so that only the essence of our true Being remains. He insists that this transition does not entail a separation from physical life but solely from *this* existence (Schelling 1994: 237). Poe's horror fiction also conveys this notion of the dissolution of individual identity in the universal but, contrary to Schelling, who conceptualizes it as a self-realizing event, the poet sees it as self-destructive. For his part, Locke makes the radical and controversial assertion that personal identity is neither founded on the body nor the soul, nor in the union of both, but on consciousness alone. He maintains that on the Day of Judgment the dead will be resurrected to answer for their deeds in this life. The saved will be admitted into an eternal state of bliss, while the guilty will be condemned to a second and final death (Locke 1847: 175, 210, 231).

3. The Oracle of Doom

In *Eureka* (1848), Poe declares that ultimately "the sense of individual identity will be gradually merged in the general consciousness" (1984: 1358). However, an eventual collapse into the Absolute is not at odds with the idea that the soul can survive death and exist as separate from what he terms the rudimental body (Poe 1978a: 1037). In fact, Poe continuously explores this possibility in such stories as "The Premature Burial" (1844), "Some Words with a Mummy" (1845), "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845) and "Mesmeric Revelation" (1845). In the latter, he describes bodily demise as a mere process of transmutation:

> There are two bodies —the rudimental and the complete; corresponding with the two conditions of the worm and the butterfly. What we call "death", is but the painful metamorphosis. Our present incarnation is progressive, preparatory, temporary. Our future is perfected, ultimate, immortal. The ultimate life is the full design. (Poe 1978a: 1037)

This "painful metamorphosis" is analogous to the cycle of purification related by Empedocles of Acragas (c. 490-c. 430 BCE), a close follower of Pythagoras's doctrine of metempsychosis. The fact that Edgar Allan Poe was familiar with Empedocles is evidenced by a direct reference to him in Poe's writings: "Empedocles professed the system of four elements, and added thereto two principles which he called 'principium amicitiæ' and 'principium contentionis'. What are these but attraction and repulsion?" (Poe 1985: 93). For Empedocles, it is the fallen daemon that preserves its continuity through its various incarnations, in accordance with what he refers to as "an oracle of Doom" (in Plutarch 1959: 569). He identifies himself and others with this "exile from heaven", who, having "[d]efile[d] himself with foul and sinful murder", is compelled to wander through a succession of lives before finally being able to return to his original divine state (B 115 607c-d, in Plutarch 1959: 569). In his past lives, Empedocles allegedly recalls being "a boy […], and a maiden, [a]nd bush, and bird of prey, and fish, [a] wanderer from the salt sea" (B 117, in Hippolytus 1921: 40). Pythagoras and Empedocles "assert that there is a single legal condition for all living beings and […] proclaim that inexpiable punishments await those who have done violence to an animal" (D27b, in Laks and Most 2016: 379). Plato, who is believed to have derived his doctrine of metempsychosis from Pythagoras, proposes a rather disturbing variation on this maxim. In *Laws*, he alludes to the widespread belief that the perpetrators of crimes of violence are punished both in Hades and once again when they return to this world, where they will be forced to die in exactly the same manner as their victims (Plato 1920b: 615). Compellingly, in Poe's story "The Black Cat", the protagonist brutally hangs his feline companion only to see the creature reemerge, now a harbinger of doom, the gallows on its chest unmistakably announcing that an

equal fate awaits his slayer. The prophecy is fulfilled, and the narrator is ultimately sentenced to death —also by hanging.

Like Empedocles's daemons, the narrator in "The Black Cat" is in a state of bliss at the outset, and his suffering only begins when he becomes corrupted by evil. This in truth occurs long before he engages in the first act of violence against his cat Pluto. Therefore, it is not his ugly deeds that are attributed to the daemonic power, but rather the divine retribution which ensues. Even though he will eventually be confronted with this deific force, only he can be held responsible for his wicked and perverse behavior. The manner in which he describes the dastardly murder of the poor animal leaves no room for doubt:

> One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree; —hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart; —hung it *because* I knew that it had loved me, and *because* I felt it had given me no reason of offence; —hung it *because* I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin —a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it— if such a thing were possible —even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God. (Poe 1978a: 852, emphasis in original)

James W. Gargano considers this extreme self-condemnation "an outrageous excess" (1960: 173). However, Pythagoras and Empedocles would have undoubtedly taken issue with this assertion. They would also have likely disagreed with Gargano's assessment that the narrator's initial affection towards non-human creatures is "an unhealthy overdevelopment of the voluptuary side of his nature" and "an abnormality" (173). Either way, as Gargano rightly argues, the protagonist does appear to have an ambivalent, divided and possibly schizophrenic personality. He continuously refuses to take responsibility for his vile actions and instead chooses to ascribe them to his being "an erratic plaything of an inscrutable force" (172). In effect, the main character's cruelty to animals is an indubitable sign of his moral deterioration, which will eventually result in him killing his own wife.

As we have seen, Plato's doctrine of metempsychosis seems to have been inspired by Pythagoras. In the myth of Er, which appears at the end of the *Republic*, Plato provides an alternative description of Orpheus's descent into the Underworld. In Plato's account, which contradicts that of Homer (c. 750 BCE), the soul can in fact leave Hades by reincarnating into either an animal or a human being. All souls choose their model of life, which form they wish to take on, and the daemon that will guide them. Er asserts that these choices must be made with the utmost caution, as even the impious can aspire to a satisfactory existence rather than a wretched one. In life and death, all souls must strive to become more just and disregard all other considerations (Plato 1992: 285-290). He goes on to explain

how the first to be asked rashly chose a life of tyranny, only to deeply regret his decision after learning that it would result in him having to eat his own children. Very much like the protagonist of "The Black Cat", "he blamed chance, daimons, or guardian spirits, and everything else for these evils but himself" (Plato 1992: 290). According to Plato's theory of metempsychosis, the truth is that the narrator selects his own daemon, which will in turn shape his fate. Hence, only he can be held accountable for his despicable acts. Nevertheless, as frequently occurs with Poe, there is a masterful twist in his tale. The psychopathic killer was once a compassionate and affectionate human being, seemingly guarded by a good daemon. There is a critical event in the story that marks a point of no return —the definitive departure of this entity, the main character's agathos daemon, his true and better self. It is an occurrence that immediately precedes his vicious mutilation of the innocent feline creature. Poe explicitly alludes to this instance: "[m]y original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame" (1978a: 851). In fact, the narrator claims that he has previously been "instantly possessed" by "[t]he fury of a demon", but as he himself confesses, his "general temperament and character" had already "experienced a radical alteration for the worse" (851) long before this incident. It is true that his cat Pluto had so far been spared and had "only" started to feel the effects of his bad temper, but his wife had by then begun to endure his verbal and physical abuse. Additionally, he had been neglecting and behaving violently towards his pets. He attributes his misfortune to excessive drinking and to this so-called "instant possession", but it is *his own* moral decline that subsequently results in the absolute and irrevocable desertion of his eudaemon. However hard the narrator of "The Black Cat" tries to attribute his viciousness to a supernatural force, his fate is driven by the compulsion to ravage his own soul and, as Poe puts it, "to do wrong for the wrong's sake only" (852). Much the same as the man who chose tyranny in Plato's myth of Er, the reckless slayer in Poe's tale inadvertently summons a powerful deity, who will ultimately return in the form of a resurrected Pluto to exact his severe and inescapable retribution.

4. Doppelgängers and Collapse into Oneness

Metempsychosis provides Poe with an ideal framework to develop another of his recurring themes, that of the *doppelgänger*. In much of Poe's fiction, including "The Black Cat", the double is associated with survival after death and an avenging conscience, in this case symbolized by the punishing daemon embodied in a reincarnated feline (Herdman 1990: 89). A shapeless white mark on the breast of

the second cat, which will gradually become the image of the gallows, is the only feature that distinguishes it from the first. Indeed, the eerie similarity between the two animals —both are black and have only one eye— further contributes to the uncanniness of this story (Kennedy 1987: 136; Nadal 2004: 459). Several critics have noted that the narrator projects his feelings toward his wife onto the feline creature, and thus conceives of the cat as a surrogate of the spouse (Hoffman 1972: 236; Amper 1992: 479; Dern 2017: 163). Even though the wife is not resurrected, one could also argue that she forges an alliance with Pluto which extends beyond their worldly existence. Revealingly, the cat and the woman's violent demise precede the moment they succeed in wreaking their vengeance on the offender (Nadal 2004: 459; Dern 2017: 174). Kenneth Silverman points to the concurrence of the afterlife and the double in Poe's writing: "to have twins, doubles, and twos means that […] one can be here and not here, can die and still survive" (1991: 151).

In "The Black Cat", the protagonist's identity is fragile, fragmented and volatile, blurring the boundaries between self and other. He projects everything he despises about himself upon another being. Hence, his murderous deed could be interpreted as a desperate attempt to annihilate the darker side of his own nature. However, once the crime is perpetrated against his other, the main character is appalled to discover that even bodily demise cannot rid him of the tormenting presence. The man is repelled to find that he is breathing in the air exhaled by Pluto, petrified to learn that he cannot flee from the ψῡχή (psyche) —aspiration, breath, soul, spirit— of this implacable daemon or from its godlike power: "I started, hourly, from dreams of unutterable fear, to find the hot breath of *the thing* upon my face, and its vast weight —an incarnate Night-Mare that I had no power to shake off— incumbent eternally upon my *heart*!" (Poe 1978a: 856, emphasis in original). The evil he attributes to the cat is in truth a wickedness that stems from within. The real source of his dread is the darkness of his own soul and its ineludible fate, but the object of his fear has become indiscernible from the self. In Poe's fiction, the inner and the outer realms frequently become indistinguishable. In this regard, he is consistent with many of his contemporaries. As Linda Nash explains, "[for] nineteenth-century Americans, the body itself was not a clearly bounded entity, separate and distinct from its surroundings; rather, it was porous and permeable" (2006: 24). According to Matthew Taylor, Poe impels us to transcend the human through his "paradoxical simultaneity of sameness and difference" (2013: 39) as "self and not-self are collapsed into a common union" (33). Subject and object are hence conceived as versions of being, intrinsically woven into an inexorable oneness. Moreover, this dissipation of boundaries results in a disruption of the anthropocentric view of the cosmos.

According to various critics, it is the narrator's wish to end his own life that manifests as aggression towards his cat Pluto. Thus, the feline's eye, which the protagonist cruelly removes from its socket, is a projected symbol of his own death anxieties (Kennedy 1987: 135, 137; Nadal 2004: 459). This organ may also represent moral conscience and omniscience. Its destruction could therefore be understood as a pathetic attempt to assuage his guilt or as a refusal to accept the malicious nature of his actions. As Robert Shulman points out, "in cutting out the eye of the black demon, the narrator is also irrationally […] seeking to destroy his own demons, his own unacknowledged impulses and affinity with evil" (1970: 256). According to Ansu Louis, the despised enemy is truly within, but to the narrator, the cat embodies all that his superego-dominant personality wishes to subdue (2022: 316). Either way, the man's fundamental blindness, his inability to recognize the true origin of his degeneracy, will inexorably lead to madness and self-annihilation. Any attempt to degrade, brutalize, subjugate or vanquish his ever-present companion ultimately involves an act of self-harm and suicide. The protagonist does initially seem to be aware of his predicament, as he admits that the cat's hanging was driven by his own "perverseness", by the "unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself*—to offer violence to its own nature" (Poe 1978a: 852, emphasis in original). This is a remarkable acknowledgement because he is conveying that by harming Pluto he is in fact hurting himself (Taylor 2012: 365). Still, further on in the story, he displays a deep contempt for the creature: "*a brute beast* to work out for *me* —for me a man, fashioned in the image of the High God— so much of insufferable wo!" (Poe 1978a: 856, emphasis in original). This haughty sense of entitlement, his violation of the sacred Pythagorean and Empedoclean law which connects all animate beings, will only serve to precipitate his doom. Paradoxically, by indulging his own obsessive phobia, the narrator is inextricably reunited with the very source of his angst (Taylor 2012: 365-366).

The opposing phenomena of attraction and repulsion which Poe refers to in *Eureka* are analogous to what Empedocles termed Love and Strife. The Presocratic poet believed that these forces alternately dominated the universe. This eternal cycle in which the many emerges from one and one from many resembles Poe's concept of the Heart Divine, with every beat causing a new cosmos to expand into existence and then return into itself (Poe 1984: 1356). Poe considered the possibility that this process of agglomeration and dissolution could occur perpetually, in accordance with the Divine Will. Interestingly, the pairing of positive and negative forces, wherein the former tends toward absolute oneness and the latter creates individuality in nature, is also found in Schelling (Follesa 2021: 271). Empedocles shares with Poe the conviction that everything is eventually restored to perfect unity (Tennemann 1852: 77). According to Empedocles, during the rule of Love, the four elements are fully united and form

a single living being, which he calls the Sphairos. By killing another living thing we are in effect replicating the destruction of the sacred One carried out by Strife. Empedocles states that there is a universal kinship based on the common divine origin of all forms of life, which come into existence during the cosmic cycle (Primavesi 2008: 253, 256-258, 267). For Empedocles and Poe, life is not static or external to matter but rather the result of a creative and dynamic process that pervades all entities alike. Even though there is a clear distinction between humans and animals in their philosophies, Pythagoras and Empedocles contend that to treat any being with justice requires us to respect their nature. This premise does not apply exclusively to the human species, but to all of existence. These assertions remained highly controversial in Ancient Greece for many centuries, as they disrupted the prevailing paradigm, which was strictly anthropocentric. For instance, Empedocles is known to have been ridiculed for his belief that "all things have insight and a share of understanding", including animals and plants (Empiricus 2005: 146; Renehan 1981: 246). For his part, Pythagoras primarily views the soul as the seat of emotions. As such, it differs from the intellect and is closely associated with sentience. The kinship between animals and humans is therefore grounded in the fact that both share this capacity to experience and respond to sensations such as pleasure or pain. When the soul is born in a human body, it is forged by the intellect. Nevertheless, it is not this faculty which passes from one body to another but a personality defined by its feelings and desires (Huffman 2009: 23). Of course, Edgar Allan Poe is far from endorsing this premise. However, he arguably takes Pythagoras's notion a step further in that he even challenges the supremacy of reason over instinct. Tellingly, according to Joseph Stark, "The Black Cat" is in fact a statement on the inadequacy of human rationality (2004: 263). In an article published in *Alexander's Weekly Messenger* in 1840, entitled "Instinct vs Reason —A Black Cat", Poe makes a surprising assertion:

> While the self-love and arrogance of man will persist in denying the reflective power to beasts […], he yet perpetually finds himself involved in the paradox of decrying instinct as an inferior faculty, while he is forced to admit its infinite superiority […] over the very reason which he claims exclusively as his own. Instinct, so far from being an inferior reason, is perhaps the most exacted intellect of all. It will appear to the true philosopher as the divine mind itself acting *immediately* upon its creatures. (Poe 1978b: 478, emphasis in original)

Later on, he speaks of "the perceptive and reflective faculties" which we mistakenly believe pertain to reason alone (Poe 1978b: 479). Indeed, in "The Black Cat", the protagonist's lack of empathy, insight and emotional intuition ineluctably lead to his self-destruction. By comparison, his cat Pluto appears to be a much more reasonable being. Poe thus subverts the Cartesian dualism which places human beings on a higher rung than their animal counterparts. By killing his feline

companion, the protagonist becomes a murderer even before he takes the life of his spouse (Moreland and Rodriguez 2015: 205, 210). From the very moment he disparages his initial "tenderness of heart" (Poe 1978a: 850) and betrays the trust of his human and non-human loved ones, only the most dreadful fate can befall him. Pythagoras and Empedocles state that to defile or obliterate is to act violently and unjustly. If the law of measure is violated, it must be restored. Harmony is understood in terms of cosmic equality, which in turn is a prerequisite to ensure that cosmic justice prevails. As Gregory Vlastos explains, "the order of nature is maintained *because* it is an order of equals" (1970: 57, emphasis in original) and "[p]owers are equal if they can hold one another in check so that none can gain 'mastery' or 'supremacy' […] over the others" (58-59). In *Eureka*, Poe alludes to this inexorable restoration of the natural order:

> The absolute, irrelative particle primarily created by the Volition of God, must have been in a condition of positive *normality*, or rightfulness —for wrongfulness implies *relation* […]. That a thing may be wrong, it is necessary that there be some other thing in *relation* to which it *is* wrong —some condition which it fails to satisfy; some law which it violates; some being whom it aggrieves […]. Any deviation from normality involves a tendency to return into it […]. Rëaction is the return from the condition of *as it is and ought not to be* into the condition of *as it was, originally, and therefore ought to be* […]. (Poe 1984: 1297-1298, emphasis in original)

Both Empedocles and Poe propound universal sentience, as to them all of matter is imbued with mind. In fact, when alluding to the Sphairos, Empedocles writes, "It lives,/ One holy mind, ineffable, alone,/ And with swift thoughts darts through the universe" (B 134, in Leonard 1908: 61). Pythagoras understands the cosmos as an animate and breathing entity, albeit constrained by a mathematical structure (Wright 2008: 421). Pythagoras and Empedocles are believed to have claimed that "we have a certain commonality not only towards one another and the gods, but also towards the non-rational animals. For *there is one breath reaching through the whole world like a soul*, which also unites us with them" (Empiricus 2012: 28, emphasis added). In *Timaeus*, Plato subsequently depicts the world as "a living creature truly endowed with soul and intelligence" (1920c: 14). This reverberates with the aforementioned metaphysical principle that Schelling himself termed the world soul. Schelling, who worked extensively on Plato's *Timaeus*, shares this conception of the universe as a great animal wherein all the parts are organically and reciprocally connected to the whole (Follesa 2021: 270). For Poe, the expansion of consciousness across the cosmos casts doubt on whether human beings are in truth the very culmination of this sentience. Indeed, he questions this assumption and even grants consciousness to inanimate beings. In "The Island of the Fay" (1841), he states that we are merely the inhabitants of "one vast animate and sentient whole" (1978b: 600), and in *Eureka*, he writes the following:

> All […] creatures —*all*— those whom you term animate, as well as those to which you deny life for no better reason than that you do not behold it in operation —*all* these creatures have, in a greater or less degree, a capacity for pleasure and for pain […]. These creatures are all, too, more or less, and more or less obviously, conscious Intelligences; conscious, first, of a proper identity; conscious, secondly and by faint indeterminate glimpses, of an identity with […] God. (Poe 1984: 1358, emphasis in original)

According to Empedocles, everything, including gods and daemons, will eventually fuse into a fundamental unity, the Sphairos. As we have seen, Poe shares this vision of ultimate fusion into oneness. In "The Black Cat", universal unification translates into the protagonist's particular demise. Matthew Taylor envisages the returning cat as a material herald and synecdoche of Poe's vision in *Eureka* —the fatal compaction of all entities into one another (2013: 40, 43). The conflation of the narrator and the feline's identities erodes the mind's integrity and individuality, rendering the man unable to discern between his psyche and the outside world. Furthermore, the merging of the inner and outer realms completely undermines his autonomy. He can therefore no longer rely on his senses, and physical reality becomes elusive. This dissolution of ontological boundaries ultimately implies that the supposed destructive other cannot be distinguished from the indwelling enemy, which is the corruption of his own soul. Hence, the attack is perpetrated from within and without by means of cosmic convergence and a disintegration of the self.

5. Conclusion

In "The Black Cat", Edgar Allan Poe accepts the premise that metempsychosis can occur from one feline creature to another. He thus embraces the Pythagorean and Empedoclean notion that it is not an exclusively human phenomenon. Both Presocratic philosophers contend that by inflicting violence and needless suffering on animals, one is not only defying the Hellenic sacred law, but also disturbing a natural order, which must finally be reinstated. Moreover, according to Plato's perturbing dictum, killers are condemned to a death equaling that of their victims. Since Pythagoras and Empedocles claim that any creature can potentially be bestowed with a human soul, it follows that by cold-bloodedly hanging his feline companion, the narrator becomes a murderer long before he commits homicide against his wife. For this reason, it is perhaps no coincidence that the protagonist is himself sent to the gallows. In fact, in Poe's story, it is a human being and not an animal that behaves irrationally and self-destructively, which in turn subverts the traditional hierarchy of reason over instinct.

The daemon in "The Black Cat" has often been depicted as a purely malicious presence. The aforementioned hegemonic reversal, however, points to a more ambiguous ancient Greek conception of the daemonic, and the true origin of evil in Poe's tale remains as mysterious as the universe itself. Striving for unity of effect, Poe steered away from straightforward explanations so as to leave the reader in a perpetual state of wonder, a result which he undoubtedly achieves in this work. In fact, the protagonist's sadistic behavior precedes the moment when he is purportedly possessed by a so-called daemonic fury. While he is clearly intent on ascribing his vile acts to anything but the deterioration of his own soul, he also alludes to his spirit of perverseness and inclination to commit violence against his own nature.

In addition, various analogies can be drawn between Empedocles and Poe's cosmologies. In "The Black Cat", Poe creates a microcosm in which to explore his metaphysical principles. Both writers argue that, in time, all that exists will eventually lapse into complete unity. In this tale, the narrator's psyche and individual identity merge with external physical reality so that the inner-outer and human-animal boundaries are confounded. Thus, in the same way as it is impossible to obliterate one's shadow, the protagonist cannot rid himself of the ubiquitous and avenging feline creature. Indeed, any effort to do so only hastens his own annihilation.

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Received: 08/10/2023
Accepted: 02/05/2024

STATIC AND KINETIC UTOPIANISM IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *PARABLE OF THE SOWER*

UTOPIANISMO ESTÁTICO Y CINÉTICO EN *LA PARÁBOLA DEL SEMBRADOR* DE OCTAVIA BUTLER

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202410023

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Abstract

Dystopian worlds are filled with inequalities, oppression and authoritarian regimes. They are cautionary tales that warn about potential dangers. And yet, it is also possible to find positive attitudes and insubordinate characters who fight back through the utopian wish, such as the case of Lauren Olamina. This utopianism yearns for better worlds, free of injustices. This paper focuses on Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and the confrontation of two utopianisms, static and kinetic, through religion. Kinetic utopianism, represented by Lauren and Earthseed, advocates for change and adaptability. In contrast, static utopianism, represented by Lauren's father and the Baptist religion, focuses on traditional values, and shows reticence towards change. This novel does not intend to condemn any belief system, but to explore the impact that these two utopianisms have on a particular society. The article concludes that the kinetic utopianism of Lauren and Earthseed makes possible the change that she wants in the world through adaptability and progress. On the other hand, the refusal of change and adaptation that characterises static utopianism ultimately leads to its own disappearance.

Keywords: utopianism, utopia, dystopia, *Parable of the Sower*, Earthseed.

Resumen

Los mundos distópicos están llenos de injusticias, opresiones y gobiernos autoritarios. Estas historias avisan de posibles peligros futuros, pero también contienen positivismo y personajes rebeldes que luchan a través del deseo utópico, como en el caso de Lauren Olamina. Este utopianismo les permite soñar con mundos mejores, libres de injusticias. El objetivo principal de este artículo es el análisis de la confrontación de dos tipos de utopianismo, estático y cinético, mediante la religión en *La parábola del sembrador* (1993), de Octavia Butler. El utopianismo cinético, representado por Lauren y Earthseed, defiende la adaptabilidad. En cambio, el utopianismo estático, representado por su padre y la religión Bautista, preserva los valores tradicionales y muestra reticencia hacia los cambios. La intención de esta obra no es la de criticar ningún sistema de creencias, sino analizar el impacto que estos dos tipos de utopianismo tienen en la misma sociedad. El artículo concluye que el utopianismo cinético de Lauren y Earthseed permite el cambio que ella quiere en el mundo mediante adaptabilidad y progreso. Por otro lado, el rechazo al cambio y a la adaptabilidad que caracterizan al utopianismo estático, a la larga, les conduce a su propia desaparición.

Palabras clave: utopianismo, utopía, distopía, *La parábola del sembrador*, Earthseed.

1. Introduction

Dystopian novels are cautionary tales which represent negative outcomes of undesirable situations, such as the rise of totalitarian governments or a subversive use of technology. They are usually inspired by major historical events and became especially relevant during the twentieth century because of the unprecedented global wars and the subsequent crises that took hold. The aim of this article is to discuss the utopian wish in the dystopian novel *Parable of the Sower* (1993) by Octavia E. Butler. This study will delve into the representation of two different types of utopianism: a kinetic model that favours evolution and a static model that prevents it, and the effect that each of them have on the society depicted in the novel.

Lauren Olamina is an African American adolescent who lives in a post-apocalyptic United States that has succumbed to climate change and social mayhem. The author highlights the existence of class division and hierarchies of power that are clearly motivated by race; a few neighbourhoods lead comfortable lives at the expense of the rest. The majority of the population suffer from poverty, misery and drug addiction. Lauren and her family live in a gated neighbourhood, where they are mostly safe from the barbaric world outside and where the majority of

citizens are adamant about following Protestant doctrine. However, Lauren renounces this religion and focuses on Earthseed instead, a religion that she has founded. Through Earthseed, she plans to introduce a set of improvements and create a future without violence. Lauren's objective is to start a new community based on critical thinking, participation in society and the capacity to adapt to new situations.

The two aforementioned models of utopianism appear within the two religions depicted in the novel: Baptist Protestantism and Earthseed. The first is an embodiment of static utopianism, which defends tradition and fixed ideas. The second is a fictional religion that embodies kinetic utopianism, which promotes change, adaptability and multiplicity. The two appear as opposites, yet they also share common traits. They both intend to create a sense of community, provide solace and comfort and improve overall life conditions. Octavia Butler addresses the importance of change for survival, and she adds an Afrofuturistic perspective to the "classical" dystopian story. In a world filled with negativity and pessimism, the utopian wish represents a beacon of light and people's initiative to fight for a better life.

2. Utopia, Dystopia and Utopianism: The Creation of New Societies

Throughout history, utopianism has received multiple names, including utopian wish, thought, spirit, impulse or vision. Literary critics use these terms interchangeably to represent the same idea: an undefined wish for social improvement and an attempt not to succumb to the pessimism of societies. Frederic Jameson defined it as "something like a utopian impulse detectable in daily life" (2005: 1). This concept should not be confused with the utopian genre, which is solely concerned with the literary world. Nonetheless, the utopian wish appears within utopian novels. The utopian wish is a literary device to imagine better societies, explore different alternatives and even criticise politics and inequalities. According to Fatima Vieira, utopianism "has at its core the desire for a better life" (2010: 6). Vieira further argues that the utopian literary genre is one of the many representations of this utopianism, implying that one is contained within the other. Utopianism is an intrinsic part of the human experience, and it is informed by specific times and places. Each society has their own dreams and aspirations, and thus, their utopian content will vary.

Literary utopias are based on this utopianism, a trend initiated by Sir Thomas More in *Utopia* (1516). Regarded as the first proper utopia, More did not create utopianism, but he reinvented the way it applied to fiction: "It is thus

certain that although he invented the word utopia, More did not invent utopianism […] but he certainly changed the way this desire was to be expressed" (Vieira 2010: 6). Previous works were more speculative in nature and focused on allegories or the afterlife. More drew from what already existed and moulded it to fit his own needs.

The origin of this wish is uncertain, but it can be traced back to the times of the Bible or Ancient Greece. The utopian wish is the basis of many religions, real and fictional, including Butler's Earthseed. Utopianism draws on the traditions of mythical lands and visions of paradise: "It is widely recognized that four major mythical models of felicity contribute to the genesis of the utopian genre: the Golden Age, the Land of Cockaigne, the Millennium and the Ideal City" (Dutton 2010: 224). Even though the works of the Golden Age are not usually considered utopian works *per se*, the influence that these had over later texts is undeniable since they provided a foundation for the genre.

Utopianism also occupies a significant place within dystopias, or negative utopias: "It is generally conceded that in the twentieth century, dystopia becomes the predominant expression of the utopian ideal, mirroring the colossal failures of totalitarian collectivism" (Claeys 2010: 108). The dystopian genre completely dominated the twentieth century following a series of notorious events, including the World Wars and other incidents such as the Great Depression and the rise of totalitarianism. Thus, it is no wonder that this historical context had a huge impact on authors, who deemed it necessary to denounce recent developments in their fiction. In these novels, the utopian wish appears as a force of positivity intended to eradicate oppression, manipulation and overcontrol. Dystopian fiction projects cautionary tales of potential dangers, but it also provides a flicker of hope for characters and readers. The utopian wish illustrates how humans find the strength to fight for a better future, even in the darkest of times.

In Butler's fictional work, Lauren embodies the utopian wish because she fights to improve the world, and she includes this utopianism in Earthseed. Lauren has something special that differentiates her from the rest: her hyperempathy, which allows her to feel others' pleasure and pain. The way in which she experiences the world inspired her to create her religious manifesto, where she documents her religious doctrines, titled *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*: "Lauren uses her hyperempathy to imagine a new world and mother the birth of a new religion" (Hinton 2018: 450). She shares various traits with the archetype of the rebellious leader, such as her interest in denouncing injustices, advocating for change and giving a voice to the marginalised. Many might oppose the government or other world injustices, but only a few have the courage to act. Lauren is willing to take risks and to put herself on the line.

The utopianism that appeared in the late twentieth century differs from the classical dystopias of the middle of the century, because it incorporates an element of hope in the ending: "by resisting closure, [recent novels] allow readers and protagonists to hope: the ambiguous, open endings maintain the utopian impulse within the work" (Baccolini 2004: 520). Lauren's fate differs from the characters of the earlier dystopias, which tended to end on a negative note and with futile attempts to overthrow dictatorships. In those novels, the utopian impulse was external, reserved for readers to avoid the dystopian scenarios that they presented. Lauren undergoes tremendous pain and suffering throughout the novel, but by the end she has escaped the dystopian setting and is founding her own community.

Although predominantly dystopian, the end of the twentieth century saw a groundswell of positivity thanks to several popular movements, including the civil rights movement, the second wave of feminism and the environmentalists. This novel uses race in its exploration of some of the contemporary issues intrinsically connected to the author's context, which makes this novel a candidate for the field of Afrofuturism. In Mark Dery's words, "Speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture […] might, for want of a better term, be called Afro-Futurism" (2008: 8). Octavia Butler adds a much-needed perspective of race to the traditional white-dominating dystopias, as has been claimed by Garnter: "The Afrofuturist elements in both *Parable of the Sower* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* demonstrate how Butler and Hopkinson create literary worlds that challenge traditionally exclusive white feminist narratives" (2021: 1). As a part of the black community, Octavia Butler vindicates her own right to create imagined futures; in fact, in Womack's words, "As feminist dystopian literature imagines possible futures through a feminist lens, Afrofuturism imagines possible futures through a black cultural lens" (2013: 9). The gender barrier had been somewhat broken, but there was still a lot to be done about racial issues.

3. Static and Kinetic Utopianism

The utopian wish, or the intrinsic desire for better worlds, can be understood under different lights depending on its creator's ideology and beliefs. There is one type of utopianism that advocates for multiplicity, multiculturalism and change. This utopianism appears in several time periods, but it is especially representative of modern societies and postcolonial and postmodern studies. On the contrary, there is another utopianism that aims towards universalism, which is likely to ignore and disregard smaller or marginal cultures and civilisations. This utopianism was more common in older times, such as the Renaissance or other classical periods.

This latter utopianism is likely to lead to imposition, totalitarianism and violence. Plus, the idea that a state of perfection can be attained seems inconceivable: "The notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all good things coexist, seems to me to be not merely unattainable —that is a truism— but conceptually incoherent" (Berlin 2013: 14). The static type of utopianism can present difficulties such as the suppression of diversity, lack of multiculturalism and unrealistic expectations about life in community. Utopian visions are not infallible, and they should be conceived within realistic limits. These two types of utopianism can be regarded as kinetic and static because of their changing and fixed nature, respectively. Kinetic utopianism supports constant change and evolution, and it encourages multiplicity. It assumes that problems and conflict will arise, but it also offers potential solutions. Static utopianism strives to achieve perfection, understood as a state in which all of humanity is satisfied. According to Berlin, "Nothing in [static utopias] alters, for they have reached perfection: there is no need for novelty or change; no one can wish to alter a condition in which all natural human wishes are fulfilled" (2013: 21). This utopianism assumes that once everyone's wishes and needs are met, change will not be necessary.

In *Parable of the Sower*, each of these utopianisms is reflected in the credo of the two religions. The Baptist religion can be equated with static utopianism, as it relies on conventional rituals and practices. With a well-established foundation, its followers adhere to traditional values and are reticent to change. Conversely, Earthseed relates to kinetic utopianism in the sense that it embraces change and adaptability over other values. Lauren's vision is centred on creating a better version of the world and promotes resilience and proactivity. This will be the religion of the new generations.

In 1945, Karl Popper developed the theory of the open society, which can partly be applied to these two notions of utopianism. Popper's theory comments on different types of social and political systems. Open societies advocate in favour of pluralism and diversity. They encourage freedom of expression and participation in the government's decisions and envision "the society in which individuals are confronted with personal decisions" (1947: 152). In a few words, they embody the same values as kinetic utopianism.

Alternatively, closed societies identify with static utopianism. They defend traditional and fixed values, are prone to resist change, and the participation of the citizens tends to be limited. In the worst cases, they lead to totalitarianism and violence. Popper defends that these societies deem certain laws and customs as inevitable as natural phenomena: "It is one of the characteristics of the magical attitude of a primitive tribal or 'closed' society that it lives in a charmed circle of

unchanging taboos, of laws and customs which are felt to be as inevitable as the rising of the sun" (1947: 49). Popper links the term 'tribal society' to the societies ruled by hierarchies and which adhere to traditional values and are averse to change. In religions, this attitude can be connected to spiritual and mystical aspects.

Earthseed relates to kinetic utopianism and open societies because it highlights the importance of adaptability and change in humans; as Wanzo has argued in relation to this text, "The essentials of the text and religion are that human beings can shape Change" (2005: 81). Lauren creates Earthseed because she disagrees with all other religions, which is supported by Choudhury and Mukherjee when they say that "Lauren Oya Olamina rejects dominant white Christianity and also her black father's black church to invent a new religion which gives hope to the suffering masses and is inclusive of the rejects of society" (2023: 3). Lauren's wilful personality leads her to confront the traditionalism and static nature that characterise conventional religions.

Conversely, Lauren's father and Protestantism represent the static tradition and closed societies. The Baptist religion is rooted in age-old beliefs; it supports the traditional idea of God as a force of the universe that sees and controls everything. Apart from the religious aspect, the closed society is also representative of the overall fictional world of the novel. The established power hierarchy perpetuates the state of constant violence and control because it benefits a small minority. Lauren's father is a Baptist minister and he is regarded as a positive figure in the neighbourhood. He is very protective of his family, and he is one of the most proactive members of the community. Because he is aware that he will not be able to keep his children safe indefinitely, he tries to teach them to protect themselves, as can be read in the following fragment: "Dad tries to shield us from what goes on in the world, but he can't. Knowing that, he also tries to teach us to shield ourselves" (Butler 2019: 35). He actively defends the neighbourhood and fights for its survival, but ultimately, he trusts that God will provide salvation. When he disappears, the static utopianism and the chances of resistance and survival leave with him.

Butler creates a strong comparison between these religions to illustrate the contrast between two opposing forces: the old and the new, the immutable and the mutable, universalism and multiculturalism. Butler denounces the limitations of static utopia as, in Wanzo's words, she depicts "a dystopia aimed at critiquing contemporary social problems, particularly in examining how destruction of the environment and religious conservatism could result in a fascist state leaving women and people of color particularly vulnerable" (2005: 75). Nonetheless, rather than condemning religion as a whole, *Parable of the Sower* criticises the aspects of religion that need

improving, according to Butler's opinion. She criticises the justifications of violence and oppression made in the name of religion and the blind submission to religious authority.

4. Utopianism and Religion in *Parable of the Sower*

Parable of the Sower is a compilation of diary entries by Lauren Olamina, an African American teenager who lives in a post-apocalyptic United States ravaged by climate change and social inequality. This diary represents the backbone of the story, Lauren's unfiltered perspective, which she writes from July of 2024 to October of 2027. During the course of the novel, Lauren's character evolves as she matures and acquires new knowledge. Still, her diary always remains a subjective work that contains only her perception of the world.

Apart from the diary, the novel is composed of fragments from *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*. This is a religious text that contains the Earthseed doctrines, which Lauren writes down throughout the years as she comes up with them. Lauren starts this religion as a response to the dystopian atmosphere that surrounds her and in a utopian attempt to create a better version of the world. This argument is supported by Stillman when he says: "Earthseed is a religion, a belief system, and a world view. It begins as Olamina's responses to the problems in Robledo" (2003: 25). Earthseed revolves around the tenet that 'God is change'; it defends that change is inevitable and that it is in the hands of humans to shape it. Lauren's ideals and the religion she has founded, Earthseed, are representations of kinetic utopianism because they argue in favour of the need for adaptability and resilience for survival. In Lauren's words: "Out here, you adapt to your surroundings or you get killed" (Butler 2019: 172). This is exemplified by the members of the neighbourhood who perished because they were unable to adapt to the dystopian circumstances.

Lauren's dream for a better life and her yearning to start a new community propel her and help her to survive in such a pessimistic and corrupt world, and she finds comfort in her own writings: "We'll adapt. We'll have to. God is Change. Strange how much it helps me to remember that" (Butler 2019: 138). As Choudhury and Mukherjee have explained, "as a female protagonist who creates a new religion, Lauren exemplifies qualities of critical dystopia and Afrofuturism. In her refusal to accept a violent society as the norm, Lauren performs as a protagonist of critical dystopia who does not bow down to hegemony" (2023: 8). Lauren has faith in the future, and believes that it is in her hands, and the hands of her future community, to shape it when she says, "There's no power in having strength and brains, and yet waiting for God to fix things for you or take revenge for you […] God will

shape us all every day of our lives. Best to understand that and return the effort: Shape God" (Butler 2019: 206). In juxtaposition to this, there is a book that embodies the opposite values and represents static utopianism: the Bible. As a representative of static utopianism, the Bible is an embodiment of old values and traditions. The Bible is particularly relevant while Lauren lives with her family and attends mass, because the neighbourhood is structured according to the principles set forth in the book. Lauren rejects her father's religion, as can be read in the following passage: "'We were Baptists', I said. 'I couldn't make myself believe either, and I couldn't tell anyone'" (Butler 2019: 246). She refuses this religion because it does not align with her own views, and she is especially critical of the image of God and divine lack of action. She perceives this God as an almost cruel figure who does not care whether humans live or die: "That God sounds a lot like Zeus —a super-powerful man, playing with his toys the way my youngest brothers play with toy soldiers. Bang, bang! Seven toys fall dead. If they're yours, you make the rules. Who cares what the toys think" (Butler 2019: 15). Therefore, it can be observed that Lauren's views sharply contrast with the Protestants who pray to God in exchange for salvation.

4.1. 2024: The Birth of Kinetic Utopianism

The first part of the novel is an introduction to Lauren Olamina and her gated community. Through diary entries, the reader gets to know the laws and traditions, Lauren's dreams and desires, and the religion that she has founded: Earthseed. The vast majority of community inhabitants are practicing Baptists; they go to church and find solace in the traditional image of God and the Bible. The adult characters exude a nostalgia for a long-lost past and a yet non-existent future: "They never miss a chance to relive the good old days or to tell kids how great it's going to be when the country gets back on its feet and good times come back" (Butler 2019: 8). They are torn between having lost faith in the future and the hope that God will protect and save them.

The members of the community rely upon the idea that God will provide salvation and they lack the confidence necessary to shape their own future. The Baptist religion is shown as static because it is centred around fixed dogmas and beliefs, and believers follow the Bible word for word: "[Mrs. Sims] believed, like Dad, that if you kill yourself, you go to hell and burn forever. She believed in a literal acceptance of everything in the Bible" (Butler 2019: 23). While Baptists are not inherently opposed to change, they show scepticism and reticence. However, not all neighbourhood residents are religious devotees, especially the younger citizens. Most children get baptised merely to fulfil their parents' desire and they show a certain indifference towards religious rituals: "We would be baptized out of duty

or as a kind of insurance, but most of us aren't that much concerned with religion. I am, but then I have a different religion" (Butler 2019: 8), especially the younger members. In fact, the secularisation of religion was a growing topic of interest in the 20th century, and Octavia Butler manages to emphasise both the importance of religious pluralism and the loss of faith in traditional institutions. In her novel, the static model of utopianism is starting to lose followers because of the hostile environment and growing scepticism of the members of the closed society. On the other hand, the popularity of kinetic utopianism increases as Lauren spreads the word of Earthseed.

The idea of God reflected in the Baptist and Earthseed religions is very representative of the statuses of these religions as examples of static and kinetic utopianism, respectively. Lauren questions the idea of God in traditional religions and wonders why he allows such barbarism, injustice and violence: "Is there a God? If there is, does he (she? it?) care about us?" (Butler 2019: 15). She argues against the idea of a God who determines the fate of humanity and against the idea that it is futile to propose alternatives. Instead, Lauren's idea of God is change, which vastly differs from the traditional image, as she says, "My God doesn't love me or hate me or watch over me or know me at all, and I feel no love for or loyalty to my God. My God just is" (Butler 2019: 25). Lauren refuses to worship a God whom she deems unfair and unjust, and instead avers that change can come from humans. In the dystopian world, change, resilience and adaptability are essential for survival, and these are the pillars of Earthseed.

Earthseed: The Books of the Living opens with the claims that "without persistence, what remains is an enthusiasm of the moment. Without adaptability, what remains may be channeled into destructive fanaticism. Without positive obsession, there is nothing at all" (Butler 2019: 1). Throughout the novel, Lauren demonstrates how all of these abilities allowed her to successfully start the community she had dreamed of. She faces constant dangers and unexpected incidents, but she perseveres. Lauren's interest in developing Earthseed starts from an impulse that assimilates to the utopian wish, because this impulse comes from a desire for a better future without violence and poverty. It could even be argued that Earthseed is born from a yearning that Protestantism is unable to fulfil. Some critics such as Choudhury and Mukherjee have connected Lauren's hyperempathy syndrome and the constant suffering that it entails with the creation of Earthseed: "Lauren emerges as a protagonist who can share others' pain —a dystopian condition— which leads her to contemplate the need for a new religion and a communal social order invested in people's happiness" (2023: 7). In fact, the analysis exposed in this article agrees with the theory that it is Lauren's ability to feel others' suffering that motivated her to create this religion. It seems that she conceives Earthseed in

a desperate need to pursue a future without such violence and in an attempt to establish an order of peace.

4.2. 2025: The Victims of the Closed Society

In the second part, Lauren helps her stepmother with her kindergarten classes. She plans to use her influence for good and to prepare children for the difficulties ahead. Even though she draws from some of Earthseed's doctrines, she does not teach directly from the book. Additionally, there are various altercations in the neighbourhood, including incidents of theft, arson and assault. Lauren's neighbours have experienced such sorrows that they can barely dare to dream of better worlds: "We are coming apart. The community, the families, individual family members. … We're a rope, breaking, a single strand at a time" (Butler 2019: 109). Thinking of alternatives seems like a faraway fantasy. Within the neighbourhood, people are anxious about surviving the present and they are not as concerned with a utopian future that might never come, as Stillman has explained: "People are so involved in hierarchy and domination, so convinced of their own rightness, so scared, or so committed to maintaining their own arbitrary power that it can be disheartening to attempt to hope, think, and act in utopian, promising, or novel ways" (Stillman 2003: 16). But Lauren is determined to fight.

These citizens are victims of the closed society; the members of the neighbourhood have been indoctrinated to stay within a certain narrative. They see the mayhem and dangers of the outside world and are content with their small, civilised neighbourhood where they have stability, protection and resources to a certain extent. Their reliance on static utopianism has led them to complacency; they are resigned to their circumstances and seek comfort in what is familiar. They are passive characters in the sense that they are waiting for a divine intervention, as Lauren says: "Things are always changing. This is just one of the big jumps instead of the little step-by step changes that are easier to take. People have changed the climate of the world. Now they're waiting for the old days to come back" (Butler 2019: 52). They view destiny as a force that cannot be meddled with.

During the course of the novel, Lauren progressively becomes more proactive, and in 2025 she packs a bag to be kept for the imminent moment when she will have to flee. In her bag, along with seeds and survival tools, she includes her diary and the Earthseed notebook. The fact that she prioritises her book of Earthseed highlights the importance she gives to the implementation of this new religion. When she was younger, Lauren was a Protestant: "At least three years ago, my father's God stopped being my God. His church stopped being my church" (Butler 2019: 7). Lauren's departure from Protestantism signifies a rupture with her father and the neighbourhood, at first spiritually but later also physically. It is

the change from Protestantism to Earthseed which transfers her from passive to active; she evolves from being a minor member of the Baptist church to becoming the leader of a religious movement.

The core idea of utopianism lies in the desire for improvement, equality and a sense of shared community. For Lauren, these qualities are intrinsically linked with the notions of change and adaptability. Earthseed's most important tenet, as written in the *Books of the Living*, states that "the only lasting truth/ Is Change./ God/ Is Change" (Butler 2019: 75). In the world, the only constant thing is change; change is inevitable and ever-present. Lauren's idea that 'God is change' and that humans can produce change is very representative of utopian ideals. Lauren's ideas are consistent with the notion that a true utopia should be kinetic and not static, as explored by H.G. Wells in *A Modern Utopia*: "the Modern Utopia must be not static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages" (2009: 13). Wells stresses the importance of adaptability and movement within the utopian society. Utopias ought to evolve along with humanity and adjust to their wants and needs. In Lauren's opinion, change is part of the human experience, but maybe they do not know how to deal with it yet.

Lauren refuses to leave her destiny in the hands of a God and would rather act of her own volition. She yearns for a faraway community, and dreams of taking Earthseed to space. The notion of finding a new place to start a community is a representative characteristic of utopian fiction and the utopian vision in general: "Is not this dreaming of life on another world, this desire for that which is not yet here, what marks utopian thinking?" (Miller 1998: 355). This allowed people to deal with issues such as overpopulation and space exploration. The conception of space as a place to locate new societies became popular in the utopian tradition after its blending with science fiction, and Octavia Butler further connects it with Afrofuturism through her portrayal of the racial perspective. Lauren's objective is space: "The Destiny of Earthseed/ Is to take root among the stars" (Butler 2019: 80), which represents the potential for a blank slate without violence and injustices.

4.3. 2026: The Disappearance of Static Utopianism

In the third part, Lauren suffers two tremendous losses: her brother's gruesome death and her father's mysterious disappearance. In the neighbourhood, incidents continue to happen, and some families decide to move to richer neighbourhoods. For her part, Lauren continues with her Earthseed plans, which are starting to take shape. It has been explained that Lauren repeatedly advocates for change and adaptability, but it is important to consider the extent to which she might try to impose her own convictions on other characters. She constantly employs

authoritative language and imperative verbs, which produce definite and categorical statements. Lauren claims that her statements are true: "I wrote that verse a few months ago. It's true like all the verses. It seems more true than ever now, more useful to me when I'm afraid" (Butler 2019: 117), but she shows no empirical proof. Instead, it seems that she writes to reassure herself. Paradoxically, Lauren's kinetic doctrines resemble static utopianism in the sense that she wants to establish a somewhat fixed vision that she tries to impose on her society.

After thoughtful consideration, Lauren takes a step further and decides that she will leave Robledo, which at this point she has been planning for some time. She wants to travel north, where there are better opportunities of finding a quiet place to start her community. This travelling is reminiscent of the journey to reach utopian islands in traditional utopias, such as More's *Utopia* (1516) or Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626). The travelling was a device used for locating utopias in time and space. In both traditional utopias and *Parable of the Sower*, there is a sharp contrast between the place of origin and the destination. In fact, the weaknesses of the place of origin stress the superior quality of the new place. The experiences and contents of the travels are complete opposites, but the destination in both cases is a land to start anew. Lauren is aware of the dangers ahead, but she is prepared to deal with the consequences.

It is also in this third part when Lauren decides the name for her book, which she names *Earthseed: The Book of the Living*. The naming of the book indicates that Earthseed has stopped being an abstract idea. Lauren continues to think about teaching directly from the book of Earthseed when she writes "Teaching is what I would choose to do. Even if I have to take other kinds of work to get enough to eat, I can teach. If I do it well, it will draw people to me —to Earthseed" (Butler 2019: 117). By doing this, she will become a sort of prophet.

Within her writings, Lauren finds solace in the notions of adaptability and change; the idea of living in a world where she is not in constant fear helps her to cope with reality. In her darkest moments, Lauren is able to return to Earthseed and regain her confidence in the future. Lauren intends to create a book that compiles Earthseed's prime principles and doctrines, which is how Earthseed resembles a religious text. Nonetheless, Lauren never completely abandons the Bible, and when her father disappears, she reads from it to the neighbourhood. Lauren might disagree with the conception of God, but she shares the same sense of community and wishes to lift people's spirits: "We have God and we have each other. We have our island community, fragile, and yet a fortress. Sometimes it seems too small and too weak to survive. […] But also like the widow, it persists. We persist. This is our place, no matter what" (Butler 2019: 127). Lauren preaches a sermon about persistence, and it can be extrapolated to two different issues. Firstly, to continue

the search for her missing father, who has disappeared in mysterious circumstances, but also to resist as a community against adversity. It is not enough to have faith in the future: it is necessary to act on it.

By the end of the third part, people's spirits are lower than ever: "People are setting fires because they're frustrated, angry, hopeless. They have no power to improve their lives, but they have the power to make others even more miserable. And the only way to prove to yourself that you have power is to use it" (Butler 2019: 135). The community is coming apart, and the death of Lauren's father represents a turning point, because he was the force that kept it together, in Ruffin's words: "Lauren associates the death of her father with the death of the community, and rightly so" (2005: 90). Because Lauren's father represented static utopianism, when he disappears, this variant of utopianism leaves with him. Eventually, the members of the neighbourhood determine that their attempts to change the world are futile and they are resigned to the lives they currently have.

4.4. 2027: The Utopian Journey

In the fourth part, the gate falls and the neighbourhood succumbs to violent outsiders. Lauren's family and the majority of the neighbourhood perish, but she escapes. Lauren starts her journey to find the perfect location in which to found her open society. Before this moment, the journey had only been a theoretical plan. During the journey, she progressively forms a group of unconventional people who decide to join her. Earthseed starts to become a reality.

Lauren survived the fall of the neighbourhood because instead of hoping for a miracle, she devised an escape plan. Butler creates a stark contrast between the followers of static and kinetic utopianism. The followers of static utopianism had faith not only in the protection of God, but also in the gate. When the gate falls, they are unprepared and ill-equipped; they are unable to adapt to the circumstances. Kinetic utopianism allows Lauren to adapt and to survive; she acts quickly and efficiently, and her utopian journey begins. During the journey, Lauren teaches Earthseed to some of her companions. She has carefully planned the order in which the doctrines ought to appear: "Last year, I chose these lines for the first page of the first book of *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*. These lines say everything. Everything!" (2019: 184). The first lines of the book stress the importance of change and mention the mantra of the religion; God is Change. *Earthseed: The Books of the Living* is a book in progress, as opposed to the Bible, whose content has been set for centuries. The Bible does not present a linear narrative; it is a compilation of texts from different sources that can be read and interpreted in a variety of ways. Once again, the essence of static utopianism resides in stability and traditionalism, whereas the kinetic favours movement, because it is a work in progress.

The first verses of Earthseed are essential to attract new members. They are a presentation and summary of the whole religion. When Lauren reads aloud to one of her companions, she carefully chooses a fragment from the first page: "Would have given him money to read and digest some of the Earthseed portions of my journal. But he had to be eased into them. If he read the wrong thing, it would just increase the distance between us" (Butler 2019: 183). Lauren wants to sound convincing, and she is afraid of scaring away potential followers. She aims to dissipate the mistrust of the group and create a soothing atmosphere.

Unlike the book of Earthseed, the Bible does not need presentation. In the novel it is depicted as a well-established text with a clear objective: to offer solace and moral guidance. Lauren argues that people resort to religious texts when facing adversities as she states: "People do that all the time. They reach back to the Bible, the Talmud, the Koran, or some other religious book that helps them deal with the frightening changes that happen in life" (Butler 2019: 208). One of the most crucial differences between the two religions is the image of God, because Christian religion presents an all-seeing and powerful God that decides the destiny of humanity. In Earthseed, God is a spiritual force, and humans are in charge of shaping their own destiny. Once again, the difference is based on that which is stationary in contrast with movement.

Finally, Lauren gets some of her travelling companions to join Earthseed: "I think Travis Charles Douglas is my first convert. Zahra Moss is my second" (Butler 2019: 209). Lauren is confident in her ideas and thinks she can get more people to join Earthseed. Lauren's feelings towards creating a better future are genuine and she welcomes everyone into her group. When they first met, the members of Lauren's group showed reticence towards Earthseed and the open society because of the suffering they had undergone. They were sceptical and wondered whether Lauren's own project would likewise end in a closed society. Nonetheless, they eventually decide to join her and her project, abandoning their old religions along the way. In dark times, the joint sense of community is part of what draws people to Earthseed. Either purposefully or inadvertently, Earthseed incorporates ideas and beliefs that exist in other religions: "It sounds like some combination of Buddhism, existentialism, Sufism, and I don't know what else" (Butler 2019: 246). Earthseed contains elements such as the impermanence of things from the Buddhists, the importance of individual responsibility of existentialism, or the pursuit of spiritual development from Sufism. Needless to say, Lauren also subverts certain values from Christianism, such as the traditional image of God as an all-seeing figure: "But it's not a god. It's not a person or an intelligence or even a thing. It's just… I don't know. An idea" (Butler 2019: 204). In Earthseed, God is not a person, but an idea that Lauren personifies for other people to remember the

mantras more easily. Furthermore, she incorporates the sense of community and a desire for belonging that most religions exhibit.

By the end of the novel, Butler introduces the notion of mutability within religion: "All religions change. Think about the big ones. What do you think Christ would be these days? A Baptist? A Methodist? A Catholic? And the Buddha —do you think he'd be a Buddhist now? What kind of Buddhism would he practice?" (Butler 2019: 247), and the idea that all religions change within certain parameters. Religions are never completely static, and it is natural that, as societies advance, new interpretations and offshoots appear. Yet, the old religions are regarded as static because of their reticence of change. At this point, Lauren has to accept that her own religion might change beyond her own control if it continues to expand. To Lauren, change is at the mercy of humans, and not a supernatural force. The concept of change as Lauren understands it relates to the utopian wish inasmuch as it recognises that change is necessary for progress. If a society refuses change, then it cannot properly evolve, and Robledo is the perfect example. In this sense, Butler successfully portrays "a narrative about the tragic consequences of rejecting change by means of restoring paternalistic structures" (Nilges 2009: 1333). The inhabitants of this neighbourhood did not survive because they relied on fixed and antiquated traditions; they were unprepared and unable to adapt to the hostility of the world.

Lauren wants to provide the same sense of calm and reassurance that religion provides for others. In the end, Earthseed is not starkly different from traditional religion; in a sense, it has a church, sacred texts and a preacher. Lauren does not mean to impose her religion or fix all of the world's problems, but she thinks the world would be a better place if they followed the Earthseed doctrines. Lauren's devised society is the representation of an open society in that it is based on communication, respect and, most of all, collaboration: "If we're a good pack, and we work together, we have a chance" (Butler 2019: 172). Individually, humans have little chance of surviving in the dystopian world, but as a group they can protect each other.

When the group reaches their destination, their first act as a community is to hold a funeral for their lost members and to plant a tree for each of the departed. The funeral provides a sense of closure, and the scene as a whole reflects the potential for a new beginning and the birth of Lauren's community. Finally, Earthseed becomes the reality that Lauren has dreamed of for so long. Now that Earthseed is not a mere theoretical proposition, it is inevitable to question whether Lauren will manage to stop it from becoming a static utopia. The novel closes with the *Parable of the Sower* from the King James Bible and the idea that seeds will die if they fall on barren ground, but they will bear fruit if they are planted in fertile

ground. The inclusion of this parable at the end of the text might be an indicator that Lauren's society will most likely flourish because she has found a location where it is fit to start it.

5. Conclusion

Overall, this article has explored the notion that utopianism yearns for the creation of alternative visions to current realities in order to improve them. This tenet forms the basis of utopian fiction, since utopias are born of a yearning for improvement and the creation of good places. But this aspect is also of paramount importance within dystopian fiction, where this spirit is embodied in the characters who fight to eradicate bad places. In the dystopian novel *Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler juxtaposes two different religions, one real and one fictional, to represent a conflict between a static and a kinetic approach to the idea of utopia.

This article has aimed to analyse how each of these two models of utopianism and their respective religions affected the society that Butler depicted within her novel. *Parable of the Sower* does not mean to condemn any religion, but it clearly favours Earthseed over Baptist Protestantism. Lauren and Earthseed are able to evolve and persevere because she is a fervent supporter of the adaptability that characterises kinetic utopianism. Lauren's determination to shape her own future forges her resilient character, and in the end she manages to translate her utopian vision into the real world. On the other hand, the reticence of change that characterises static utopianism and the inability of the Protestants to adapt to the dystopian circumstances ultimately leads to its disappearance altogether.

In conclusion, Octavia Butler contrasts these two variants of utopianism to express the extent to which the conception of what a good place entails depends on time, place and, especially, on the beliefs of its creator. This article concludes by agreeing with the idea that change is necessary for the evolution and survival of any society. This message is especially relevant within the context of the novel, but it can be extrapolated to the real world. *Parable of the Sower* encourages readers to be proactive and to seek the change that they want to see in the world.

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Received: 22/12/2023
Accepted: 04/07/2024

READING MARTIN AMIS'S RECREATION OF THE PERPETRATOR'S GAZE IN *THE ZONE OF INTEREST*

LA RECREACIÓN DE LA MIRADA DEL PERPETRADOR EN *THE ZONE OF INTEREST,* DE MARTIN AMIS

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202410052

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Abstract

The Zone of Interest is a historical novel set in Auschwitz in the months from August 1942 to April 1943, and which belongs to the category of perpetrator fiction. This article centres on the character of Paul Doll, the camp commandant, who represents the banality of evil and, through whose voice Amis gives the readers a sharp picture of the abominations committed by the Nazis, while he recounts the causes and devastating consequences of the perpetrators' actions. By transforming Doll into a buffoon, Amis offers a different perspective on the Holocaust and makes the reader realise that those responsible for the worst crimes were neither monsters nor exceptional human beings, but normal, vulnerable people who had the fate of millions of Jews in their hands.

Keywords: *The Zone of Interest*, Martin Amis, perpetrator, Holocaust, Auschwitz, buffoon.

Resumen

The Zone of Interest es una novela histórica que transcurre en Auschwitz desde agosto de 1942 hasta abril de 1943 y que se incluye dentro de la categoría de "perpetrator fiction". Este artículo se centra en el personaje de Paul Doll, el

comandante del campo, que encarna la banalidad del mal y a través de cuya voz Amis le ofrece al lector una visión nítida de las atrocidades cometidas por los Nazis y recrea las causas y el efecto devastador de las acciones de los perpetradores. Amis transforma a Doll en un bufón y ello le permite dar una visión diferente del Holocausto y hacer que el lector sea consciente de que los responsables de los peores crímenes no eran seres excepcionales ni monstruos, sino gente normal y vulnerable que tenía en sus manos el destino de millones de judíos.

Palabras clave: *The Zone of Interest*, Martin Amis, perpetrador, Holocausto, Auschwitz, bufón.

1. Introduction

In "The Jewish Tragedy and the Holocaust" Isaac Deutscher states that the great obstacle to understanding the Holocaust is its uniqueness. He does not believe that the passage of time will provide a better comprehension of what happened: "It is rather the fact that we are confronted here by a huge and ominous mystery of the degeneration of the human character that will forever baffle and terrify mankind" (1968: 164). Saul Friedländer agrees with Deutscher that, although knowledge of the Holocaust has increased, there is "no deeper comprehension than immediately after the war" (1976: 36). In fact, he asserts that, in the case of the Shoah, we have to abandon our natural tendency to look for some meaning or interpretation, because "[i]n Walter Benjamin's terms, we may possibly be facing an unredeemable past" (Friedländer 1989: 73). In this sense, Friedländer arguably belongs in the group of writers and scholars who believe that, on a global level, there is no redemptive message in the Shoah (Langer 1975; Friedländer 1988; Ozick 1988).

British author Martin Amis echoes these scholars' words when he admits that, despite his extensive reading on the Holocaust, "while [he] might have gained in knowledge, [he] had gained nothing at all in penetration" (2015: 309). Amis recognises that he has always been amazed and fascinated by the Holocaust's exceptionalism (Rosenbaum 2012; Seaman 2014). He is concerned not only with the magnitude of the event, but also with the inexplicability of the crime and of the figure of Hitler and the actions of the German people (Seaman 2014). In fact, he admits that the problem of understanding Hitler bedevilled him until he read Primo Levi's statement on the Nazi fanatical hatred of the Jews: "But there is no rationality in the Nazi hatred: it is a hate that is not in us; it is outside man, it is a poison fruit sprung from the deadly trunk of Fascism, but it is outside and beyond Fascism itself. We cannot understand it, but we can and must understand from where it springs, and we must be on our guard" (Levi 2004: 395-396). Levi's

statement was like an epiphany for Amis since it relieved him of the pressure to understand the Holocaust, and he felt free to write about it again (Rosenbaum 2012).[1] As Ron Rosenbaum states, Amis seems to believe that he has a responsibility as a writer and thinker to deal with the extermination of six million Jews in his works (2012). This explains why, after the publication of *Time's Arrow* (1991), in 2014 Amis returns to the subject of the Holocaust with *The Zone of Interest*, a novel set in Auschwitz in the months spanning August 1942 to April 1943.

The Zone of Interest, as Tova Reich has asserted, may be considered as a novel of written testimonies (2014). The story is told from the point of view of the three central characters, who Reich interprets as representations of the collaborator, perpetrator and victim. The collaborator is Angelus Thomsen, a womaniser who happens to be a nephew of Martin Bormann, Hitler's private secretary; the perpetrator is Paul Doll, the "Old Boozer", the camp commandant and the source of most of the comedy in the novel;[2] and the victim is Szmul, the leader of the *Sonderkommando*, the name given to Jewish prisoners forced to do the Nazis' "dirty work", that is, to help the Nazi officers deceive the prisoners on arriving at the camp and dispose of the corpses.[3] This article centres on Paul Doll, a ludicrous figure who personifies Hannah Arendt's concept of the banality of evil and, through whose voice Amis gives "the reader a stomach-turning awareness of the abominations the Nazis inflicted on their victims" (Kakutani 2014). By transforming Doll into a buffoon, Amis achieves what he believes should be the aim of a writer, which is to change the reader's habits of perception, so that they can look at the world with refreshed eyes (Stadlen 2013).

2. *The Zone of Interest*: A Perpetrator Fiction within a Historical Novel

Whereas *Time's Arrow* is an experimental novel,[4] with *The Zone of Interest* Amis wanted to deal with the Holocaust in a more realistic way, and this is why he chose social realism as the genre for the novel (Seaman 2014). Some critics have indeed described the book as a traditional, realistic, historical novel (Ozick 2014; Preston 2014; Wood 2014), and one which merits praise due to Amis's thorough research into the atrocities committed by the Nazis. In fact, in the acknowledgements section and epilogue at the end of the novel, Amis includes the historical documentation he used to write the novel and emphasises that he "adhere[d] to that which happened, in all its horror, its desolation, and its bloody-minded opacity" (2015: 310). Wynn Wheldon believes that Amis has achieved a great accomplishment is performing a fundamental task by doing justice to his subject: "If it only helps to explain to those who at present so promiscuously throw around

the word 'genocide' what that awful word in reality denotes it will have earned the attention it will certainly receive" (2014). Wheldon's statement is very revealing, because Amis eschews what James E. Young considers to be one of the main problems with what he calls "documentary fiction". According to Young, although the writer of Holocaust fiction asserts the factual basis of his work, there is a danger of trivialising the historical event that is recreated (1988: 201). In addition, Young establishes an insightful distinction between non-fiction and fiction about the Holocaust. For him, "[w]here the nonfiction account attempts to retrieve its authentic connection to events in order to reinforce its documentary authority, fiction necessarily fabricates its link to events in order to reinforce its documentary authority" (1988: 211-212). In the case of the literature of atrocity, as Langer points out, the writer has the "advantage" of dealing with a portion of reality the audience already knows. Due to this reason, this kind of narrative can never be just a fiction inasmuch as an author "can never totally conceal the relationship between the naked body and the covering costume, the actual scars of the Holocaust and the creative salves that often only intensify pain" (1975: 91).

More specifically, when it comes to Holocaust fiction, *The Zone of Interest* belongs to the category of what Robert Eaglestone calls "perpetrator fiction" (2010, 2013, 2017). This literary critic explains that in the last two decades there has been a boom across Europe and America of works dealing with perpetrators —a trend that, according to Eaglestone, has a three-fold justification: the growth of historical research into perpetrators, the ongoing popularity of the historical novel and the fascination with the question of evil (2017: 48-49). Jenni Adams has also pointed out that this renewed attention to the figure of the perpetrator in recent Holocaust literature "forms another key strand of the lifting of prohibitions and taboos within both literature and criticism" (2014: 251). Erin McGlothlin considers that this taboo, which until recently shunned or regulated representations of perpetrators, derives from most literary critics' belief that Holocaust fiction should focus on the victims' suffering and pain (2010: 212) in order to avoid betraying the memory of the victims (213).[5] However, she strongly defends that critics should earnestly and critically analyse the consciousness of the perpetrators: "If we leave the representation of their thoughts and motives unexamined, we construct them as abstract, mythical figures whose actions cannot be accounted for (even and particularly if their thoughts and actions remain, in their extremity, essentially incomprehensible to us)" (214).[6]

The aforementioned statement by McGlothlin is highly significant because those scholars, who in recent years have argued in favour of the need to explore perpetrator trauma, have argued that such research would contribute to destroying the perception of "perpetrators as cartoonish monsters by exposing their

ordinariness and humanity" (Mohamed 2015: 1157). Certainly, as Stef Craps and his co-authors point out, some believe that by focusing on the emotional and psychological response of perpetrators to events, there is a danger of identifying the perpetrator with the victim and excusing his or her crimes (2015: 920). Obviously, those interested in perpetrator trauma do not only reject this possibility, but emphasise that the unease that readers experience when contemplating the psychological scars of the perpetrators may derive from "the uncomfortable and challenging nature of the self-scrutiny that this entails" (Vice 2013: 16), revealing our potential for evil (Craps, Cheyette and Gibbs 2015: 920). Certainly, whereas *Time's Arrow* also belongs in the category of perpetrator trauma narrative,[7] the main aim of *The Zone of Interest* is to show how ordinary people are capable of the worst atrocities.

3. Paul Doll: The Perpetrator's Gaze through the Figure of the Buffoon

In *The Zone of Interest*, Szmul, Thomsen and Doll conclude that the concentration camp shows your soul, revealing who you really are. In Doll's words, "it's true what they say, here in the KL: No one knows themselves. Who are you? You don't know. Then you come to the Zone of Interest, and it tells you who you are" (Amis 2014: 68). Amis is very much concerned with the fact that, as survivors have constantly asserted, you discover who you really are when you find yourself in extreme circumstances: "In normal, peaceful, civilized life you are aware of ten per cent of your resources and your deeper personality, but in an atrocity producing context you find out amazing things about yourself, both the perpetrators and the victims" (Seaman 2014). In fact, in an insightful article Christopher R. Browning makes a statement that reinforces Amis's thesis: "The men who carried out these massacres, like those who refused or evaded, were human beings. I must recognize that in such a situation I could have been either a killer or an evader —both were human— if I want to understand and explain the behaviour of both as best as I can" (1992: 36).

Actually, according to Arendt, the case of Eichmann confronted the judges with the question of how long it takes an average person to overcome their repugnance toward crime and how they behave on reaching this point (2006: 93). Indeed, half a dozen psychiatrists certified that Eichmann was "normal" (25) and, for Arendt, this normality was more terrifying than all the atrocities put together, because it showed that Eichmann and many others were neither monsters nor perverted or sadistic (276).[8] Moreover, what the trial showed was that Eichmann and those who were like him represented the banality of evil since they were incapable of

thinking or at least thinking from the standpoint of somebody else (49). It was precisely this banality —this sheer thoughtlessness— that predisposed Eichmann to become one of the worst criminals of the period (288). The terrible lesson that was learnt in Jerusalem, where the trial took place, was that "such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together" (288). In the same line, Amis argues that we must accept the fact that those who implemented the Final Solution were not a gang of psychopaths "getting together saying, let's kill a lot of people, let's have an orgy of violence", but a group of people who thought they were doing something good in the name of Good (Wachtel 1996: 45).

Nearly every page of *The Zone of Interest* reports some horror, which is not the figment of Amis's imagination, but the reflection of a cruel reality, and it is in this portrayal of the enormity of the Holocaust that Doll's consciousness plays a major role. According to most critics, Doll is an admirable creation. Michael Hofmann has argued that Doll is "really the only reason for reading the book" (2014: 3) and Alex Preston maintains that "the sections in his voice are the novel's bravura performances" (2014). For his part, Wheldon believes that the "best realized is Doll, in whose company the novel is most enjoyable" (2014), and Reich has asserted that the commandant is "a masterful comic performance" (2014). Doll has also been described as "a wickedly funny Monty Python figure" (Oates 2014), a buffoon (Oates 2014; Reich 2014), an oaf, a clown. Incidentally, "clown" is the word that Arendt uses to describe Adolf Eichmann. She argues that the German transcription of the taped police examination constitutes a gold mine for a psychologist, "provided he is wise enough to understand that the horrible can be not only ludicrous but outright funny" (2006: 48). She believes that during the trial the judges became aware of his "worst clowneries" but decided to ignore them, because it would have been hard to sustain that someone like him had caused so much harm (2006: 54). This is the terrible reality that Amis portrays through the ridiculous character of Doll.

It is no surprise that the conception of this Nazi perpetrator as a comic figure in Amis's work may be met with objection. Ozick, who has been very critical of the character of Doll, has asserted that "[h]istory as comedy has a parallel effect: it trivializes the unconscionable. The blood the clown spills is always ketchup" (2014). She also claims that no genre is more liberated from the obligation to be truthful to history than comedy. This viewpoint, however, is questionable because, as some critics have proved in the last few years, comedy can deal with the Holocaust respectfully while offering a different perspective that does not belittle its enormity. Des Pres believes that comedy has become essential when coping with such a horrifying event as the Holocaust, because "humour counts most in

precisely those situations where most decisive remedies fail" (1991: 218). Mark Cory endorses De Pres's argument when he emphasises that, as a literary device, humour has "functioned aesthetically to make the unfathomable accessible to the minds and emotions of the reading public" (1995: 39). Casey Haskins reaches the same conclusion in his analysis of Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* when he argues that humour is often the only possible response to a reality before which ordinary representational strategies fail (2001: 380). *Life is Beautiful* has certainly attracted the attention of those scholars concerned with the Holocaust and its representation through comedy. Most of them agree with Haskins that the film, far from trivialising the Shoah, proves that comedy can provide a different perspective without cheapening its subject. Thus, Daniel Kotzin claims that in the film "[l] aughter is nearly irresistible but it is earned without minimizing the horror of the camp" (1998: 4), while Maurizio Viano argues that comedy can be an effective tool for the dissemination of the memory of the Holocaust (1999: 33).

In keeping with this, Amis himself has argued that humour should have no limits, although he recognises that a subject such as the Holocaust carries with it certain responsibilities, a kind of decorum that the writer must bear in mind (in Mars 2015). As Preston has argued, humour in *The Zone of Interest* is more restrained than in other works by Amis and is always directed towards the ethical ends of the novel (2014). Paul Doll is the main source of comedy in the novel and, by approaching the terrible events of the Holocaust from the point of view of a buffoon, Amis succeeds in creating a terrifying picture of the cruelty and violence of the "ordinary men" who committed mass murder. The first step in the whole process of extermination was the confinement of Jews in ghettos, where many of them died, either of starvation or disease (Gill 2018: 38). However, in Amis's novel Doll gives us his own view of life in the ghettos while blaming the Jews themselves for living in such dramatic conditions, as a way to dehumanise them:

> (As a loving father, I found it particularly hard to stomach their vicious neglect of the semi-naked children who howl, beg, sing, moan, and tremble, yellow-faced, like tiny lepers.) In Warsaw there are a dozen new cases of typhus every week, and of the ½ a million Jews 5-6,000 die every month, such is the apathy, the degeneracy, and, to be quite frank about it, the want of even the rudiments of self-respect. (Amis 2015: 110)

This biased description of the ghettos offers readers a devastating picture of this Nazi perpetrator, particularly his lack of empathy, his sense of racial superiority, his fanaticism, as well as his blindness to the fact that it is the Nazi apparatus that has led the Jews to this terrible predicament. Nonetheless, the implication that the Jews are responsible for their subhuman living conditions, for their "degeneracy",

which can be extracted from Doll's words, rather reveals the prejudices that Nazi officials like Doll had about them.

The second step for many Jews after the harsh experience of the ghetto involved being transported to a concentration camp by train. Here Amis makes the reader acquainted with what he calls "the mercenary aspect" (in Rosenbaum 2012) when he refers to these trips toward death: "how incredibly avaricious the whole operation was. The way they made the Jews pay for their tickets in the railway cars to the death camps. Yeah, and the rates for a third-class ticket, one way. And half price for children" (in Rosenbaum 2012). Precisely, in the novel one of the Nazi characters, Boris, expresses how bizarre the whole situation surrounding the train tickets is: "'You know they pay for their own tickets? They pay their own way here, Golo. I don't know how it went with those Parisians, but the norm is […]'. '…But this —this is fucking ridiculous" (Amis 2015: 41-42). As a Nazi, Boris understands the rationale behind many of the norms implemented by the Third Reich, but, like Amis, he finds it absolutely ridiculous that the victims have to pay for their tickets to Auschwitz. In fact, in the above conversation Boris refers to a train that has just arrived from Paris with new prisoners. Doll and Professor Zulz, the head doctor, do not hesitate to mock the French is spite of the ordeal they are about to go through:

> "Three classes? Well, you know the French. They do everything in style."
> "Too true, Professor," I rejoined. "Even the way they hoist the white flag has a certain —a certain *je ne sais quoi*. Not so?"
> The good doctor chuckled heartily and said, 'Damn you, Paul. Touché, my Kommandant.'
> Oh yes, we bantered and smiled in the collegial fashion […]. (Amis 2015: 22)

The fact that Doll and his colleagues can make these jokes when dealing with the painful fate of the prisoners is quite revealing, because, as Andrea Reiter explains, many reports by survivors testify to the sadistic "humour" of the SS despite the eventual doom awaiting the butt of the joke (2005: 127). Actually, throughout the novel Doll prides himself on his sense of humour, like when he jokes about the tattoo on a prisoner's arm: "And is that your phone number? Just joking" (Amis 2015: 127). He even considers himself blessed with "a sense of humour" (111) when he makes fun of a Jewish family at a funeral service in the Jewish cemetery of Warsaw. Doll shows again his cruel humour when he is confronted by a French woman who has just arrived at Auschwitz:

> "No service at all. Even in 1st class!"
> "Even in 1st class? An outrage."
> "All we had were the cold cuts we'd brought with us. And we almost ran out of mineral water!"
> "Monstrous."

> "…Why are you laughing? You laugh. Why are you laughing?"
> "Step back, Madam, if you would," I spluttered. "Senior Supervisor Grese!" (24)

The reference to Ilse Grese is highly relevant because she was Senior SS Superior at Auschwitz and killed an average of thirty people a day —hence her nickname, "the Hyena of Auschwitz". She was in charge of selecting women for the gas chamber, which explains why Doll calls her to deal with the French woman "in the appropriate manner" (25), a euphemism for her use of the most sadistic methods, such as sicking dogs on inmates. Of course, Doll "respects" her: "Grese is admirably firm with recalcitrant females" (21). As Rees explains in his memoir, Rudolf Höss, the SS officer and commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp, records that for mass murder to be successful it was vital to conduct the whole process in an atmosphere of great calm, which is why it was important to keep an eye on those individuals who could cause trouble for the Nazis on their way to the gas chamber by warning the other prisoners of what was going to happen to them. Such people were immediately removed from the scene and shot (Rees 2005: 146). Obviously, in *The Zone of Interest* the French woman does not know what is awaiting her, but the fact that she complains and therefore can disturb the whole process turns her into a threat for Doll and the deathly project he is involved in.

Once the Jews arrived at the concentration camp, what Rees has described as "one of the most infamous procedures associated with Auschwitz" started: the initial selection which "would come to symbolize the cold-hearted terror of the place" (2005: 141-142). Boris again describes it very well: "The most eerie bit's the selection" (Amis 2015: 4). The weak ones —women with children, elderly people— were sent directly to the gas chamber, whereas those fit for work, the healthy ones, were kept alive. In the novel, this process of selection is described by Doll:

> As for the Selektion: all but a few were under 10 or over 60; and even the young adults among them were, so to speak, selected already.
> Look. That 30-year-old male has a broad chest, true, but he also has a club foot. That brawny maiden is in the pink of health, assuredly, and yet she is with child. Elsewhere —spinal braces, white sticks. (23)

The fact that Doll becomes disappointed because the young woman is pregnant is highly significant because both pregnant women and mothers with children were sent directly to the gas chambers. As Rees has explained, although the selection process separated men from women and husbands from wives, Nazi officials very soon realised that it would be against their own interest to force mothers away from their children. The reason would be that "the upset involved in such separation would be so great as to rival the emotional disturbance caused to the killing squads by shooting women and children at close range —the very trauma

that the gas chambers had been designed to diminish" (Rees 2005: 168). Doll himself refers to this reality in the novel:

> And now, I see (the teletype lay before me), that that moron Gerhard Student at EAHO is floating the bright idea that all able-bodied mothers should be worked till they drop in the boot factory at Chelmek! *Fine,* I'll tell him. *And you can come to the ramp and try separating them from their children.* These people —they just don't *think.* (Amis 2015: 73, emphasis in original).

As his words evince, Doll is furious with the bureaucrats, but not because he worries about the mothers dying in the factory from hard work and starvation, since he is indifferent to their suffering. Yet, ironically, he presents himself as the actual victim of those who try to make his life more difficult, which is highly revealing, because in his final statement Eichmann argued that the court had not understood him, since he was merely "the victim of a fallacy" and only the ruling elite deserved to be punished (Arendt 2006: 247-248). Actually, Arendt argues that Eichmann's statements in the police examination are so funny because he told everything in the tone of someone who thought that people would feel sympathy for what he considered to be the hard-luck story of a man whose personal affairs and work plans always went wrong (2006: 50). Like Eichmann, Doll presents himself as a victim, not only because his colleagues and superior officers do not appreciate his work, but because, as will be discussed later, he marries a woman who overpowers him.

Once the selection was complete, it was necessary to make the Jews believe that what was going to happen was just a formal procedure, which was done for everyone's benefit, as Doll's welcoming of the prisoners reveals:

> *We apologise for the lack of sanitary facilities in the boxcars. All the more reason, though, for a hot shower and a light disinfection —because there are no diseases here and we don't* want *any.* Frightfully good, that, I had to admit. The stethoscope, the white coat (the black boots)— awfully good. *Oh, and would diabetics and those with special dietary needs report to Dr Bodman after supper at the Visitors' Lodge. Thank you.* Fearfully good, that, really 1st rate… (Amis 2015: 176, emphasis in original)

The aim of the Nazis' reassuring words was not to make the Jews' last minutes less painful, but to solve some of the problems that the procedure might generate. As Rees affirms, "[n]ot only did it prove easier to get people into the gas chamber by deception rather than outright force, it was also less stressful for the killers themselves" (2005: 121). This explains why, for Doll, the fact that the French have arrived quite "comfortable" by train is a dream come true because everything has been done peacefully without the need to use "the dogs, the truncheons, and the whips?" (Amis 2015: 25). Yet, although Doll is very proud of the way in which he welcomes the new inmates, his colleagues question his ability to deceive the prisoners:

> "What's wrong with the business of the barrel?" The barrel: this was a wheeze I dreamt up in October. Concluding my speech of welcome, I'd say, *Leave your valuables with your clothing and pick them up after the shower. But if there's anything you especially treasure and can't afford to be without, then pop it in the barrel at the end of the ramp*. I asked, "What's wrong with it?"
> "It stirs unease," said Entress. "Are their valuables safe or aren't they?"
> "Only the juvenile and the senescent fall for that 1, Kommandant," said Zulz. "All we ever find in the barrel's a jar of blood-thinners or a teddy bear." (173-174, emphasis in original)

The irony and comedy that pervades the whole extract emphasises Doll's incompetence and his role as a buffoon, who becomes the source of laughter for those who work for him. In this sense, it could be argued that one of the most subversive aspects of the novel is that Amis has created a perpetrator who is everything but strong and powerful. In fact, he is described by his wife, Hannah, as "so coarse, and so…prissy, and so ugly, and so cowardly, and so stupid" (Amis 2015: 298). Interestingly enough, Hannah is the strong one in their relationship, which is a clear reversal of the roles allocated to women married to camp commandants. Doll admits that he is afraid of her (222) and that he cannot discipline her (31). She even gives him black eyes, which, as Doll himself admits, "seriously detract from [his] aura of infallible authority" (58) and makes him feel "like a pirate or a clown in a pantomime" (59). What Doll is not aware of is that he is really a clown whom nobody respects. Doll would like Hannah to be more "tractable" (62) and more solicitous when he comes home burdened with problems (29). Nonetheless, Hannah's aim is "to hasten the psychological collapse of the Commandant" (143), because she despises what her husband is doing in Auschwitz. She knows that he sometimes uses music to muffle the horrible screams of the inmates when they are confronted with a reality they cannot process because of its terrifying nature. On such occasions, she is so numb with terror that she cannot utter a word, and only smoking helps her cope with the situation (14-15). Accordingly, the Nazis actually used music at the concentration camps, especially to calm newly arrived prisoners (Fackler). In this case, Doll has given orders to his musicians to start playing because the French inmates have just seen a heap of corpses in a lorry and are terrified:

> Now you don't go far in the Protective Custody business if you can't think on your feet and show a bit of presence of mind. Many another Kommandant, I dare say, would have let the situation at once degenerate into something decidedly unpleasant. Paul Doll, however, happens to be of a rather different stamp. With 1 wordless motion I gave the order. Not to my men-at-arms, no: to my musicians! (26)

As this excerpt from the novel shows, once again Doll is presented as a clown, an oaf, who is convinced that he is a kind of genius for the way in which he has

handled the whole situation. But for Hannah, who knows what he has done, this is just another instance of his cruelty and inhumanity, which leaves her devastated. In fact, at the end of the book she admits that she has been destroyed by what she witnessed and experienced in Auschwitz (Amis 2015: 299).

Nevertheless, Amis does not only recreate the devastating effect of the perpetrators' actions on their victims and even themselves; he also explains the rationale behind some of them. Thus, gassing was not the Nazis' first option. They started by shooting the Jews, but then they decided to use Zyklon B to eliminate them, not only because it was cheaper, but because it helped the executioners cope with their task (Rees 2005: 89-90). One of the characters in the novel, Professor Konrad Peters, describes the reasons for this change: "But the gas chambers and the crematories are just epiphenomena. The idea was to speed things up, and *economise* of course, and to spare the nerves of the killers. The killers…those slender reeds" (Amis 2015: 246). According to Rees, when Heinrich Himmler visited Minsk in August 1941 to see the work of the killing squads first-hand, he realised that many of the officers were traumatised after the executions, since the shootings included women and children (2005: 86). Eichmann himself was horrified when he went to Minsk and Lwów and saw the shootings: "Our people will go mad or become insane, our own people" (Arendt 2006: 89). In the novel, one of the characters refers to the way in which some of the Nazis were mentally destroyed by the denigrating tasks they were asked to fulfil: "I heard they were killing psychiatric patients in Konigsberg. Why? To clear bedspace. Who for? For all the men who'd cracked up killing women and children in Poland and Russia" (Amis 2015: 95). Doll himself admits that not everybody is prepared to follow the execution orders: "And mind you, disposing of the young and elderly requires other strengths and virtues —fanaticism, radicalism, severity, implacability, hardness, iciness, mercilessness, und so weiter" (123). Here the use of irony and more particularly antiphrasis —what Doll considers virtues are obviously unacceptable vices— enables Amis to emphasise once again the brutality and dehumanisation of the Nazis.

One of the cruellest jokes that readers can find in the novel in relation to the extermination of the Jews appears when a woman who has just arrived at the camp smears lice on Doll's face and he has to follow the same protocol as the inmates to get disinfected: he is told to take off his clothes and fold them tidily (Amis 2015: 181). The whole situation is ironic because Zyklon B was used initially at Auschwitz as an insecticide and that the "epiphany" about the mass killing potential of this gas occurred when Karl Fritzsch, Höss's deputy, came to the conclusion that "[if] Zyklon B could be used to kill lice, why could it not be used to kill human pests?" (Rees 2005: 89). Once the prisoners had been gassed

in the chambers, the Nazi officers had to get rid of the bodies. At first, they decided to bury them in what Amis ironically calls in the novel the "Spring Meadow" (Amis 2015: 37). The problem is that the bodies soon start to putrefy, and the smell becomes unbearable, as readers can grasp from Doll's words: "You could smell it, of course; and you could hear it. Popping, splatting, hissing" (65). A delegation of local worthies talks to Doll about the problem the population is facing:

> "…They said it's undrinkable no matter how many times you boil it. The pieces have started to ferment, Hauptsturmfuhrer. The water table's breached. There's no alternative. The smell is going to be unbelievable."
>
> "The smell is *going* to be unbelievable, my Kommandant? You don't think it's unbelievable already?" (61, emphasis in original)

In this extract Doll is addressing Wolfgang Prufer, his *Lagerführer*, who is shocked by Doll's inability to acknowledge a terrible reality. In fact, Doll does not realise that Prufer is just being ironic and reprimands him for always complaining. Because of the smell, they have to dig up the bodies and find a way to get rid of them. The first idea they have in the novel is to blow them up, which, of course, creates a surrealistic situation, because rather than disappear completely, the corpses go everywhere and there are "bits hanging from the trees" (65-66). When reading this scene in *The Zone of Interest*, one is tempted to believe that this is just another instance of Amis's sarcastic humour. Even Doll, who is an incompetent officer, is perplexed when they tell him about the experiment, because he realises how ludicrous the whole thing is. Unfortunately, the whole episode is based on facts. Amis is merely reproducing the testimony of Wilhelm Jaschke, a captain in Einsatzkommando 8 (Rees 2005: 87), who explains that Albert Widmann, an SS Untersturmführer from the Technical Institute of Criminal Police, in charge of devising a new method of killing the prisoners, first thought that to blow them up would be a viable option. He put several mentally ill patients in a bunker with a packet of explosives, and the result was truly heinous.

Given the aforementioned unsuccessful experiment, Doll decides that the best option is to burn the corpses, but he does not know how to make naked bodies catch fire (Amis 2015: 74). Ironically enough, it is precisely Szmul, the leader of the *Sonderkommando*—the Jewish prisoners in charge of throwing the bodies into the fire— who gives him a series of suggestions "which, as it happened, proved key" (74).[9] Pressburger, who was a member of the *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz, testifies to this reality and emphasises that the stench was terrible (Rees 2005: 144). Pressburger's reference to the stench provoked by the burning of bodies is of utmost importance, because, as Kakutani has pointed

out, one of the most powerful aspects of the novel is Amis's "insistent dwelling on the stench that emanated from the camp (which would have been impossible for nearby residents to ignore, however invested they might have been in denial)" (2014). The stench became part of life in Auschwitz, and obviously nobody could ignore it. In fact, one of the civilian contractors at the Buna-Werke plant complains to Doll that in the town, which is 50 km away, it is impossible to swallow a mouthful from six to 10 p.m. because the wind brings the terrible smell. Even Doll is shocked when he goes outside and is confronted with the disgusting smell:

> During the drive back […] I kept pulling over and sticking my head out of the window and taking a sniff. It was as bad as I've ever known it, and it just got worse and worse and worse…
>
> I felt as if I were in one of those cloacal dreams that all of us have from time to time —you know, where you seem to turn into a frothing geyser of hot filth, like a stupendous oil strike, and it just keeps on coming and coming and piling up everywhere no matter what you try and do. (Amis 2015: 112, emphasis in original)

The smell was really so unbearable that a British prisoner who survived after working at the Buna-Werke, stated that he could never forget the "sweetish gagging corruption that caught at the throat and nose and clung to clothes and hair" (Jeffreys 2008: 234). Doll's approach to this terrible reality shows to what extent he is delusional, since he believes that everyone has from time to time what he calls the "cloacal dream", which he describes using words like "geyser" or "stupendous", as if he were describing something beautiful.

Moreover, Doll, who represents the quintessence of Nazism and is becoming more paranoid and grotesque as the novel advances, imagines himself surrounded by dead bodies recently exhumed for immolation on the pyre while he is attending a concert. However, in juxtaposition to the corpses of Jews, he believes that dead German bodies do not stink: "And how sweet the Aryans smelled! If I rendered them into smoke and flame, the burning bones (I felt confident) would not forsake that fresh aroma!" (Amis 2015: 191). Doll admits that this is not the first time his mind plays tricks on him. During his previous experience as a concert spectator, he "spent the whole $2^{1/2}$ hours intently estimating how long it would take (given the high ceiling as against the humid conditions) to gas the audience" (70). Doll's ludicrous daydreams show the extent to which he is obsessed with his work and believes in the righteousness of the Nazi project. In another passage from the novel, he goes so far as to state that the fact that prisoners are often incapable of assimilating what they see at the camp is "a reminder of —and a tribute to— the blinding *radicalism* of the KL" (27-28, emphasis in original). By

characterising Doll as a buffoon who is constantly despised and ridiculed by his wife and colleagues, who is not aware of his own shortcomings and who wholeheartedly supports the Nazi vision, Amis is capable of dealing with some of the most terrible atrocities committed by the perpetrators from a different perspective.

4. Conclusion

There is a moment in the novel when Doll says to Szmul that he has never hated the Jews, but something "had to be done about them" (Amis 2015: 139). Doll goes so far as to ask himself why they do what they do (222). Doll's moment of doubt does not last long, but it is highly revealing because, as Eaglestone has argued, both perpetrator testimony and perpetrator fiction seem to promise to answer the question "why", explaining why the protagonists committed such atrocities, but in the end they fail to answer the question they posed for themselves. They swerve, leaving "our speech broken, with nothing to say" (2017: 29). It is obvious that, for Amis, there is no reason, and his aim with *The Zone of Interest* is not to provide a definitive answer or interpretation. As Julia Klein has asserted, "It may require a novelist's skill to penetrate the psyche of a Holocaust perpetrator. But even when the novelist is as accomplished as Martin Amis, the mystery of radical evil is probably destined to remain elusive —possible to describe, but not to understand" (2014).

In this novel, Amis makes no claim of offering the reader new insights into the Holocaust, but to remind them of its enormity. He truly believes that it is important to remember an episode of modern history whose brutality and horror still leave us bewildered (Rosenbaum 2012), and in order to achieve his goal he uses comedy, which, according to him, is the only form left that can take on the real ills (Wachtel 1996: 53). In a world where evil is not always punished and good is not necessarily rewarded, "we can deal with iniquity only by sneering and laughing if off the stage" (Wachtel 1996: 53). Since the machinery of punishment and conversion has become obsolete, the writer can only use ridicule to achieve his aims. This is precisely what Amis does in *The Zone of Interest* by creating Doll, a buffoon who shows that intellectually and morally shallow people can become the incarnation of evil. By approaching the atrocities committed at Auschwitz from the point of view of a character who is defined by his stupidity, incompetence and fanaticism, Amis offers the reader a different perspective and makes them realise that those responsible for the worst crimes during the Holocaust were not monsters or exceptional human beings, but normal, vulnerable people who had the fate of millions of Jews in their hands.

Notes

1. Ozick has criticised Amis for what she considers to be a manipulation of Levi's words (2014).

2. Although Amis asserts that he based the character of Doll on Rudolf Höss, Alex Preston has argued that Doll exists somewhere between Rudolf Höss and Kurt Franz, an SS officer and commandant at the Treblinka death camp, whose nickname was Doll (2014).

3. On the figure of Szmul, see Aída Díaz Bild (2018). In an interview Amis explains that in *Time's Arrow* he dealt with the victims from a distance, but by the time he started working on *The Zone of Interest*, he felt closer to them, because now he was married to a Jewish woman whose family were Holocaust victims (in Mars). Already in 1993 Amis defined himself as a philo-Semite and emphasised how much he admired the Jews for their heightened intelligence and their tendency towards transcendentalism (Self 1993: 162).

4. Most of the articles on *Time's Arrow* focus on how the experimental narrative strategies —double narrator, reverse chronological order, defamiliarisation— contribute to the novel's ethical import. See McCarthy (1999), Vice (2000), Martínez-Alfaro (2008) and Chatman (2009).

5. In his analysis of Jonathan Littell's "Les Bienveillantes", Debarati Sanyal expresses the same idea: "How can its narrative deployment be dedicated to those who perished at their hands" (2010: 50).

6. McGlothlin's statement echoes Aharon Appelfeld's thoughts on the Holocaust. He rejects the tendency to mystify the Holocaust, to link the extermination of Jews to the incomprehensible, the mysterious, the insane and the meaningless (1988: 92).

7. See Martínez-Alfaro (2011) and Roldán-Sevillano (2021).

8. It is highly revealing that throughout the novel Doll emphasises again and again that he is "a normal man with normal needs. I am completely normal. This is what nobody seems to understand" (Amis 2015: 32, emphasis in original).

9. Amis pays so much attention to the episode of digging up the bodies and burning them because he thinks that historians have not paid enough attention to it. He believes that the Germans were trying to cover their tracks, although it was only 1942, because they knew they were going to lose the war and would have to pay for their terrible crimes if they came to light (Seaman 2014).

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Received: 06/01/2024
Accepted: 09/07/2024

AN EDUCATION FOR (FUTURE) HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND LITERARY SCHOLARS: AUDRE LORDE'S *THE CANCER JOURNALS* AND MARISA MARCHETTO'S *CANCER VIXEN*

UNA EDUCACIÓN PARA (FUTURAS/OS) PROFESIONALES DE LA SALUD Y EXPERTAS/OS EN LITERATURA: *THE CANCER JOURNALS* DE AUDRE LORDE Y *CANCER VIXEN* DE MARISA MARCHETTO

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202410198

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Abstract

Life-writing on breast cancer vindicates women's health rights, but, as this article demonstrates, the autopathographies *Cancer Journals* (1980) by Audre Lorde and *Cancer Vixen* (2006) by Marisa Marchetto also have the potential to teach lessons to (future) health professionals and scholars in literary studies, so that they can, respectively, improve their interactions with patients and understand the therapeutic power of illness narratives to emotionally heal their authors and intended female readers. Lorde uses the weapon of anger both to criticize how cancer patients are dehumanized by the often-insensitive medical profession and to proudly assert her post-mastectomy identity as a one-breasted warrior. Meanwhile, Marchetto opts for humor to describe her eleven-month war against breast cancer and its associated complications: her lack of health insurance to treat her illness and her fear of losing her fiancé. Yet, as this article examines, *Cancer Vixen* shows the illuminating power of graphic medicine as a breakthrough narrative form, to mitigate the antagonism between doctors and cancer patients, while enhancing literary scholars' and health professionals' empathic understanding of patients' personal stories of illness beyond clinical and hospital encounters.

Keywords: breast cancer, diaries, graphic medicine, patient, health professionals.

Resumen

Los testimonios de mujeres sobre el cáncer de mama reclaman su derecho a la salud, pero como este ensayo demuestra, *Cancer Journals* (1980) de Audre Lorde y *Cancer Vixen* (2006) de Marisa Marchetto igualmente enseñan lecciones a (futuras/os) profesionales de la salud y a expertas/os en literatura para, respectivamente, mejorar sus relaciones con las pacientes de cáncer y apreciar el poder terapéutico de las autopatografías: la recuperación emocional de sus autoras y lectoras. Lorde emplea el arma de la rabia para criticar que la profesión médica es insensible y deshumaniza a la enferma de cáncer, además de afirmar, con orgullo, su nueva identidad tras la mastectomía: guerrera con un solo pecho. En cambio, Marchetto elige el humor para describir su batalla de once meses contra el cáncer de mama y sus complicaciones: no tener seguro médico para tratar su enfermedad y su miedo a perder a su prometido. No obstante, como este artículo examina, *Cancer Vixen* refleja que la medicina gráfica, como nuevo género narrativo, mitiga el antagonismo entre médicos y pacientes, a la vez que ayuda a que profesionales sanitarios y expertas/os en literatura empaticen con las historias personales de las enfermas de cáncer de mama más allá de encuentros clínicos y hospitalarios.

Palabras clave: cáncer de mama, diarios, medicina gráfica, paciente, profesional sanitario.

1. Autopathographies on Breast Cancer

Breast cancer forms in the cells of the breasts and, according to the Mayo Clinic, it is the second most common cancer diagnosed in women in the United States. Breast cancer patients face traumatic, invasive surgical procedures, such as lumpectomy, mastectomy and breast reconstruction, often in combination with equally painful hormone therapies, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Historically, cancer has been enveloped in a fog of secrecy, fear and stigma that renders individuals with the disease socially invisible and their post-surgery, post-treatment anatomies weak and ravaged. As Susan Sontag notes, because cancer has been felt to be a "morally, if not literally, contagious" disease, many cancer patients have been shunned by relatives and friends as if they had an infection (1978: 3). In recent times, social awareness and research funding have helped to advance the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer to the point that, today, deaths associated with this illness have declined thanks to enhanced understanding of the disease and an individualized treatment regimen for each patient's recovery. Caring for the individual experiences of women with cancer and showing empathy for their physical pain and psychological damage during their illness are vital battles to

eliminate the fog around cancer. During second-wave feminism, women's political activism along with literature have contributed to defeating breast cancer both medically and socially. Adrienne Rich posits that, in the second half of the twentieth century, a vigorous feminist movement advocating for medicine to support female needs, has defied the medical industry and healthcare systems, which have been arrogant and indifferent to women (1986: x). Female patients have been essential to this health feminism in their refusal to submit to medical authority —often male— and have reclaimed their rights to be listened to by health professionals and to tell their own stories about their ill —or pathologized— bodies and minds. As Anne Boyer states, "disease is never neutral. Treatment never not ideological. Mortality never without its politics" (2019: 123), so women's life-writings have joined the public debate around female health rights and survival. Notably, two paradigmatic texts advocating for greater empathy and better care by the medical profession in the management of women's illnesses are *The Bell Jar* (1963) by Sylvia Plath, related to mental health and psychiatry, and *The Cancer Journals* (1980) by Audre Lorde, for breast cancer and oncology.

Edmund Pellegrino, a pioneer of modern medical ethics, contends that "medicine is the most humane of sciences, the most scientific of the humanities" (2011: 313). The interdisciplinary field of medical humanities explores human health and disease through the methods and materials of the creative arts and humanities, including literature. This discipline envisages improving healthcare practice by influencing its practitioners to both refine and complexify their judgments in clinical situations based on a deep, complex understanding of illness, suffering and personhood (Shapiro et al. 2009: 192-193). Medical humanities offers health professionals knowledge and sensitivity about the patient's experience of illness, her circumstances and surroundings and her emotional spectrum —from strength, courage and optimism to vulnerability, panic and defeatism— which have been traditionally ignored by the education and routine work of health practitioners; yet, they enrich the quality of medical care and foster mutual understanding in doctor-patient relationships.

Medical humanities also enlightens literary scholars to better examine the genre of autopathography, which Anne Hawkins defines as "a form of autobiography […] that describes personal experiences of illness, treatment, and sometimes death" (1998: 1). To explain the artistic boom in autopathography since the second half of the twentieth century, Hawkins argues that an autopathography is a "modern adventure story" when "life becomes filled with risk and danger as the ill person is transported out of the familiar everyday world into the realm of the body that no longer functions" (1). This type of illness narratives[1] also becomes "the logical counterpart to the medical history written by the physician" because it describes

how the experience of being sick and the treatment of illness are understood by its patient, who is its author (12). Beyond the impersonal, objective knowledge of a biomedical condition on the part of health professionals, the subjective first-person account of being ill is a literary form that gives voice to typically silenced individuals —the patients— and describes how their lives are conditioned by disease. For Thomas Couser, an autopathography becomes a cathartic act of scriptotherapy "by heightening one's awareness of one's mortality, threatening one's sense of identity, and disrupting the apparent plot of one's life" (1997: 5); so to say, the act of writing about being ill facilitates the patient's emotional recovery. Additionally, an autopathography denounces social constructions of the sick body as evil, dangerous, shameful or ugly, while becoming a personal counternarrative of the patient's fight against their marginalization and dehumanization in clinical interactions and elsewhere. Illness involves the transient or enduring alteration not only of the physical self, but also of the inner self. Virginia Woolf emphasizes the tremendous spiritual change that illness brings to its sufferer, who feels "the waters of annihilation" (1926: 32). An autopathography thus expresses emotional pain, fear and anxiety or how harrowing it is to be seriously ill and, even, to face death. Yet, as Theresa MacPhail states, this form of illness narrative is "a method for coming to terms with the myriad effects, both positive and negative, on our worlds of any crisis, chronic illness, or contagious disease" (2014: 5). Indeed, an autopathography also illustrates an individual's ability to transform the ordeal of being sick, making it into an empowering act leading to personal growth, knowledge about the world, finding meaning in life and even laughing at adversity.

In the case of cancer, Federica Frediani contends that this disease suddenly and brutally drives patients to a marginal space, where their bodies are exposed to violent therapies —ultimately to loss and even to death— so they feel separated from their former selves, and writing their stories becomes a tool with which to reclaim agency, deal with grief, reconnect with their former identities and, in the process, acquire a new one (2017: 254). Accordingly, as an autopathography, *The Cancer Journals* shares Lorde's fear of dying and mourning of her amputated right breast. Yet, she accepts her new post-mastectomy physical self and defends any woman's right and duty to speak of her illness and to make her own decisions about her body. Sontag argues that metaphors to describe cancer and its treatments usually come from the language of warfare and military terminology (1978: 4). Symbolically, cancer cells are enemies that invade and massacre the cancer patient's body and are counterattacked by oncologists. In *The Cancer Journals*, Lorde becomes a warrior who narrates her early battles during her fourteen-year personal war against breast cancer. She also aims the artillery of her feminist criticism to target the often-insensitive medical profession, the cold hospital institution and the profit-driven beauty business of replacement breasts. Lorde sees enemies both

inside her own body —the cancer cells— and outside her body —healthcare providers. Hence, how can the rage in *The Cancer Journals* help (future) health professionals to advance their expertise and treatment of patients afflicted with this illness? If we trust Virginia Woolf's harsh analysis of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the use of anger discredits a writer and ruins her literature. The purpose of this essay is twofold. On the one hand, it discusses key *angry* elements from *The Cancer Journals*, which can be, indeed, instructive for health practitioners, and reflects the beneficial use of humor in comics belonging to the new literary genre known as graphic medicine, like *Cancer Vixen* (2006) by Marisa Acocella Marchetto (1962), to enhance doctor-patient communication. On the other hand, focusing on the field of literary studies, this article highlights the power of autopathography as a consolidated narrative form, to become an effective therapy for authors and intended readers to navigate sickness and its mental wounds, while gaining an in-depth understanding of the subjective experience of illness that counterbalances the authority of physicians and healthcare systems in the management of breast cancer.

2. The Patient's Anger: Audre Lorde

Cancer patients may construct their own narratives as subjective experiences of illness beyond the patient-doctor encounter, their medical history and the scientific management of their symptoms (Karpf 2013: 179). In agreement with this writing choice, Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* does not revolve around breast cancer itself, but around what it feels like being a woman with this illness: her mental and physical pain, despair and fear of dying. Lorde's autopathography, stressing her own emotions and sensations, complements objective knowledge about breast cancer that health professionals must acquire and employ at work on a daily basis.

Iris Young argues that, in our culture, the woman feels and is, indeed, judged and evaluated according to the size and contours of her breasts, both as visible signifiers of her womanliness, and as fetishes, thus blurring the lines between sexuality and motherhood and becoming objects of sexual desire (2005: 76-77). Accordingly, non-medical readers of Lorde's autopathography also observe that having breasts is not only a biological fact about the female anatomy, but also a worry, or even an obsession, in women's lives. Breasts become some kind of discourse for patients to be accepted and approved in social and sexual contexts. Mastectomy is surgery to remove all breast tissue from a breast to treat or prevent breast cancer, including breast skin and nipple. It is a routine operation for doctors; yet, for women, this procedure involves both a physical loss and the mental mourning of that loss. The surgery to restore the shape of an amputated breast is called breast reconstruction

and may be undertaken at the same time as a mastectomy or in a second operation later. In *The Cancer Journals*, Lorde confesses that she is against prostheses as "a norm for post-mastectomy women" (2020: 56) and against breast reconstruction, although she admits that other women are entitled not to share her views and choices about her ill body. Lorde decides never to hide the fact that she has a missing breast as she reflects in her autopathography. Ten days after her mastectomy, she remembers visiting her doctor for the first time without a prosthesis —a "wad of lambswool pressed into a pale pink breast-shaped pad" (34)— and being confronted by a nurse, who tells Lorde "you will feel so much better with it on" (52) and who reprimands her for not wearing one, because it was "bad for the morale of the office" (52). The text reveals that, for this medical staff, Lorde's choice represents a defeat for other cancer sufferers. The nurse does not care for the patient's own morale and denies her space to mourn the painful change in her body (Karpf 2013: 187). Lorde confesses being speechless during that encounter, and that is why she makes her own diagnosis in *The Cancer Journals*: the patient's silence about her health rights and feelings is as harmful as cancer itself, so ill people must find their own voices to defend themselves against verbal assaults, while healthcare workers must avoid inconsiderate remarks.

Divided into three parts, *The Cancer Journals* were written between 1977 and 1979 when, like Marchetto, Lorde was in her forties. In its second part —"Breast Cancer: A Black Lesbian Feminist Experience"— she explains her experience with mastectomy and feeling discriminated against as a person with breast cancer. This section alternates among Lorde's recollections, recording transcriptions and the reprint of short journal entries written by her in the hospital. The use of tape recordings during her stay in the medical institution, which she replays at home at the time of writing *The Cancer Journals*, was the way in which Lorde captured what she could not bring herself to write in her journal because she was weak, tired and in pain. The author claims that healthcare systems and professionals do not seem to care about the emotional problems of cancer patients who endure invasive surgery. Alfred Hornung states that, in *The Cancer Journals*, the hospital institution, including its layout and organization, extinguishes all feelings and "reduces human beings to the status of what the word patient literally means: a non-active persona acted upon" (2022: 133), just as Lorde recalls: "the very bland whiteness of the hospital, which I railed against and hate […] a blank environment within whose undifferentiated and undemanding and infantilizing walls I could continue to be emotionally vacant —psychic mush— without being required by myself or anyone to be anything else" (2020: 38-39). Besides, Lorde is invaded by fear: "There is the horror of those flashing lights passing over my face, and the clanging of disemboweled noises that have no context nor relationship to me except to assault me" (28). The repetitive start of each sentence with "I remember"

shows the depersonalization or dehumanization felt by Lorde as a post-mastectomy patient in hospital: "I remember screaming and cursing with pain in the recovery room, and I remember a disgusted nurse giving me a shot. I remember a voice telling me to be quiet because there were sick people here, and my saying, 'well, I have a right, because I'm sick too'" (28-29). Although doctors partly rely on information provided by their patients, they assume all responsibility for diagnosis, prognosis and therapy, while patients submit to their doctors' authority for the decision-making in the management of their illnesses (Lupton 2012: 112). To function effectively, hospital life also involves routines and regulations which nurses and other healthcare workers impose on patients. Lorde depicts a side of medicine and healthcare that training in these fields discount: the incongruity between what the patient considers to be her life's great crisis, characterized by powerlessness and her subjugation to forces outside her control, and the fact that such crises, for healthcare providers, seem a part of the everyday routine of their professions (Schleifer and Vannatta 2019: 96). Lorde also feels that she is being ignored and damaged by health professionals, who disregard her emotional needs, while they control and monitor her ill body.

Beyond being an autobiographical testimony of illness, *The Cancer Journals* also becomes literary when Lorde asserts her desire to survive, not to die; to be a warrior, not a victim. In her journal entry from September 21, 1978, she wonders how in previous centuries, the women warriors of Dahomey —the only known all-female army in history— coped with losing one of their breasts when they were only girls. These female soldiers from the African kingdom of Dahomey —today's Benin— were known for the fierceness and courage in combat to protect their king, so the Europeans who first encountered them, called them Amazons. In *The Cancer Journals*, Lorde employs the term Amazon to describe the Dahomey women warriors because, according to Greek mythology, Amazons were excellent horse riders who cut or burned off their right breasts to have better bow control and become more effective archers. Amazons are also a feminist myth of powerful, independent warriors who fought in wars against male-dominated societies and lived freely in all-female communities, and they are frequently found as characters in breast cancer memoirs. Although Greek Amazons and the Dahomey warriors were not part of the same civilization, Lorde fuses them and wonders how they must have felt when having their breast cut off. She does not describe her own mastectomy to her readers but compares her own sacrifice —the amputation of her right breast to escape death— with the sacrifice of Amazons and the Dahomey warriors —the amputation of their right breasts to become better fighters. But more importantly, Lorde identifies herself with these mythical and historical women to embrace her new identity as a one-breasted survivor. In her analysis of the language of warfare, Robina Khalid argues that

during the process of her recovery, Lorde imagines herself to be a warrior as a defense mechanism against those who would make her feel inadequate after the surgery (2008: 701), including health professionals. Instead of having swords or bows with arrows, Lorde has words as weapons to help herself and other breast cancer sufferers to heal and, like Amazons and the Dahomey warriors, she cherishes living in a community of women, who offer her love and support in her war against cancer.

In *The Beauty Myth*, concerned with society's unrealistic standards of flawless female physical beauty, Naomi Wolf argues that women delay mammograms for fear of losing a breast and becoming "only half a woman" and, although implants make cancer detection more difficult, women increasingly choose to undergo breast surgery for purposes of enhanced sexual desirability (1991: 229, 243). A leg prosthesis is useful because it helps a person to walk, but Lorde believes that breast prostheses, or "false breasts" (2020: 56), are cosmetic devices placed not for well-being or health reasons, but instead are designed "for appearance only" (56). This intensifies the belief that, in our culture, being a woman means having breasts, while having perfect, prominent and symmetrical breasts means being a more worthy female. Contrary to these rules, Lorde embraces her own deviance from biology and the beauty canon after mastectomy: "Prosthesis offers the empty comfort of 'Nobody will know the difference'. But it is that very difference which I wish to affirm, because I have lived it, and survived it, and wish to share that strength with other women" (54). Lorde reconceives her own anatomy by explaining what her breast means to her: it gives her pleasure, but not apart from the rest of her body (Alexander 1994: 701). Although she mourns her beautiful right breast which was removed, she believes that she must reconcile herself with her forced loss, instead of concealing this physical loss by means of a prosthesis: "Either I would love my body one-breasted now, or remain forever alien to myself" (Lorde 2020: 37). She also rejects existing gender stereotypes in society that support that post-mastectomy female patients like herself are asexual and unattractive, when she insists that "a woman can be beautiful and one-breasted" (57). Indeed, Lorde places herself "in the vanguard of a new fashion" (58), as the first one who designed clothes and jewelry to favor "asymmetrical patterns" (58), and intended to be worn by one-breasted women like herself. Readers of *The Cancer Journals*, both healthcare workers and those outside of the medical field, can admire Lorde's fierce determination as a post-mastectomy warrior, while realizing that breast cancer patients not only endure a life-threatening illness, but also life-lasting social and sexual pressures and expectations to maintain female beauty standards about their breasts, compulsorily viewed in plural.

Lorde also condemns the process by which a prosthesis trivializes and ignores women's own perceptions of themselves, particularly in the case of African American female patients like herself. This is illustrated by the episode of a volunteer from the US association Reach for Recovery who visits her after her mastectomy. While this white person praises the advantages of prostheses, Lorde "look[s] away, thinking, 'I wonder if there are any black lesbian feminists in Reach for Recovery?' […] I needed to talk with women who shared at least some of my major concerns and beliefs and visions, who shared at least some of my language. And this lady, admirable though she might be, did not" (2020: 35). Lorde explains that the pink prosthesis "was the wrong color, and looked grotesquely pale through the cloth of my bra" (36). By denouncing how her own racial difference is discounted by this pale-colored prosthesis manufactured for white women, she emphasizes how illness —like being Black, a lesbian and a mother— is not experienced in a uniform way by all women: she is not like others; she does not want to comply with the social norm of having, or pretending to have, two breasts. Lorde appears to represent the racist cliché of the Angry Black Woman (ABW) which permeates US culture. As Melissa Harris-Perry states, Black women's passion and righteous indignation are often misread as irrational anger, so this image is used to silence and shame them if they challenge social inequalities, complain about their circumstances or demand fair treatment (in West 2018: 149). Yet, Lorde transcends the social punishment inherent to the ABW stereotype and exhibits the literary use of loud anger in her autopathography to denounce white privilege and the invisibility of Black patients in the (medical) treatment of breast cancer patients.

The Cancer Journals also discusses the profit-oriented medical industry of breast reconstruction. Lorde rejects the aesthetic operation of silicone gel implants inserted by plastic surgeons, as well as the preventive removal of her heathy left breast. She views the demand for a normal body, on which the choices of prosthesis and breast reconstruction are based, as "an index of this society's attitudes toward women in general as decoration and externally defined sex object" (2020: 53). Contrary to this, Lorde asks that health workers, from doctors to volunteers in cancer associations, respect her decision, which strengthens the educational dimension of her autopathography for all types of readers. Mastectomy was mandatory to save her life. Conversely, wearing a prosthesis and breast reconstruction do not obey medical, but social impositions of feminine beauty and homogeneity.

The Cancer Journals gives visibility and strength to its author and to her female readers as breast cancer patients to define and empower their post-mastectomy selves. Any lethal illness is a life crisis, but also has the potential to change one's

life. Unlike other women choosing to ignore the pain and fear of cancer, Lorde seeks strength at the heart of her own cancer experience: she uses her pain and fear to better understand that the high risk of dying is a source of power. Death must be integrated into life and cancer enables Lorde to embrace her new one-breasted body, to learn to love life, and enjoy being alive. Beyond the fact that her autopathography is the best therapy of self-healing, it is equally important for Lorde to admit, thanks to her cancer ordeal, that health is a political issue: "If we are to translate the silence surrounding breast cancer into language and action against this scourge, then the first step is that women with mastectomies must become visible to each other" (Lorde 2020: 54). Being a voiceless patient means powerlessness, particularly in the case of female Black patients. Meanwhile, writing about illness means becoming powerful because, as Hornung notes, by extending her text into the reality of her readers, Lorde builds a "community of like-minded people" sharing a common experience (2022: 133). Arthur Frank claims that one type of illness narrative is the "quest story", in which the ill person accepts their illness and believes that "something is to be gained" through the experience of being sick (1995: 115-116). *The Cancer Journal* is, indeed, the story of a quest in which Lorde embraces her own cancer to make a meaningful contribution to the world: patient advocacy. In other words, her autopathography seeks to *gain* rights for its intended addressees —other breast cancer warriors— and to win the war against the social stigmatization and the medical dehumanization that women may endure on their journey toward survival or death. Identifying these two pathological conditions associated with breast cancer becomes Lorde's proposal to educate any reader of her quest story.

3. The Patient's Humor: Marisa Marchetto

More than twenty years after Lorde published her autopathography, the Italian American cartoonist Marisa Acocella Marchetto writes *Cancer Vixen*, whose artistic gun is not loaded with Lorde's anger, but with humor to narrate her eleven-month story with breast cancer, from diagnosis until cure. Nancy Walker identifies essential characteristics of women writers' humor in the United States: they write about what they know best and concerns them most; their humor is less aggressive and hostile than that of men; and their jokes can capture the incongruity between promise and reality to send feminist messages toward gender equality (1998: 32). However, race is not accounted for in Walker's description of humor, so whiteness is presented as a universal feature, like Lorde's pale-colored prosthesis manufactured for white women. Marchetto's graphic novel is consistent with these traits of US female humor: she writes about herself; she does not attack but,

instead, nurtures friendly ties with health professionals; and she guides unrealistic women, who may resist learning more about breast cancer, doing self-exams and having mammograms after reaching the age of forty. However, *Cancer Vixen* also epitomizes the illuminating power of graphic medicine to serve both healthcare and the literary study of illness narratives. Since its coinage in 2007 by the comic-doctor Ian Williams, graphic medicine has entered medical humanities as an umbrella term for comics and graphic novels on being sick. In 2015, comic-nurse M.K. Czerwiec and her collaborators published *The Graphic Medicine Manifesto*, which defines graphic medicine as "the intersection of the medium of comics and the discourse of health care" to train health professionals, and as "an emerging area of interdisciplinary academic study" (2015: 1). This type of comic, exemplified by *Cancer Vixen*, becomes a valuable text for both readers employed in healthcare and scholars on illness narratives to better understand their authors as patients and the power of literature toward (self-)healing, while enhancing quality care and communication in doctor-patient encounters. Physicians may successfully excise a cancerous tumor and, later, find its best clinical treatment, but they also need instruments to stop the cancer sufferers' emotional bleeding in the process of eliminating illness.

Traditionally, humor has been viewed as a form of entertainment, not as serious writing to be immortalized by the literary canon, and the same can be said for comics, which usually employ humor. Traditionally, writing has never been a decent career for women, as in the advice given to US wisecracker Dorothy Parker by her grandfather, which she comically expresses in a poem: "My dear,/ Remember what I tell you when you're choosing a career: […] Rob your neighbors' houses in the dark midnight;/ but think of your families, and please don't write" (2010: 309). Traditionally, humor is unsuitable, vulgar and offensive when narrating a serious, painful and dangerous illness like cancer. Contrary to all these traditions, Marchetto —a female illustrator working for the magazines *Glamour* and *The New Yorker*— uses satire and comedy to laugh at her illness and at herself as a patient toward purposes of survival and self-healing, because, as *The Graphic Medicine Manifesto* states, "comics have often been associated with cultural changes and are ideal for exploring taboo or forbidden areas of illness and healthcare" (Czerwiec et al. 2015: 3). *Cancer Vixen* does.

Marchetto's graphic novel recounts her cancer experience in chronological order, including the continuation of her professional career as a cartoonist and her romance and ultimate marriage to the famous restaurateur Sylvano. Breast cancer is, therefore, not the only narrative event in Marchetto's life during the eleven months of her illness. In *Cancer Vixen* she uses parody and clowning in her self-portrait as a patient, as if she personified a happy-go-lucky fictional female character

snatched from the US television show *Sex and the City*: "a shoe-crazy, lipstick-obsessed, wine-swilling, pasta-slurping, fashion-fanatic, single-forever, about-to-get-married big city-girl cartoonist […] with a fabulous life" (2006: 1), when she "finds… a lump in her breast?!?" (1). Text and images reflect that urbanite Marisa loves being a socialite in New York's vanity fair: haute-couture clothes, high heels, fancy cars and restaurants, expensive getaways to Europe, glamorous galas before, during and after her illness, because her daily existence can be fabulous —if she wants it to— even while having a tumor in her breast. Cancer might kill her, but it cannot define her or rule all her days and nights. Marisa is not what a scholar in literary studies expects to find in a patient with a life-threatening illness: neither the helpless victim to be pitied nor the furious warrior, like Lorde, to be admired, because there is no prototype for breast cancer sufferers. For Arthur Frank, another type of illness story is the "restitution narrative", whose plot is, "Yesterday I was healthy, today I'm sick but tomorrow I'll be healthy again" which reflects a natural desire to get well (1995: 77-78). *Cancer Vixen* is a restitution narrative in which Marisa remains as frivolous, vain and funny as she used to be, while being serious about fighting the war against illness, recovering her physical and mental health from cancer, and surviving.

Her graphic novel begins when Marisa discovers a lump in her left breast, goes to Dr. Mills's clinic, and a biopsy confirms the diagnosis of cancer, so she must undergo a lumpectomy. This breast-conserving surgery removes cancer or other abnormal tissue from the breast, including a small amount of healthy tissue that surrounds it to ensure that all the abnormal tissue is removed; thus, not all the breast tissue. Dorothy Judd lists some states of mind which a life-threatening illness may provoke in people with disease can experience, like uncertainty, nameless dread, loneliness, falling forever, catastrophic change, guilt, mourning, or the need to make reparations (2013: 27-28). When Marisa finds out that she has breast cancer and must endure a surgical procedure, some panels in the same page of *Cancer Vixen* reflect these feelings: "The Electrolux of the universe sucked me into a black hole. I was alone, afraid. Frozen in time for an eternity in a vast expanse of nothingness, surrounded by dark matter… wishing I could just go back to worrying about my stupid, self-absorbed, self-esteem, weight, bad-skin, bad hair issues that had obsessed me my whole life…" (Marchetto 2006: 9). Here, words capture her distress; the drawing parodies her fall into darkness, while color plays a vital narrative role in this example of graphic medicine, because it adds meaning to text and sketches, notably, her emotions. Thanks to the visual presence of red in her shoes and black in her surroundings, the reader observes the intensity of the cancer patient's anxiety at having no future and the fear of dying soon. Yet, in her graphic novel, she keeps her sense of self during her descent into the hell of coping with illness: she still wears her trademark high heels.

Before enduring a lumpectomy, Marisa's text and images show that, suddenly, three interrelated problems coexist in her daily routine: breast cancer, no insurance to pay for this procedure to eliminate cancer, and no assurance that her fiancé Sylvano will ever marry her as a cancer patient. She should focus all her energy on winning the war against her illness, but she cannot. Indeed, she is forced to devote two thirds of her emotional resources to two other inescapable endeavors: she must tell Sylvano the bad news and later, prove to him that she is not so sick that she cannot still enjoy the *dolce vita* that his money and high social status afford her, as well as manage to pay the bills of about USD 200,000 for the lumpectomy and subsequent medical treatment. In the early twenty first century, US healthcare was ruled by the Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) —a group of insurance providers, which offered insurance coverage for a monthly or annual fee that not all Americans could afford or would remember to pay. David Morris explains that this system negotiated contracts with hospitals and health professionals, while limiting doctors' autonomy about treatment, because decision-making often rested with cost-conscious bureaucrats, and an HMO may withhold access to care from some patients, which undermined their health and eroded their trust in the medical profession. Morris further states that "an illness does not count as illness unless HMO certifies it" (2007: 13).

Cancer Vixen is a collage combining various visual and textual elements, including Marisa's own medical reports and statistics from the National Breast Cancer Foundation to add individual veracity to what, for her, is a problematic situation in US society and legislation: "Fact: women without insurance have a 49% greater risk of dying from breast cancer. And when it's needed the most, that's when it's the hardest to get" (Marchetto 2006: 94). Health workers and scholars in literary studies may overlook the added anxiety when, unlike in Europe, cancer sufferers were not protected by a tax-funded, government-subsidized healthcare system in the United States but sometimes were, instead, at the mercy of the profit-driven business of care and cure. Beyond visualizing Marisa's agony because she has no health insurance, *Cancer Vixen* suggests that US oncologists violate the Hippocratic Oath when they fail to uphold the ethical standard of non-maleficence: their forced inaction to treat the uninsured cancer patient means harming that patient. Not only being poor but also oversight may be the reason why some US women have no health insurance with which to cover the expenses of surgery and later therapies, because as *Cancer Vixen* reflects, it is human to think that others —never us— will endure a life-threatening illness. Marchetto's graphic work illustrates how she recalls that her coverage had just lapsed right when she most needed it: when she was diagnosed with a tumor in her breast. Then, profit-driven insurance companies reject her. Her economic problem renders her invisible vis-à-vis health professionals and adds distress to her life, which complicates her efforts to heal, and can even

jeopardize her chances to receive the best cancer treatment. Indeed, *Cancer Vixen* exposes the inequalities of healthcare systems because it is sometimes money —not a dangerous illness— that decides whether one lives or dies. Marisa's humor pictures her unfounded fear: being rejected by her wealthy fiancé because she receives her cancer diagnosis only three weeks before her wedding and dreads that Sylvano will not marry an ill bride. However, he still loves her with cancer and adds her name —as his wife— to his medical insurance so, unlike less fortunate women, Marisa's success story means that she has the *romantic* economic means to survive and live happily ever after, like in fairy tales.

Whereas money and love are narratives that eventually find a happy ending, *Cancer Vixen* must also necessarily address illness itself and captures how medical speech frequently chooses euphemisms that are not useful for patients. Before surgery, Marisa's mother asks Dr. Mills if her daughter should stay at home with her after lumpectomy, and he says: "Even though she probably won't stay overnight… This is a major procedure" (Marchetto 2006: 115), which Marisa translates as "There will be pain" (115). She does not care about spending the night in hospital, alone in her flat or being looked after by her mother, because all that matters to her, what frightens any cancer sufferer, is excruciating pain. Yet, this is not always information that a doctor eagerly discloses. A later sequence of panels in *The Cancer Vixen* shows lumpectomy from the patient's eyes on the operating table. First, the practitioner's words before administering anaesthesia to Marisa: "OK, we're going to excise the tumor and…" (119); then, black color to show that she "was out" (119); and finally, waking up after this procedure and hearing him again say "The operation was a success, and it looks like the margins were clear" (119). Sketching reflects the practitioner's blurred image, which is what Marisa —still dizzy— sees when she recovers her consciousness. In the last sketch, she educates non-physician readers about lumpectomy: a peach symbolizes the breast tissue extracted during the surgery and inside, its pit was the cancer that was excised. Some time after, Dr. Mills informs Marisa at his office:

> You had early breast cancer. The tumor is completely removed. It was 1.3 centimetres. Chemotherapy and hormone therapy are systemic treatments. They treat the whole body. They lessen the risk of the disease spreading somewhere else. Surgery and radiation are local treatments. Radiation treatment to the breast significantly reduces the risk of recurrence. Radiation is given because there could be cells in transit that have been undetected. (123)

Panels from *Cancer Vixen* evince that physicians sometimes communicate poorly with their patients. Dr. Mills assumes that Marisa is familiar with technical details of cancer treatment and does not realize that, overwhelmed by the fact that her ordeal has not yet ended, she is unable to absorb all the information that he

transmits to her. Furthermore, post-surgery patients have more pressing preoccupations, which are not necessarily addressed by doctors, like in Marisa's case: "How long are treatments? How often are treatments? How many treatments will I need? Will I be tired? What kind of exercise should I do? Can I keep working? Does each treatment get progressively worse? Will I throw up? Can I travel? How nauseous will I be? When will this ever end?" (2006: 144). Yet, this is not textually reflected as a conventional list of concerns. Graphic medicine offers readers from the healthcare field and beyond additional non-verbal information. Thanks to the use of a larger typeface for some of Marisa's questions, it is evident that she has three priorities: to know how exhausted she will be, if each treatment will gradually intensify her pain, and if there is light at the end of the tunnel of cancer.

Chemotherapy is a drug treatment that uses powerful chemicals to kill cancer cells that can easily and quickly multiply in the patient's body, although it carries risks of side effects and is painful. Susannah Mintz contends that, although it has become "a truism that pain cannot be described, that it defies representation in language", pain can be uttered in literature (2013: 4). *Cancer Vixen* reflects that, after surgery, invasive chemo must treat Marisa's cancer, and visualizes the most frightening artifact during its sessions: the needles, which were initially shown when a biopsy removed breast tissue to diagnose cancer. But, more importantly, Marchetto's synergy between comical sketches and serious language in her work explains pain to health professionals and scholars in literary studies and what she feels after chemotherapy: "Imagine being injected by a truckload of wet cement. Imagine that truckload… hardening… in your entire body, immobilizing you with extreme muscle and bone aches" (Marchetto 2006: 164). Pictures and text eloquently describe the chemo aftermath: its intrusion into her ordinary life and its heavy burden of suffering and paralysis because, for days between sessions, Marisa is prostrate in bed.

In the United States, some medical institutions today work with graphic artists to spread information about healthcare issues and treatments among the public, while graphic novels appear on syllabi in medical humanities courses and medical schools encourage students to read comics about illness to gain empathy and insights into what their patients may be experiencing (La Cour and Poletti 2021: 2). *Cancer Vixen* prioritizes the interactions between the patient and healthcare workers. As graphic medicine, it has the potential to educate students, because they can see themselves as future doctors in the mirror of comic panels and observe details about the practicalities of cancer treatment that typically go unnoticed but can be valuable information when following-up their patients; like the discomfort that cancer sufferers feel but do not dare to confess to doctors. As a taboo breaker,

Cancer Vixen is useful for both the medical profession and scholars in literary studies. Marisa is embarrassed in front of Dr. Paula due to her flatulence's bad smell: "Chemo farts. Nobody, I mean nobody, told me about them" (Marchetto 2006: 161). Meanwhile, she is a slave to society's beauty standards of thinness and abundant hair. Due to chemotherapy, she suffers because she is putting on weight. Text and images show that, for Christmas, she offers a gift to one of her doctors: "Mary Ann, we brought you some cookies" (181), which this practitioner accepts: 'Oh, I'm on a diet. But I'll take them anyway" (181). Marisa not only thanks her doctor and takes the liberty of calling her by her first name as they have become friends, but she also uses humor to symbolically take revenge against Mary Ann, who is ordering chemo sessions for the author and is as obsessed with gaining weight, as is Marisa herself. The greatest fear in cancer is death, while the greatest fear in chemotherapy is hair loss, which scares most women. Marisa makes a parody of her frivolous pre-cancer self as her tactic to confront the terror of not looking attractive for herself and for others: "All those complaints about bad hair days… I just should have been thankful I had it" (124). Between being comical and serious, she shares her worries with Dr. Klein: "Let me be really straight. My husband owns a restaurant where the most beautiful women go and I can't look like crap!... and I will kill myself if I lose my hair" (132). Indeed, Marisa has already been a victim of the cancer stigma when a girl openly flirted with Sylvano in front of her, gave him her card, and told him: "I'm not sick… call me if you want a healthy relationship" (99). Because of her illness' early stage, Marisa can "enjoy […] chemo light. Light chemo…" (132), which comically for her "sounds like a soft drink…" (132). Dr. Klein not only listens to her patient and writes down Marisa's farcical threat of suicide in her medical history, but also angrily warns her: "There's nothing soft about it… chemo light is still chemo" […] I would never let you risk your life to save your hair" (132). Therefore, both medical competence and sympathy are found in Dr. Klein's praxis, while readers of *Cancer Vixen* who are not part of the healthcare industry see that Marisa succeeds in navigating through the threatening waters of light chemo because she obeys the social expectation of feminine beauty: her hair.

Part of a physician's expertise in managing disease and its sequalae is to know and understand a patient's story, particularly when she is not in the doctor's office (Myers and Goldenberg 2018: 158). Sometimes cancer diagnosis is accompanied by a bad prognosis beyond illness itself. During chemo sessions, Marisa learns that it is impossible for her to become a biological mother. In a panel, after informing her about the onset of her early menopause due to her treatment, her doctor asks her: "Are you OK? You look upset" (Marchetto 2006: 150). Marisa replies: "Well, I was just given some pretty terrible news considering I'm 43 and it's already late for me to have children" (150). This is a typical doctor-patient conversation, but

to foster empathy, healthcare and lay readers of *Cancer Vixen* also penetrate Marisa's realm of emotions after she discovers that she will remain childless: cancer invalidates the narrative of motherhood in the future. Outside the clinic, she imagines a baby boy in the sky, who says, "Hey Mom! Up here! Your son wanted to say goodbye. My time's up. I'm not happening in this lifetime" (150), to reveal how she tries to assimilate the news she received from her doctor, and to mourn her maternal loss.

The graphic novel reproduces other routine episodes of check-ups during cancer treatment. Dr. Klein —now called Paula— asks Marisa whether or not she is experiencing chemo side effects, like nausea, hot flashes, night sweats, fatigue and diarrhea. When she confirms all of them, this doctor adds empathy to her clinical practice by asking her patient, "How's everything else?" (Marchetto 2006: 189), which implies interest in non-health issues affecting the life of Marisa, who replies: "I got no complaints" (189). As a patient, she is not a troublemaker and instead, maintains a positive attitude, which is both vital to recover her health and not to alienate her doctors. She does not blame physicians for her physical pain, discomfort, early menopause and infertility. Nevertheless, *Cancer Vixen* does not incorporate any racist experiences because, as a white patient, racism is absent from Marchetto's personal account of illness, as opposed to the medical hostility and social invisibility suffered by a Black woman, which Lorde narrates in her autopathograhy. When Marisa successfully finishes her treatment and is cancer-free, friendly goodbyes at the clinic prove that she established good relationships with health workers. Yet, *Cancer Vixen* also reflects that every time she sees the white coat of a doctor who calls her name during a post-cancer check-up, "there will always be a second where I lose my breath" (208), implying that Marisa is always afraid of visiting a clinic and receiving bad news about cancer recurrence, even if her doctor is only going to say, "you can change out of your gown" (208). Thus, readers of Marchetto's work from the healthcare field can learn to be careful with patients after recovery from their disease, whereas her readers in literary studies observe emotional residue of post-cancer fear, also omnipresent in Lorde's journals.

4. Life Lessons in Cancer Narratives

Marisa becomes a cancer vixen, or a victor, because she fails to allow illness to deflate her spirit, and the last page of her graphic novel, showing her driving with her husband in his Maserati on their one-year wedding anniversary, sends the final message of her success (Chute 2017: 416). Some women survive cancer, like Marchetto, while others, like Lorde, die. However, her autopathography from

1980, including her furious critique of the medical profession, has paved the way for later generations of breast cancer sufferers as authors like Marchetto. First, Lorde empowered these women to raise social awareness about their illness; second, she prompted them to elicit both self-healing through the act of writing autopathographies and healing through the act of reading them by other female patients; and third, Lorde urged them to fight to improve patient-doctor relationships. Narratives like *The Cancer Journals* and *Cancer Vixen* have the power to enhance both healthcare providers' clinical practice and students' education. Lay readers of Lorde's autopathography enjoy her literary audacity when comparing herself to the mythical Amazons and the historical Dahomey female soldiers, all of them proud, strong and brave one-breasted warriors. Meanwhile, (future) physicians are encouraged to select passages of Lorde's emotional hemorrhage, which contain vital lessons on medical ethics. Both types of reader should also situate the necessary —and not offensive— anger of *The Cancer Journals* in the historical past: Lorde's activism fighting for the rights of women, Black people and patients during the 1970s.

Searching for knowledge and interpretation of illnesses, (future) physicians gain more confidence from seeing images than readings texts, much less literary ones. In their daily practice, they look at the results of blood and other laboratory tests while contemplating results from imaging technology for the diagnosis and prognosis of patients' symptoms and illnesses. In their research done to treat diseases, they trust information from visually instructive diagrams, curves, tables, graphs and other forms from data and statistics in peer-reviewed publications. Unlike conventional narratives relying on words only, the blending between speech and images in graphic medicine speaks a new message in the same language of health professionals, and scholars in literary studies should acquaint themselves with this language. *Cancer Vixen* is, thus, not only a survival guide to help other women, but also an effective visual text to be included in *vade mecums* to train physicians in observational skills and cancer treatment, while developing their intuition, empathy and understanding of patients' personal stories beyond clinical examinations or hospital encounters. Readers from the health professions can picture themselves as humans in Marchetto's graphic medicine and extract valuable lessons for their own sake to embrace a more humanized clinical practice and to have healthier interactions with the protagonists of illness: their patients. Concurrently, scholars in literary studies discover the potential of humor in *Cancer Vixen* to narrate the individual experience of being sick, to denounce economic injustices endured by those with cancer, and to emotionally recover from illness. Although there have been losses in Marchetto's life, she survives and writes; thus, she laughs last.

Notes

1. Arthur Kleinman defines illness narrative as "a story the patient tells, and significant others retell, to give coherence to the distinctive events and long-term course of suffering" (1988: 49).

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Received: 06/02/2024
Accepted: 02/07/2024

SHADOWING FEMI(NI)CIDE, MADNESS AND THE POLITICS OF FEMALE CONTROL IN LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S "A WHISPER IN THE DARK"

LA SOMBRA DEL FEMINICIDIO, LOCURA Y LA POLÍTICA DE CONTROL FEMENINO EN "UN SUSURRO EN LA OSCURIDAD" DE LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202410298

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Abstract

The term 'femicide' entered public discourse only in the late 1970s, when feminist critic Diana Russell used the term to bring attention to male violence and discrimination against women. This article intends to re-examine the representation of femicide through Louisa May Alcott's short story "A Whisper in the Dark" (1865) in light of studies on femicide and female violence. Drawing from Russell's definition of femicide, its theoretical approach and multiple redefinitions, the article proceeds by exploring Alcott's depiction of femicide in the text. After a preliminary discussion, I critically examine Alcott's short story in light of studies on femicide by placing the text within American female Gothic fiction. Afterwords, I will demonstrate how femicide in the tale is based upon an interplay of three main tropes: wrongful confinement, the threshold and madness, all of which are themes that Alcott develops with astonishing topicality and which underscores the importance of the tale as an example of female abuse and domestic violence, a phenomenon that has improved considerably all over the world in recent years. I conclude by showing how Alcott illustrates the politics of female control and offers an example of femicide long before the term was ever used.

Keywords: femicide, Alcott, female abuse, madness, female control.

Resumen

El término 'feminicidio' no entró en el discurso público hasta finales de la década de 1970, cuando la feminista Diana Russell lo utilizó para llamar la atención sobre la violencia masculina y la discriminación contra las mujeres. Este artículo pretende reexaminar la ilustración del feminicidio a través del relato corto de Louisa May Alcott "Un susurro en la oscuridad" (1865), que se examinará a la luz de los estudios sobre el feminicidio y la violencia femenina. Partiendo de la definición de feminicidio de Russell, su enfoque teórico y sus múltiples redefiniciones, el artículo procede a explorar la ilustración que Alcott hace del feminicidio en el texto. Tras esta discusión preliminar, examino críticamente el cuento de Alcott a la luz de los estudios sobre el feminicidio, situando el texto dentro de la ficción gótica femenina estadounidense. A continuación, demostraré cómo el feminicidio en el cuento se basa en un intercambio de tres tropos principales: el confinamiento injusto, el umbral y la locura, temas que Alcott desarrolla con asombrosa actualidad y que subrayan la importancia del cuento como ejemplo del maltrato femenino y la violencia doméstica que en todo el mundo ha mejorado considerablemente en los últimos años. Concluyo mostrando cómo Alcott ilustra la política del control femenino y ofrece un ejemplo de feminicidio mucho antes de que se utilizara el término.

Palabras clave: femicidio, Alcott, abuso femenino, locura, control femenino.

1. Introduction

In the 1990s, the neologism 'femicide'[1] entered public discourse forcefully in the Western world as media, scholars, feminists and activists devoted attention to the epidemic of men exercising violence on women, in most cases going so far as to kill them. Since then, its dramatic rise in international attention has been unprecedented. In 2021,[2] staggering statistics from the United States proved how domestic violence, and more generally, gender asymmetries, still pervade in many areas of social, political and professional life, occurring at a shameful rate. This persistence seems to constitute a backlash to the fight for gender equality. According to recent data, violence in America affects almost three women every day —a fact that led the month of March to become recognized as female violence awareness month in the US. In 2023, the White House launched a first-of-its-kind national action plan to end gender-based violence, such as domestic abuse, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence.[3] Beyond doubt, the phenomenon of gender-based violence has gained greater visibility all over the world, especially in recent years, when the actual numbers of victims have begun to increase.

Taking a step back from recent media attention, violence against women and femicide were first represented in 19th century North American literature, coinciding with the earliest documented examples of femicide, even though at the time these representations appeared as tacit demonstrations of denunciation that, if read today, make us ponder more deeply the actual roots of this phenomenon. Louisa May Alcott's short story "A Whisper in the Dark" (1863) deserves prominent attention in the debate on this surprisingly topical phenomenon, addressing the question of psychological and physical violence exerted upon women. From the very first pages, the main plot line is a case of domestic and gender-based abuse or, to use a contemporary term, an example of femicide. At the time Alcott wrote the story, the term femicide did not yet exist; however, throughout the gloomy framework of the narrative, abuse and violence run like an inner thread that stretches to the present debate on this issue. By contrast, it is revealing to note how, for decades, scholars did not acknowledge the innovative aspect of this text. The reason for this oversight can be traced back to critical appraisal of Alcott's work, which recurrently classified her works under domestic, sentimental or sensational fiction. More gripping, however, are those approaches arguing that Alcott's narratives do not deal with the image of fragile and passive women, as they conversely present active and self-sufficient female archetypes (Cogan 1989). Those who are familiar with the work of Louisa May Alcott, who achieved fame with her undisputed classic *Little Women* (1868),[4] can easily note that "A Whisper in the Dark" is narratively and stylistically distinct from her masterpiece, which consecrated her popularity and helped to sketch the decisive portrait of Alcott as a sentimental writer. The tale is part of a series of thrillers Alcott published —anonymously and pseudonymously— in *Frank Leslie*'s illustrated newspaper and that were eventually republished in 1889 in the volume *A Modern Mephistopheles and a Whisper in the Dark*.

First published in 1863, "A Whisper in the Dark" offers a fierce portrayal of issues that are still crucial today —freedom of individual choice, the accusation of insanity and power relations within the traditional family— narrated with an apparent simplicity through a brilliant style and with the help of a gripping story line. The plot is based on a young woman who is deceived, threatened, accused of insanity and eventually confined. The narrative tells the story of Sybil, a seventeen-year-old orphan heir. The young woman has been placed in the care of her uncle; the man is in charge of managing the girl's assets until she comes of age and marries her cousin, as written in her father's will. Sybil is then forced by her uncle into an arranged marriage with her cousin, Guy. Initially, the young woman is curious and well-disposed to the arrangement, but her arrival at the uncle's residence changes the course of events. Sybil is young and naïve in appearance and, seduced by her uncle's ambiguous charm, she initially seems to accept Guy's courtship, but,

discovering she is trapped in an arranged marriage, she rejects her preordained future and declines the proposal. As Sybil will eventually discover, the will contained a clause stating that if Sybil showed signs of madness like her mother, all assets would pass into the hands of her uncle and cousin. Because of her refusal to marry her cousin, the uncle, with the aid of an unscrupulous doctor, Dr. Karnac, causes Sybil to be diagnosed as mentally unstable and, supported by the doctor's false diagnosis, he confines Sybil to a mental institution. In the asylum, Sybil meets her mother, whom she believed to be dead, discovering instead that she was condemned to the same fate and imprisoned on charges of insanity. Yet, the story ends with a positive outcome: Sybil manages to escape from the asylum and marries her cousin, who discovers the truth and his father's dreadful plan.

As Alcott's narrative can be read through the lens of femicide and gender-based violence, in what follows I delve into the meanings and implications of femicide, its theoretical approaches and multiple redefinitions, mostly drawing on Diana Russell's theory. This discussion will be necessary to examine "A Whisper in the Dark" as a fictional representation of femicide long before its current definition and within the context of American female Gothic fiction. Afterwards, I will demonstrate how femicide in the tale is based upon an interplay of three main tropes: wrongful confinement, the threshold and madness —all of which are themes that Alcott develops with astonishing topicality and which underscore the importance of the tale as an example of female abuse and domestic violence.

2. Femicide: Meanings and Implications

Before delving further into the text and its author, it is crucial to clarify the moral and epistemic significance of femicide, which before being associated with Alcott requires definitional and conceptual clarity. Undoubtedly, the concept has had many definitions and has evolved over time. Feminist critic Diana Russell coined the term in 1979, even though it officially acquired a definition in 1990 with the seminal study by Russell and Radford, *Femicide: The Practice of Women Killing*, regarded as the most compelling study on the phenomenon. There, Diana Russell and Jill Radford explain how the term designates extreme violence by men against women, who become victims primarily because of their sex. As Russell and Radford observe, femicide is the peripheral of a broader phenomenon: violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual violence and psychological abuse (Russell and Radford 1990). Besides this, in 2001, Russell slightly changed the original epistemic meaning, considering femicide as an umbrella term that encompasses *any* form of male sexism over women, turning them into victims especially because they are female. As she additionally notes, "There are many

kinds of femicides that can be identified, for example serial femicide, rape femicide, wife femicide, racist femicide […]" (Russell and Hermes 2001: 18), to name but a few examples from a long list. Although femicide generally refers to the misogynous killing of women, its significance has changed to encompass any form of violence systematically exercised on women in the name of a patriarchal ideological superstructure in order to perpetuate subordination and annihilate female identity through physical or psychological subjugation, to the point of incarceration or death (Russell and Radford 1992: 6-7).

At its root, "femicide has many different forms and the concept extends even beyond legal definitions of murder to include situations in which women are even permitted to die as a result of misogynous attitudes" (Russell and Radford 1992: 7).[5] Yet, as Russell and Radford further imply, at the origin of femicide there is always a masculine need to deprive women of control over their lives and bodies. In making my argument, I draw on radical feminist theories that have regarded the woman's body as a starting point, considering it as the primary object of masculine violence. Indeed, the term femicide originated from the efforts of radical feminists that, as far back as the 1980s, aimed to denounce the issue of violence against women by asserting that women were systematically oppressed as a 'sex class' within a persistent patriarchal framework (MacKinnon 1989). Lea Melandri traces the cause of violence against women to an inherent failure to question gender relations. Taking up this thread, Melandri highlights how "since the dawn of time and even in modern times, man has continued to consider the woman 'an inferior subject' and at the same time the repository of a divine spark, threatening her continuity" (2011: 35, my translation).[6] In her study, Melandri maintains that love and violence tend to polarize to the point where the feeling of love and the violent act interpenetrate. According to Melandri, the 'masculinization' of public space functions as a new form of male domination. As she proceeds to argue, women have always suffered continuous expropriation of their existence, leading to a constant gender inequality that has always highlighted male dominance and placed women in a subordinate status (2011: 36-37).

In a recent study on the global resonance of femicide, Myrna Dawson and Michelle Carrigan underscore how one of the reasons behind the upsurge in attention given to the issue of femicide today has to do with the way in which "femicide should be defined and how it is distinct from homicide" (2020: 2). Femicide, in its many different forms, represents a mechanism of control and subjugation by man over woman and, even today, it often takes the form of a non-acceptance of women's freedom and independence. The man feels legitimized to take away the woman's autonomy the moment she 'rebels' and manifests a need to emancipate herself from male authority. It is precisely this aspect of femicide, well illustrated by

Dawson and Carrigan in their study, on which I will focus in order to begin the analysis of Alcott's story and the innovative facets of the narrative.

Another essential consideration concerns the issue of gender-based violence. Defining what is meant by violence is often very problematic, and there is a tendency to link the term to different phenomena. Historically, violence appeared to be the product of a certain type of culture that often stemmed from power relations, and which functioned as a natural discriminator of gender (Héritier 2005: 23). According to anthropologist Francoise Héritier, violence originates within the binary representation of masculine and feminine: in ancient times and in Western culture, it was exercised on the woman as a way to 'protect' masculine honor. Not surprisingly, in a male-dominated society, such as the one in which Louisa May Alcott sets her story, there was a use of violence against women that has been identified as a characteristic of patriarchal society, also due to the social construction of femininity as receptive and passive. As Russell and Radford maintain, "Patriarchal oppression, like other forms of oppression, may manifest itself in legal and economic discrimination, but like all oppressive structures is rooted in violence" (1992: 6), a definition that flawlessly reflects the situation envisioned by Alcott. It is precisely this form of masculine imposition and female deprivation that will allow me to read Alcott's narrative in these terms, considering its relevance within the current debate on female violence and femicide.

3. Louisa May Alcott as a Feminist Icon

As mentioned above, in her second anonymously published thriller, "A Whisper in the Dark", Louisa May Alcott illustrates the dynamics of domestic and psychological abuse against women in the 1800s. Although the writer presents a story that was often labeled under the genre of sentimental narrative, the tone and atmosphere recall those of Gothic fiction, and it surprisingly anticipates the feminist debate on physical and psychological violence within the domestic sphere. Alessandra Calanchi recently observed how it is not daring to claim that the story focuses precisely on gender issues, *including femicide* —real or attempted— well before the term was ever used (2020: 13, emphasis added).

In her compelling study, Elisabeth Lennox Keyser proves how, beneath the progressive feminism of Alcott's work, lurks a more radical image of women, which is evident in her Gothic thrillers "Behind the Mask" (1866), "A Marble Woman" (1865) and, eventually, "A Whisper in the Dark". In line with this perspective, Calanchi considers this text as the first piece of a symbolic trilogy illustrating femicide within the context of American literature and connecting this work to other canonical texts such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall

Paper" (1892) and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899). In both stories, as in Alcott's narrative, a woman is the victim of psychological violence by a man who accuses her of insanity (a theme to which I will later return).

Alcott's production shifted from Gothic thrillers, published under the pseudonym of A.M. Barnard (for the most part Gothic stories in which she explored themes such as madness, violence and revenge), to sentimental novels. However, Alcott's Gothic and 'domestic thrillers' —a term used pejoratively to diminish psychological thrillers written by women in comparison to traditional thrillers— focused on themes such as manipulation, murder and forbidden love, and were often published in anonymous form or under a masculine pseudonym. These works, including those of authors such as Edith Wharton and the aforementioned Charlotte Perkins Gilman, can be aligned with the genre of 'American female Gothic'.[7] In *The Cambridge Companion to the American Gothic* (2017), Diane Hoeveler maintains that "The subgenre of the female Gothic generally refers to the works written by women that use specific themes, tropes and conventions of the Gothic, to reflect and address female concerns such as marriage, inheritance, and patriarchal empowerment" (2017: 99). In her pioneering study *The Female Gothic* (1983), Juliann Fleenor argues that the female Gothic becomes a metaphor of female experience, and it is used to describe the condition of women within patriarchal society.[8] As literary critics have aptly shown, the American female Gothic has its roots in the work of female authors associated with the supernatural and set in New England. Narratives within the American female Gothic tradition generally articulate firm critiques of the patriarchal establishment, condemning masculine imposition in the domestic sphere. Overall, in the American female Gothic "the woman and her body becomes the ultimate embodiment of Gothic horror" (Hoeveler 2017: 111).

Teresa A. Goddu firmly includes Alcott as a relevant name within the Gothic genre (1997: 3-8), in which a recurring theme is the portrayal of the female experience and the challenges it entails. Over the course of her life, the author demonstrated a clear aversion toward the societal expectations imposed on women, particularly the requirement to adopt a submissive stance in the face of dominant male chauvinism. Alcott's Gothic thrillers, which skillfully integrate Gothic tropes with the female experience, unfold within only one setting: the domestic sphere, often depicting female tragedies, narratives of revenge, confinement, subjugation and rebellion, as exemplified in "A Whisper in the Dark". As the narrative unfolds, the young protagonist repeatedly pauses to describe the Gothic and grotesque setting of the domestic environment as "the blackened ruins of a house of horrors" (363). With remarkable consistency, Alcott's Gothic fiction encodes these scenarios by combining violence, perversion and madness —tropes I will grapple with in the pages ahead. As exemplified in the critical analysis of Alcott's Gothic fiction conducted by Madeleine

Stern, "A Whisper in the Dark" becomes not only an engrossing gruesome Gothic narrative but an interesting foray into the disorders of the mind" (1978: 429).

That said, it must be noted that the different narrative approach of Alcott's work reflects, in part, the writer's autobiographical experience. Louisa May Alcott was a precocious child: when she was only ten, she wrote plays for her circle of friends; at fifteen, she composed melodramas with her sister; and when she was only nineteen, after a brief period at the service of a wealthy family to earn money to emancipate herself financially, she published her first poems under the pseudonym of Flora Fairfield. Indeed, Alcott led an active and dynamic life. In the second half of the 1800s, the writer became a staunch abolitionist, helping fugitive slaves through the secret system of aids known as the Underground Railroad. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Alcott sewed uniforms for the soldiers of Concord and worked as a nurse at the Union Hotel Hospital in Georgetown.[9] In the late 1870s, she became a steadfast women's rights advocate and encouraged women to fight for the right to vote in the state of Massachusetts.[10] Subsequently, Alcott wrote a series of letters —later published in the Massachusetts suffrage periodical, *Women's Journal*— in which she expressed her disappointment with the government of Concord and the State of Massachusetts for their lack of action in favor of women's rights. These aspects of Alcott's life prove the writer's interest in sustaining female emancipation, an ideology at odds with that of the official discourse of the time. Given her long support toward women's rights —a support Alcott inherited from her parents, who endorsed most reforms, including women's suffrage— Madelaine Stern posits that "She was a feminist because she was a humanist; she embraced the cause of women because she embraced the causes of humanity" (1978: 429). Not surprisingly, as critics have recently suggested, Alcott's intriguing mix of fiction and auto-fiction engages and intersects —as does Alcott's life— with domesticity, femininity and female emancipation (Sesnić 2022: 1).

4. Instances of Femicide in Louisa May Alcott's "A Whisper in the Dark": Thresholds, Boundaries and the Spaces of Female Control

Fitting into the historical frame mentioned above, "A Whisper in the Dark" reflects on male authority by showing how the protagonist resists patriarchal imposition despite the strong and obvious masculine intention to exert control and use violence and psychological abuse on the female protagonist. In her critical reflection on the condition of womanhood in the 19th century, Susan Cruea claimed that "Women were the continual victims of social and economic discrimination. Upper and middle-class women's choices were limited to marriage and motherhood, or

spinsterhood" (2005: 187). Moreover, in the introduction to an Italian edition of Henry James's *Daisy Miller*, Donatella Izzo proceeds to argue that in the second half of the 19th century, the widespread dissemination of domestic ideology, as the social norm of reference, constituted a moral primacy that contemplated women exclusively within the framework of marriage. As such, the lives of women were entirely under the control and in the service of men (Izzo 2017: 20). In this sense, Elisabeth Keyser remarks on Alcott's frequent use of the verb 'to master' to accentuate the physical and psychological male subjugation of the female characters. Early in the narrative, Sybil admits "I was *mastered*. Yet only physically, my spirit was rebellious still" (Alcott 1996: 331, emphasis added).

Consistent with this I argue that the question of female victimization in the narrative revolves around three major themes: wrongful confinement as a representation of female reclusion; the threshold as a powerful metaphor for boundaries that may or may not be transgressed; and ultimately, madness as a pretext for violence and control. As we shall now see, it is on the basis of these tropes that we can read the novel in a contemporary frame and consider it a valid example of modern femicide. Along with the recurring use of the verb 'to master', closed spaces are equally relevant in contextualizing the female figure as an object of violence. As such, the asylum to which the protagonist is confined is not merely the concrete place in which Sybil is imprisoned, but also the psychological and familial one, in which she is subjugated and psychologically harassed by the masculine characters, that is, her uncle and the doctor. As Calanchi noted when analyzing this text, the home turns out to be a false domestic comfort, a symbol of female imprisonment inside which coexist explosions of violence, and fantasies of escape (2020: 15-16). The relocation of the protagonist within closed spaces, the carriage in which Sybil is introduced to the reader in the very first scene, the house, the bedroom in which she is often detained, and finally, the asylum, are the concrete representations of a persistent intention to subjugate and imprison the young woman. "I succumbed to despair […] even in my *prison-house*" (Alcott 1996: 354, emphasis added), claims Sybil. Again, when she is diagnosed by Dr. Karnac, the uncle "closed the door and locked it, having dexterously removed the key from within" (Alcott 1996: 350). Sybil then manages to escape by jumping out of the window and safely climbing down the trellis before she is brought back to her room. Although Sybil attempts to free herself, she remains relentlessly and physically confined to enclosed spaces and, as Keyser points out, "Sibyl escapes the prison of her room only to be imprisoned in Karnac's asylum" (1993: 7). Sybil's forced confinement should be read as essential to an analysis of the text as a case of femicide. In effect, the protagonist is forced into a double segregation: first, physically and psychologically; and then, at home and in the asylum. When Sybil wakes up in her room at the madhouse, the sense of imprisonment is evident: "The place was small, plainly furnished, and *close*, as if

long unused […] A moment I started about me bewildered, then hurried to the window —it was *gated*!" (Alcott 1996: 351, emphasis added). At this moment, the protagonist discovers she has gone from the reclusion in her room to the internment in the asylum. Yet Keyser, in her reading of the text, further remarks how "Motivated by youthful rebelliousness and a fondness for manipulating others, Sybil fails to question patriarchal assumptions until, at her uncle's request, she pursues her father's will in which the terms of the compact are set forth" (Keyser 1993: 352).

The frequent recurrence of the threshold as a transitional space in the narrative represents a liminal boundary that limits what the female protagonist can do and what she is bound not to do. According to Calanchi, in the text the threshold illustrates the woman's 'condition of in-betweenness', as she is torn between the desire for emancipation, which will culminate in her refusal of marriage, and the psychological and material violence to which she is condemned: being accused of insanity and locked up in an asylum for the choice to rebel against patriarchal order. The masculine power over the woman lies, in fact, in the threshold, or rather, in the spaces where the threshold is never fully open: a window ajar, a half-open door, an antechamber —all narrative threads that lead to the protagonist's realization of a need to break free from her oppressor (Calanchi 2020: 18). It is therefore essential to consider this motif to understand the importance Alcott gives to this theme, which becomes a leitmotif in the narrative.

Early in the text, Sybil repeatedly describes the uncle leaning on the doorjamb, as if his position indicates an impenetrable boundary and, most importantly, male power over the limit the woman shall not pass: "Soon he came, and paused on the threshold" (Alcott 1996: 334), recalls Sybil in one of the numerous references. Later, when she is asked for the last time if she is still convinced to refuse the marriage proposal, while waiting to be diagnosed with feigned insanity, it is the doctor who stands on the threshold, once again to suggest the seemingly insurmountable limit to which Sybil is condemned: "I pointed to the door as I spoke; the women hurried out with scared faces, the doctor bowed and followed but paused on the *threshold* while my uncle approached me, asking in a tone inaudible to those still hovering round the door —"Do you still persist in your refusal, Sybil?" (Alcott 1996: 349, emphasis added). It is precisely through a partly open door that two of the most important narrative twists in the story occur: Sybil discovers the uncle's awful intentions, and, through the threshold, she overhears her mother's voice for the first time. As one of the text's central concepts, the threshold looks like an attempt to illustrate the female transit toward emancipation and her ability, in the end, to cross the limit and override the woman's exercise of male power. Such space in the narrative serves as a way to make visible and legible Sybil's way to liberation in her capacity to surpass that boundary.

5. Madness, Imprisonment and Hysteria

The construction of violence in the text revolves around the figure of the masculine oppressor, the uncle, who, after seducing his underage niece with a marriage proposal, accuses her of insanity to sequester her in a madhouse. The question of surveillance, in Foucauldian terms, and the manipulation the man exercises on the woman, become repetitive threads that will be passed on between the protagonist and her mother, imprisoned in the asylum and condemned to the same fate. Stern observes that in this text "the reader is regaled with the lowest form of psychological manipulation —an attempt for mercenary purposes, to drive the heiress heroine insane so that her inheritance will be denied her" (1978: 429). In conjunction with masculine domination, "imprisonment takes its toll on Sybil's physical and psychological health" (Carpenter 1986: 32). In this sense, the implications of femicide in the narrative become entangled with madness to provide an extensive critique of patriarchal culture, as the author denounces a misogynistic and patriarchal society that labels women who want to be free with madness and hysteria. As the story progresses, Sybil soon admits that "Madness seemed my inevitable faith" (Alcott 1996: 356). The narrative's gradual decline into madness suggests how, at the time, any deviation from the norm was considered a sign of mental instability. From this perspective, the tale is set against the backdrop of the 1850s, and explores the pre-conceptual view of madness as a gender stereotype or a gendered disorder. In fact, it is known that in the late 1850s, asylum statistics confirmed the perception that female inmates were likely to outnumber their male counterparts, so that madness soon became a pointedly gendered illness. This phenomenon cast women in a (gendered) imbalance that fed the imposition of a patriarchal structure.

Moreover, madness and the asylum are two pitfalls of the Gothic novel, whose purpose was to illustrate the immorality of women in patriarchal society, as well as female resistance to oppression (Keyser 1993: 4). In medicine, hysteria was originally attributed to women —a theory corroborated by a historical fraud by which the origin of the term was related to the uterus. Freud then traced hysteria back to the repression of sexual desire, referring to it as a distinctively female disease, since the repression of desire was associated with the societal role of women.[11] Scholarly work has often considered madness as a rather desperate form of rebellion and, more generally, an extreme condition that deprives the subject of the capacity to protest and of self-affirmation and thus can lead to a pressing need to break free from a condition of deviance.[12] In their seminal study on madness, women and Victorian literature, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar used psychoanalytic theory to explore female anxieties surrounding authorship and space. In their study, they explained how female writers and women in general "fated to inhabit male-defined masks" (2000: 19).

As a consequence, the woman becomes polarized in the binomial 'angel' and/or 'monster' —expressions of a dual personality. If monstrosity in Alcott's text develops in masculinity, the visible inner monstrosity of female violence — embedded in hysteria as a female problem— becomes visible in the ghostly whisper of Sybil's mother, her double. In the end, Sybil rebels against her condition, and her rebellion comes precisely from the encounter with her mother whom, in an almost Lacanian sense, she sees reflected behind a broken glass, as if to mirror her image, her alter ego. In "A Whisper in the Dark", madness becomes the excuse to trigger a mechanism of control and masculine imposition. Insanity, when officially diagnosed, is the element capable of preventing Sybil from accessing her inheritance and being free to choose her future. For Alcott, mental illness becomes the scapegoat for femicide, a decisive masculine pretext to manipulate and subjugate the female protagonist. If, as Keyser has argued, "In 'A Whisper in the Dark', Alcott directly associates female madness with patriarchy" (Keyser 1993: 107), the bogus diagnosis of insanity is more than 'just' a representation of illness, as it undermines the perpetuation of femicide as an intentional abuse with a gender-related motive. In keeping with this, the scene of the accusation of insanity turns out to be a moment of absolute violence:

> I was unused to wine. The draught I had taken was powerful with age, and though warm and racy to the palate, proved too potent for me. Still sitting before my fire, I slowly fell into restless drowse […] whose motion gradually lulled me into perfect unconsciousness. Waking at length, I was surprised I found myself in bed with the shimmer of daylight peeping through the curtains. Recollecting that I was to leave early. I sprang up, took one step and remained transfixed with dismay, for the room was not only my own. (Alcott 1996: 351)[13]

As the scene makes clear, Sybil is subjected to real instances of physical violence: she is drugged, rendered unconscious and forcefully taken to the asylum, where she will wake up unaware of her fate and what has transpired. As Alcott illustrates, the young protagonist is placed in a position of vulnerability by male authority, leading to her confinement. This passage serves as a comprehensive representation of the Gothic horror depicted on the female body, as delineated by Hoeveler (2017).

In her analysis of Alcott's work through the lens of disability studies, Karyn Valerius observes that "Representations of mental health and illness might complicate and enhance established feminist readings of Alcott's fiction" (2018: 87).[14] By addressing this issue, Carpenter has claimed that "To suggest the fullest extent of masculine domination and to justify woman's anger as a response to that domination, would surely be inharmonious with the respectable traditions of Concord. For a cultured woman and an Alcott to do it might well be considered madness" (1986: 37). As such, the question of madness in the narrative is complicated by another intern living next door. Sybil is intrigued by this other individual, whom she will

soon discover to be her mother (the origin of the title's whisper). The meeting between the daughter and her mother, who urges Sybil to save herself from their common fate, is an example of how Alcott transforms madness into a double suffering handed down from mother to daughter, a repetitive cycle of triumphant abusive male power and female victimization. From Carpenter's perspective, "Alcott takes great pains to develop an identification between mother and daughter, and even to intimate that their fates are parallel" (1986: 33). By incorporating women, madness and violence into the narrative, "A Whisper in the Dark" illustrates the interconnected construction of gender and mental illness within the 19th-century concept of female hysteria. By giving centrality to insanity as a significant trope that devaluates the woman as the irrational sex, Alcott triggers a path of rage and rebellion, as mental illness, from an element of submission and control, becomes a way of reacting to femicide and gendered violence.

Particularly of note at this point is Paige Clements's recent perspective on mental disorders. Focusing on the iconic figure of Brönte's madwoman in the attic —with which Alcott's tale shares numerous similarities, such as internment on account of purported madness as a symbol of patriarchal oppression— Clements relates madness to female emancipation and wonders: "If a patriarchal system causes mental illness, then why can madness not be a form of escapism and/or rebellion within that system? While mental illness should not be erased or overshadowed insofar as it is a true medical condition, does that mean we must disregard the pathologization of women's behavior in response to oppression?" (2021: 24).

This observation reflects, in part, the narrative twist of Alcott's story. Upon closer inspection, alongside the violence, which the author highlights in concrete images (e.g. the poisoned drink, cutting of female hair, forced imprisonment), Sybil's gestures of rebellion are numerous. Following a passage in which the protagonist is deliberately drugged by her uncle, so that she can lay on his knee for his pleasure, Sybil bites the man's hand, although she immediately realizes that it would have been better to surrender, since she fears her uncle's reaction: "I had better have submitted, for slight as the foolish action was, it had an influence on my afterlife as many others such as had" (Alcott 1996: 330). According to Carpenter, "The comment implies that her own physical violence marked the first in a series of rebellions, for which she would later be punished" (1986: 35). A further subversive attitude is evident in Sybil's clear decision to refuse marriage, a choice that leads the uncle to make an incestuous insinuation, aiming to become the "faithful guardian of her life" (Alcott 1996: 347) by proposing to be her husband. The female rejection takes the form of another obvious gesture of rebellion, as Sybil goes so far as to throw her engagement ring against a mirror, cracking it in the middle: "I flung the ring, case and all, across the room, it struck the great mirror,

shivered it just in the middle, and sent several loosened fragments crashing to the floor" (347). Later in the narrative, the protagonist does not fail to stress how "[she] had never been subjected to restraint of any kind, it made [her] reckless at once, for this last indignity was not to be endured" (350). However, Sybil's personality is anything but fragmented —a term that usually evokes a neuro-psychological disorder. The young woman is very firm in her decisions: she rejects marriage and is determined to free herself from her condition.

5.1. Whispers as Threats of Masculine Utterance

A useful point that relates whispering with madness, thus considering it as an additional parameter leading to the perpetration of femicide, can be found in Jimmy Packham's recent analysis of the fundamental role haunting voices play in Gothic fiction. According to Packham, "A Whisper in the Dark" offers an example of rebellion against the initial imposition of masculine voices. In effect, the masculine voice plays an essential role in the narrative, as Alcott entrusts it with peremptory and intimidating utterances to suggest the authoritarian and subjugating tone of man over woman. The importance of whispering in the scenario of violence we have delineated so far —as Packham reminds us— sets up the transgressive and troubling role voices play in Alcott's narrative. Packham argues the following: "Alcott's tale explores the extent to which a woman's voice is heard under patriarchy as 'raving', and the extent to which this voice is coextensive with an (in)visible body; it explores the silencing and erasure of a woman's voice in law and legal matters, and the frustrating of communication between women" (2021: 80-81).

The role that voices and sounds play in the construction of femicide and the consequent process of rebellion become evident when Sybil is confined to the asylum. The footsteps the protagonist overhears above her room, the low murmurs and the screams interspersed with cries of weeping —which will turn out to belong to her mother— are the first audible presence of a female rebellion. Then, this female voice resists madness and confinement as it transmits itself through those boundaries —previously discussed— that could not be transgressed, as sounds come from a keyhole, a locked door, distinctly labeled as places of prohibition. The trajectory taken in this section of the tale highlights "the bodily limitations imposed by the domineering masculine authorities upon the woman as agent and establishes a non-physical spectralized space as the space of agency" (Packham 2021: 82). The sonority of these rumors and the silence that precedes them is indicative of the position to which women were condemned: being silenced by patriarchal authority. At its conclusion, the narrative engages the reader through the clear and assertive voices of women (Sybil and her mother, the whisper that leads to the escape).

While initially playing a marginal role compared to the dominant masculine voices in the story, women become central figures in the latter part, both in their presence and as voices. In this way, Alcott uses the sanatorium as a space to re-orient the authority of speech on the woman.

If one reads the narrative within this frame, it can be seen how, as Packham additionally implies, "The acousmatic whisper poses a continual threat to the forms of masculine utterance" (2021: 87). In the first section of the narrative, Alcott exploits the tension between a voiceless female character —which from that whispering will make her voice heard, moving from absence to presence— decisively silencing and denying the power of masculine authority. Indeed, as the narrative unfolds, Sybil rebels and renounces silent isolation. Nevertheless, as Carpenter illustrates, the protagonist will prove to have inherited from her mother not madness but the spirit of rebellion that will enable her to save her life (1986: 31). In spite of Sybil sharing the same fate as her mother, the young protagonist, to whom Alcott grants a happy ending, is the only one capable of saving herself. As the story draws to a close, the mother dies in the asylum on the night of Sybil's 18th birthday and leaves her daughter two letters urging her to flee, tying them on a dog's collar with a lock of her blonde hair. The symbiotic mother-daughter relationship reaches a climax as Sybil observes the deceased body of the mother and she contemplates their similarities: "The face I saw was a pale image of my own. Sharpened by suffering, pallid with death, the features were familiar as those I used to see; the hair beautiful and blonde as mine had been, streamed long over the pulseless breast, and on the hand still clenched in that last struggle, shone the likeness of a ring I wore, a ring bequeathed me by my father" (Alcott 1996: 359).

Susan Williams further contends that Alcott's mother-daughter relationship is an example of a sentimental bond that extends beyond emotions (2020: 53). As Carpenter explains, "Sybil's mother might be described as 'destroyed' by madness leaving her daughter 'motherless' if not in actuality" (1986: 33). Hence, if the accusation of insanity becomes the starting point for committing a case of femicide, madness for Alcott later becomes an essential narrative climax to trigger a process of female emancipation. The behavioral escalation of the female character materializes in the unexpected happy conclusion: Sybil escapes from the asylum, finally gaining her freedom at the expense of an abrupt willingness to forgive her perpetrators.

6. Conclusion

Returning to Russell's definition, as gender-based violence and femicide have different expressions, Alcott's "A Whisper in the Dark" foregrounds the violence exerted on a woman who becomes a victim of psychological abuse that causes

mental unrest and distress. Coercion, drug administration and forced confinement are the most obvious expressions of the atrocity of violence to which women were subjected. All these characteristics are also fueled by narrative patterns, that is, confinement, madness and the threshold as powerful metaphors, whose recurrence has allowed me to read Alcott's short story as an acutely topical text capable of explicitly denouncing the condition and the social system to which women were unconsciously condemned by patriarchal society in 19th century America. Yet, in this scenario of extreme violence, Alcott envisages a female protagonist who refuses marriage in the name of inspirational freedom. Indeed, the narrative strength of "A Whisper in the Dark" does not lie in Alcott's immutable victimization of the woman, as it offers her a chance to regain her liberty.

If the story departs from femicide to stage and denounce female abuse through a pessimistic tone, at least in the first section of the narrative, the ending suggests Alcott's intention to end on a positive note. As Calanchi recalls, the choice of such a positive resolution "is not a narrative device for an easy conclusion but a message of hope for abused women and an implicit invitation to react to physical and psychological violence without considering victimhood as a permanent state" (2020: 22, my translation).[15] At a time when gender-based violence and femicide as an act of violence that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm to a woman have taken center stage in the discussion on gender-based abuse, the importance of Alcott's tale lies in its moral: a current light of hope for all abused women.

Most 19th-century American female Gothic fiction, especially during Alcott's time, was motivated by the social emergency of violence against women that today is epitomized by femicide. To this end, "A Whisper in the Dark" anticipates the fast-growing attention on femicide and female abuse, a global issue prompted today by the increasing number of cases and the renewed international awareness on female violence. The exceptional modernity of Alcott's work is confirmed by its proximity to current events in the narrativization of violence, events that are as intimate as they are collective, thus taking a perspective that projects this tale into the future, leading up to our current awareness on female violence. From this view, Alcott's tale becomes a model for gender denunciation, revolt and the desire for emancipation of those women deprived of voice and authority. Along with Alcott, the heroine represents the female rebellion against violence, reclaiming her voice in the context from which women have been excluded.

As one of the most severe forms of violence against women, femicide has recently become an urgent and painful topic and a global phenomenon. As the problem stems from a culture based on patriarchal imposition and unequal power relations, there is a great need to shine a spotlight on femicide and increase awareness of its deeply entrenched nature, which extends beyond the current discourse advocating

for change. To this end, "A Whisper in the Dark" proves how literature by the end of the 19th century already provided a platform for women to reject patriarchal abuse via imposition of their voice, a 'whisper' in that loud and sonorous masculine oppression we still deal with in our current society.

Notes

1. The term 'femicide' is often used interchangeably with 'feminicide'. The difference in terminology lies in the fact that femicide (the one I am about to examine) is the original sociological term associated with the phenomenon coined by feminist Diana Russell, whereas feminicide is the political term referring to the role of the state within the phenomenon and to the judicial structures that normalize misogyny.

2. See Hackman (2021).

3. For more on this, see Howard (2023).

4. The author's fame is mainly due to the publication of *Little Women*, which soon became a bestseller and was adapted into numerous films, as confirmed by Greta Gerwig's latest adaptation, *Little Women* (2019), and cinema's recurring interest in the novel. The novel was commissioned by Roberts Brothers publishing, despite Alcott's initial doubts as she felt that this kind of narrative genre was insufficient for her potential.

5. Femicide has 14 different subtypes, distinguished by relationship or motivation. For more information, see Dawson and Carrigan (2020).

6. *"fin dall'alba dei tempi e pure in epoca odierna, l'uomo, ha continuato a considerare la donna "una vita inferiore" e allo stesso tempo la depositaria di una scintilla divina, promessa e minacciosa allo stesso tempo della sua continuità"*.

7. The term 'female Gothic' was originally coined by Ellen Moers in 1976 to encompass Gothic stories authored by women.

8. For a fuller discussion on the American Gothic, see Weinstock (2017) and Hoeveler (2017). For more on female Gothic, see Fleenor (1983) and the more recent study by Wallace and Smith (2009). An excellent overview of the topic in Alcott's fiction can also be found in Madeleine Stone's introduction to the book *Plots and Counterplots: More Unknown Thrillers by Louisa May Alcott* (1976).

9. The experience as a Civil War nurse was an important part of Alcott's life, which led not only to the publication of *Hospital Sketches* (1863), but also affected her health when she contracted pneumonia and typhoid fever and was treated with inorganic mercury medication that produced an acute mercury poisoning, causing her chronic health problems (including vertigo).

10. Alcott was the first woman to register for election to a school board in Concord.

11. For more on this, see Freud (2013).

12. See Rüggemeier (2019) and Felman (1975).

13. Sybil's case is reminiscent of a very current phenomenon: so-called rape drugs. These are mostly narcotics dissolved in small amounts in drinks to sedate the subject (in most cases women), making the victim unconscious and vulnerable to sexual assault.

14. Psychiatric disability is a recurring feature in Alcott's fiction and especially in those works published anonymously, among which we find "A Whisper in the Dark".

15. *"Il lieto fine non è un espediente per una facile conclusione, ma un messaggio di speranza per le donne vittime di abusi e maltrattamenti e un invito implicito a reagire alla violenza - fisica e psicologica - senza introiettare la condizione di vittima come stato mentale permanente e inevitabile".*

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Received: 26/02/2024
Accepted: 22/07/2024

Reviews

IMAGINING THE CELTIC PAST IN MODERN FANTASY

Edited by Dimitra Fimi and Alistair J.P. Sims
London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.20249729

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Imagining the Celtic Past in Modern Fantasy, edited by Dimitra Fimi and Alistair J.P. Sims and published by Bloomsbury in 2023 is part of the *Perspectives on Fantasy* series. This title reflects the conciliatory approach that this collection has regarding Fantasy Studies. As Attenbery, Fimi and Sangster state in the Series Editors' Preface, there is not a unique definition or set of rules, but infinite ways to understand it, since this genre evokes "different meanings at different times for different people" (2023: x).

As Fimi explains in the Introduction, defining what or who is "Celtic" is complex, since researchers choose distinctions depending on their fields and context, and in popular culture the delimitation becomes a hodgepodge (2023: 1-2). Concerning this book, the diversity is well reflected, since different fantasy writers had re-imagined their own "Celts" (Iron age, medieval, cultural crossovers with similar languages, etc.). Ten researchers analyze representations of a variety of fantasy narratives that take elements from the Celtic tradition and culture, and their works explain the reasons beyond those choices and the deep lore that is created along the worldbuilding and the plot.

The book is divided in four parts, designed to encapsulate the different subgenres of the essays. The first part, "Celticity as Fantastic Intrusion", includes three chapters. The first of them is "Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know: The Celtic Fairy Realm in Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*", written by Dr. K. A. Laity, and it analyzes the complex relationship between Englishness and Celticity, regarding the sense of "otherness", in terms of geography, language and tradition, as the key to Clarke's story. It must be considered that this novel is historical fantasy, taking place around the Napoleonic wars and focusing on the fall of the

use of magic. With this essay, Dr. Laity explains how defining "Celticity" and choosing the aspects to include in the text is an ideological act itself, with Clarke offering some restoration of magic and, at the same time, warnings about it. All of this can be related to the Celtic past and the complex cultural and political visions around it, a theme that will be shared by most of the texts cited in this book. The second chapter verses on "The Evolution of Alan Garner's Celticity in *Boneland*". In this work, Gwendolen Grant explains that Garner's narratives and vision of the myths has not only inspired his world-building, but has also contributed to the fields of History, Archaeology and Anthropology, due to the author's interest in the subjects. The interrelation between tradition and fantasy was clear for Garner, who declared that, even if he lacked the chance to learn the language, hearing Welsh felt like remembering, like "hearing the knights, who lay in the cave with their king under the hill behind our house" (Garner 1997: 196). Grant also revises how, as the author was writing the Widerstone trilogy, the Jungian ideas he was implementing in the narrative evolved, making it necessary for the reader to undertake personal research in order to understand the references. The first section of the book closes with Kris Swank's work "Woman as Goddess in the Irish Fantasies of Jodi McIsaac". This scholar analyzes how McIsaac subverts the medieval vision of the Tuatha Dé Danann and the interconnection between Celtic deities and saints. For example, the figure of Brigit / Brigid is a subject of allegories and symbolism related to fire, crosses and death (which, for Swank, is what a trip to Fairyland could mean). This essay explores how Irish legend can set the basis for feminine-empowerment and revolution but also humane qualities and values such as love and self-sacrifice, through the McIsaac powerful yet compassionate heroines whose morality can be adapted to reflect the Christian virtues and standards.

The second part, "Celtic Fantasy Worlds and Heroes" is divided into three chapters. In "The Heroic Biographies of Cú Chulainn and Connavar in the *Rigante* Series", Alistair J. P. Sims develops a study of the depiction of the heroes of the saga, inspired by the Cú Chulainn and different Roman and Gallus warriors and rulers, such as Vercingetorix. Following methods such as the Heroic Biography Pattern, Sims analyzes their deeds and ethos in David Andrew Gemell's stories. The same narrative universe is revised in "Classical Ethnography and the World(s) of the *Rigante*", by Anthony Smart, who portrays another point of view: the classical Greek and Roman basis for Gemell's imagery when it comes to barbarians and how *Rigante*'s world could be considered a Romanized perspective of Celtic history. In contrast to the kind of warriors and the heroes studied in the previous essay, Smart explains how the depictions of the Germanic barbarians from the Roman perspective present them as a menace to their identity and culture, representing their otherness as dangerous and corrupt. The sixth chapter of the book is a literal change of universe: "Celts in Spaaaaace!", by Cheryl Morgan. This researcher explores how sci-fi and

mythological fantasy intertwine in Patricia Kennealy's *Keltiad* book series, where the mythical Celtic past and Arthurian legend narratives are combined, creating a utopian magical and technologically advanced society. Morgan explains the complexity of this depiction, since the Keltic race is not only inspired by the Tuatha Dé Dannan, but also contains references to the Atlanteans, relating them to the Great Pyramids of Egypt and the Peruvian Machu Picchu and Nazca Lines. This essay explores how the myth of Atlantis is extrapolated to the Irish past, building a combination of speculative fiction and mythology.

The book's third part, "Celtic Fantasy Beyond the Anglophone" contains two essays. The first of them is titled "From *Vertigen* to *Frontier*: The Fate of the Sidhes in Léa Silhol's Fiction". There, Viviane Bergue offers a perspective of how magical beings like fairies have been traditionally linked to Celtic culture, underlying the sense of otherness that relies on those visions. As Bergue explains, the author not only got inspiration from Celtic and Greek mythology, but her lore crossed paths with Christianity, including angelic legends, since Silhol's portrays the faeries as former fallen angels who did not join Lucifer's army. As many other essays contained in this book, the connection between religion and previous Irish myths is common and serves to reinforce the imagery of fantasy literature. Narratives like this one fall into the category of "mythopoesis", as the transformation of pre-existent myths inspire the reader to examine their own spirituality and morals (Mythopoetic Society). The other chapter from this section is "'Chaidh e nas doimhne agus nas doimhne ann an seann theacsaichean': Gaelic history and legend in *An Sgoil Dhubh* by Iain F. MacLeòid", written by Duncan Sneddon. The researcher analyzes the way in which fantasy often revolves around certain clichés such as mythical swords. This work explains how the different folklores and myths influence and complete MacLeòid's narration, finding models and references to Irish Medieval stories and Norse literature. As Sneddon explains, basing these narratives about Gaelic culture on legends and traces of Norse settlements on the islands and implementing them in a fictional present builds an alternative Gaelic history with a very deep and interesting lore. It must also be said that, as the scholar remarks, MacLeòid's worldbuilding is also connected to well-established tropes from fantasy literature, such as J.R.R.Tolkien and Terry Pratchett's stories, which include elves, dwarves, among other popular creatures, confirming their strong presence as part of the popular culture's version of Celtic myths.

Finally, the fourth part, "Fantastic Perceptions of Celticity" includes the last two chapters of the book. In "The Celtic Tarot in Speculative Fiction", Juliette Wood explains how tarot magic has been associated with the Celtics (despite the fact that their texts did not explicitly mention anything about that matter) in order to build a narrative that links folklore and magic through esoteric practices. In this work, Wood

makes a recapitulation of several fantasy novels and poems where tarot imagery is essential and explains how the authors relate the cards and motives not only to Irish legends, but also to Arthurian stories and even the Templars, since the grail quest could be related to the modern Tarot seeker (2008: 110). Lastly, in "Celtic Appropriation in Twenty-First-Century Fantasy Fan Perceptions", Angela R. Cox examines how readers and audiences in general perceive the inclusion of Celtic mythology in fictional narratives. This essay analyzes how certain patterns and tropes (druids, fairies, etc.) are so intricately linked to fantasy genres that the association between Celticity and fantasy is inevitable. Through ethnographic research based on collective online discussion from two online fantasy-fan communities, Cox explains that, even if the genre contributes to the popularization of mythology, the apparently homogeneous mixture between Irish and Welsh traditions and Arthurian legendary could end up diminishing the meaning of the folklore itself in popular culture.

In conclusion, this book offers different perspectives about Celticity in fantasy texts, presenting a wide variety of study cases. Although the authors review very different texts and narratives, there are certain common subjects, such as the early Christian imagery infused by Celticity, the Arthurian legend as complement to many of the myth-based stories, and the importance of Norse settlements regarding culture and tradition within the previous idiosyncrasy of the Islands. Through the different studies with a very practical approach and a fair quantity of examples analyzed, the reader (whether scholar or not) can understand how Irish mythology and folklore have been linked to new fantasy stories, the role they play in worldbuilding, and the evolution of these Celtic-inspired narratives through time.

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Received: 05/10/2023
Accepted: 04/10/2024

THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY: CADS APPROACHES TO THE BRITISH MEDIA

Edited by Eva M. Gómez-Jiménez and Michael Toolan
London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.20249783

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The Discursive Construction of Economic Inequality is a monograph that emerged from a symposium at the University of Birmingham in mid-2018, featuring chapters presented at the event as well as additional commissioned chapters from other scholars. Edited by Eva M. Gómez-Jiménez and Michael Toolan, this book explores how language in the British media portrays and influences economic inequality. Using a variety of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study (CADS) approaches, it provides an historicized perspective on the normalization of wealth inequality in the United Kingdom from the 19th century to the present day. By analyzing print, radio, and online media, the nine chapters, written by scholars with backgrounds in Critical Discourse Studies, reveal how the media influences public perception and contributes to entrenched inequality in modern Britain. The book highlights the multifaceted nature of economic inequality and its interconnections with health, gender, and class. In the times where poverty is justified as an individual choice, and meritocracy and financial self-aid are discursively hegemonic, this book is an asset for social scientists of diverse fields (e.g., Economy, Sociology, Journalism, Pol-Sci) to gain a linguistic perspective of this phenomenon.

This volume contributes to social sciences by offering an Applied Linguistics perspective on the representation of those suffering from inequality. It shows how an imbalanced structure of power has used negationism and repression as tools to control and perpetuate itself, all in the name of democracy and liberty. The book's

core idea underscores the inescapable nature of inequality, a concept that constantly evolves with changing historical circumstances and class power balances. These social interactions lead to new forms of discourse and require innovative strategies for addressing it. The Introduction, written by Eva M. Gómez-Jiménez and Michael Toolan, establishes the overarching theme of the discursive construction of economic inequality in the UK. It provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the book's focus and methodology. Following the Introduction, nine chapters analyse specific aspects of economic inequality, examining how it is represented and perpetuated through language and British media.

The first chapter, written by Nuria Lorenzo-Dus and Sadiq Almaged, applies CADS techniques on Labour and Conservative annual conferences on poverty and social exclusion from 1900 to 2014, dividing the data into three periods. Keyword analyses are conducted to identify relevant terms, followed by manual categorization of contextualized use of these terms into Poverty and Social Exclusion discourses within the corpora. Finally, an ideo-textual analysis is performed on concordance lines containing the most frequent keywords. The findings reveal two dominant discourses: a financial-centric approach favored by the Conservative Party, and a more hardship-oriented narrative favored by Labour. Both parties tend to use abstract words to depict poverty and social exclusion, often using third-person language to distance decisionmakers from responsibility. Not strikingly, party leaders tend to use passive forms when depicting 'the poor', which reinforces the aforementioned inescapable nature of economic exclusion.

Chapter 2, by Joe Spencer-Bennet, conducts a critical discourse analysis of inequality during World War II, drawing from sources in the Ministry of Information and the Mass-Observation project. Employing a qualitative approach, the chapter thoroughly examines official texts, particularly focusing on the synthetic vernacularization of political communication directed at the masses. This shift in political discourse from abstract and educated to a more vernacular "new language of leadership" for the masses is explored. The analysis reveals that the language intended for the 'masses' was rife with stereotypes, primarily serving aims of population control rather than fostering democratization or egalitarianism.

Chapter 3, written by Isabelle van de Bom and Laura L. Paterson, offers a compelling analysis of the evolution of the 'welfare state' concept in the press. To accomplish this, they meticulously extracted concordances containing this term from a subcorpus of articles sourced from *The Times*. They systematically classified all instances of the key term from 1940 to 2009. Their findings reveal that the term is not anchored to a consistent core value and that its associated meanings have fluctuated over time. Notably, the discourse surrounding welfare shifted ideologically, aligning with neoliberalism and associating welfare with the creation

of a socially marginalized underclass. This shift intensified following Rupert Murdoch's acquisition of *The Times*. During the 1960s, the welfare state was largely taken for granted and scarcely mentioned. However, it came under intense scrutiny during the 1970s and 1980s, coinciding with the acquisition of the newspaper by the tycoon. More importantly, this chapter unveils that *The Times* has restricted the concept of welfare to the provision of benefits for the less privileged, omitting core elements such as education or the National Health System from the discourse on welfare.

In Chapter 4, Michael Toolan undertakes a critical discourse analysis by comparing the keywords extracted from a corpus of opinion articles sourced from *The Times*, spanning two distinct decades: the 1970s and the 2000s. This study's central focus is child poverty, and it introduces two contrasting script types: a *laissez-faire* approach and an interventionist approach. While the research is undeniably intriguing, it would greatly benefit from a more explicit exposition of the methodology employed. During the 1970s, the interventionist approach was considered desirable, while in the 2000s, the narrative took a contrasting turn. Discourse surrounding welfare and state-supported assistance became marginalized, and poverty in the 2000s was predominantly portrayed as a personal issue, with the state seemingly incapable of providing viable solutions.

Chapter 5, authored by Ilse A. Ras, analyzes how the press portrays elite crimes, such as 'corporate fraud' and 'modern slavery'. The research examines rhetorical techniques and neutralization in media coverage, using different time periods (2004-2007, 2008-2010, and 2011-2014) to construct the Modern Slavery Corpus from database searches in 22 British newspapers. The study finds that reporting on these crimes often avoids assigning responsibility to corporate criminals, instead blaming governments for a perceived failure to regulate effectively, allowing corporations to evade accountability.

Chapter 6, authored by Jane Mulderring, explores the intricate relationship between health and inequality, with a specific focus on the analysis of the UK government's *Change 4 Life* program aimed at reducing obesity from its inception in 2009 to 2019. This chapter seeks to examine the linguistic representation of target groups within obesity policy, aiming to uncover the linguistic processes that shape the normative linguistic identity assigned to certain populations. Furthermore, it endeavors to identify the strategies employed by the government to engage specific target audiences. To accomplish this, Mulderring's research draws upon two primary sources: a corpus of policy documents and a corpus of advertisements disseminated on television and social media platforms. However, the chapter does not provide detailed information regarding the size or scope of these corpora.

Chapter 7, co-authored by Leslie Jeffries and Brian Walker, undertakes a comprehensive examination of the evolution of 'austerity' in discourse, one of the Great Recession mantras, instrumentalized in advancing a neoliberal agenda. The authors meticulously scrutinized the utilization of the key term 'austerity' in the UK Parliamentary context by juxtaposing two time-tagged newspaper corpora during different stages of the crisis (beginning and end). Over time, the discourse surrounding austerity has transitioned from a concept associated with war-rationing across all social classes to the imperative of 'balancing the books' discourse —to justify the reduction of public spending disproportionately impacting the less affluent and exacerbated inequality. Thus, 'austerity' evolved into a hegemonic term that resists critical scrutiny, often positioned as a necessary evil.

In Chapter 8, Richard Thomas undertakes a commendable task, meticulously transcribing and analyzing news broadcasts from BBC (publicly owned) and ITV (a private broadcaster). His analysis spans the years 2007 and 2014. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, a consistent use of neoliberal anti-regulation rhetoric to shield the interests of the affluent is unveiled, which is particularly outrageous for the publicly-funded BBC, all while demonstrating reluctance to address the pressing issue of inequality. In his analysis, the author highlights how these news outlets often employ neoliberal anti-regulation rhetoric to defend the interests of the super-rich, while consistently using language to mask their reluctance to address the pressing issue of inequality. Thomas's paper artfully strikes a balance between statistical precision and engaging, thought-provoking arguments, leaving the reader with a plethora of questions that beckon further exploration.

In Chapter 9, Wolfgang Teubert boldly concludes the book with what may be considered its most combative episode, asserting that his hermeneutic work is unequivocally "not a scientific paper", and indeed, it need not be. The author challenges the foundational principles of parliamentary systems under the control of the oligos, the *few*, who safeguard their interests in the market from the masses while veiling inequalities under the rhetoric of "individual liberty" as working-class movements grew stronger in the 19th century. In his analysis, Teubert posits that true freedom is primarily enjoyed by the wealthy, thereby asserting that they are the only ones truly capable of exercising their freedoms. To manage the revolutionary aspirations of the working class and suppress major upheavals, the narrative framework was strategically shifted overnight from "democracy is evil" to "we already live in a democracy". Teubert conducts a hermeneutic analysis of select texts from political works and the records of British Parliament discussions on democracy, spanning from 1832 to the present day. While his pessimistic perspective on a seemingly divided and powerless working class may be contentious,

it offers a rare opportunity to engage with critical issues in linguistic discourse. Teubert's work offers valuable insights into the discourse surrounding the working class and contemporary discourses of meritocracy and the follies of a social ladder. Ultimately, he concludes that hegemonic discourse inhibits workers from actively advocating for equality within the democratic sphere, which would lead to equality and real democracy for the working-class social majority.

The book closes with an Afterword by Danny Dorling where he reflects on inequality and an omniscient market economy "where everything is for sale, everytime, everywhere" (185). You cannot be unlucky but rather you have not tried hard enough.

While the book undoubtedly offers valuable insights, it is worth noting that there was room for more visualizations and statistical analyses within its pages. Such enhancements could further enrich the presentation and interpretation of data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Apart from this, the book provides a highly valuable multidisciplinary bibliography, encompassing fields like linguistics, discourse studies, political science, sociology, and cultural studies. Within its pages, readers will discover a treasure trove of methodologies that are very valuable in their own right for the analysis of other discourses, but here succeed on the quest of underscoring the profound changes in discourse over time. Each chapter critically scrutinizes the discursive norms used by the elites that often obfuscate and marginalize the source of social inequalities. Encouragingly, this body of work is an antidote for fatalism: it demonstrates that nothing is irreversible. If discourse could evolve in the past for the worse, it could also be reshaped (for the better, for *the many*) in the future.

Received: 18/10/2023
Accepted: 21/09/2024

Notes for contributors

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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Miscelánea publishes articles on English language and linguistics, on literatures written in English, and on thought, cinema and cultural studies from the English-speaking world.

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As Bachelard claims, while past memories are important, "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (2004: 5, emphasis added), which raises a question about the quality of living.

According to Shaw, the works belonging to this genre are concerned with either reflecting imaginatively, responding directly or dealing with the socio-cultural, economic and racial consequences that followed the UK's exit from the European Union (2021: 4).

…language always fulfils three communicative functions (Jewitt et al. 2016).

…this idea has been rejected by several authors (Reger 2017; Evans 2015; Cochrane 2013).

As Suárez Orozco suggests …. (in Inda 2014: 34).

Should part of the original text be omitted, this will be made clear by inserting […], NOT (…).

Should the emphasis be in the original text, this will be explicitly indicated as "emphasis in original". Should the emphasis be added by the author, "my emphasis" should be added: (Bordwell 2006: 73, emphasis in original).

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Authors' full first names should be used unless the authors themselves customarily use only initials. Set the author's surname(s) in small caps (e.g. Joyce, neither Joyce nor JOYCE).

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Hyland, Ken. 2017a. "Metadiscourse: What is it and Where is it Going?" *Journal of Pragmatics* 113: 16-29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2017.03.007>.

Hyland, Ken. 2017b. "English in the Discipline: Arguments for Specificity". *ESP Today* 5 (1): 5-23.

Hyland, Ken and Feng Kevin Jiang. 2021. "'Our Striking Results Demonstrate…': Persuasion and the Growth of Academic Hype". *Journal of Pragmatics* 182: 189-202. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.06.018>.

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Author's Surname(s), Author's first name(s). (Year of 1st edition) Year of edition actually used. *Title in italics.* Place: Publisher.

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Leonard, Suzanne. 2014. "Escaping the Recession? The New Vitality of the Woman Worker". In Negra, Diane and Yvonne Tasker (eds.) *Gendering the*

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Molina-Guzmán, Isabel. 2014. "'Latina Wisdom' in 'Postrace' Recession Media". In Negra, Diane and Yvonne Tasker (eds.) *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity*. Durham and London: Duke U.P.: 59-80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1131fr9.6>.

Negra, Diane and Yvonne Tasker. 2014. *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity*. Durham and London: Duke U.P. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822376538>.

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If the author of the collection and of the short piece being cited are the same

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Oates, Joyce Carol. 2004. "Curly Red". In *I Am No One You Know: Stories*. New York: Harper Collins: 3-20.

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Lu, Xiaofei. 2011. "A Corpus-Based Evaluation of Syntactic Complexity Measures as Indices of College-Level ESL Writers' Language Development". *TESOL Quarterly* 45 (1): 36-62. <https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2011.240859>.

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"The return of Sir Thomas Phillipps' Italian manuscripts to Italy". 2021. *Institute of English Studies* (blog). (July 2). <https://englishstudies.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2021/07/02/the-return-of-sir-thomas-phillipps-italian-manuscripts-to-italy/>. Accessed March 18, 2022.

Films:

Director's Surname(s), Director's first name(s). Year. ***Title in italics.*** **Production Company.**

Ross, Matt. 2016. *Captain Fantastic*. Electric City Entertainment.

Television shows, series and limited series:

Creator's Surname(s), Creator's first name(s). Year(s). ***Title in italics.*** **Broadcast studio.**

Waller-Bridge, Phoebe. 2016-2019. *Fleabag*. BBC Three and Amazon Prime Video.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the colleagues who, without belonging to our Board of Referees, were willing to revise and assess some of the contributions.

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