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## FOREWORD

Dear reader:

Once again we can offer our readers a new issue (#18) of *The Grove. Working Papers on English Studies*. Our journal is edited by the Research Group HUM 0271, funded by the Andalusian Government and Caja Rural, and hosted at the Universidad de Jaén, and although these are difficult times for science and academic scholarship, we can proudly say that we have been able to find the time and funding necessary to meet our goals, one more year.

Recent academic evaluations by regional and national agencies make us think that we are increasingly becoming more visible and better positioned among learned Spanish and European journals in the Humanities (more specifically among English studies proper), although there is still a long way to go. In our present issue we include new editorial information which, although present in our website, we have also chosen to introduce in the paper version of the journal: submission guidelines, or affiliation of the editorial board. As always this issue offers relevant work by contributors from various international institutions, a cultural diversity that shows the international dimension that our journal has already acquired. This diversity also has to do with the topics addressed: applied linguistics, cultural studies, translation and, as always, literary criticism from a variety of periods and genres.

One more year we include a valuable poetic contribution, by Peter Figueroa, who sadly passed away while we were preparing this volume. We would like this to be a humble tribute to his memory.

To conclude, we would like to underline the gratitude of the editorial board to our referees, scientific advisory board, contributors, assistants, the Universidad de Jaén Research Group HUM 0271 and the Caja Rural for their invaluable assistance.

*Editors*





Peter Figueroa passed away as this volume was going to press. The Editorial Team of *The Grove* sends its deepest and most sincere condolences to Peter's family and friends.



# **LITERARY STUDIES AND CRITICISM**



# THE DARK INTERIORS OF *ARTHUR MERVYN*

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## Abstract

This essay examines the motif of darkness in Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*. Although seemingly the tale of an innocent rustic, the novel explores the concealments, subterfuges, and evasions in the narratives of one who interiorizes market virtues. *Arthur Mervyn* is more than the novel of a young man who finds his fortune in Philadelphia. The action of this first literary portrayal of a city in the United States is set during the 1793 yellow fever epidemic and its immediate aftermath. The tantalizing first person narratives that constitute the novel are often wrapped inside one another, complicating the search for truth. Through oblique allusions, Brown conveys the unease and anxiety associated with slavery and the dark future of a young republic infatuated with moralistic and redemptive narratives.

**Keywords:** Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn*, early American novel, darkness, yellow fever, slavery.

## LOS INTERIORES OSCUROS DE *ARTHUR MERVYN*

### Resumen

Este ensayo investiga el tema de la oscuridad en la novela *Arthur Mervyn* de Charles Brockden Brown. Aunque se hace pasar por la historia de un campesino inocente, la novela indaga en los encubrimientos, subterfugios, y evasiones en las narrativas de un personaje que interioriza las virtudes del mercado. *Arthur Mervyn* es más que una novela de un joven que encuentra buena ventura en Filadelfia. La intriga de este primer retrato literario de una ciudad estadounidense se desenvuelve durante la epidemia de fiebre amarilla

de 1793. Envueltas una en otra, las narrativas en primera persona de esta novela complican la búsqueda de la verdad. Brown nos comunica de soslayo la inquietud y la ansiedad asociadas con la esclavitud, y el también porvenir oscuro de una joven república hipnotizada por narrativas moralistas y redentoras.

**Palabras clave:** Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn*, novela estadounidense temprana, oscuridad, fiebre amarilla, esclavitud.

Published in two parts in 1799 and 1800, *Arthur Mervyn* is a novel of dark interiors that project fears and terrors into homes, attics, closets, and the souls of characters. In those shadows, we glimpse the troubled beginnings of a nation conceived in secrecy and crime. In this novel, Charles Brockden Brown parodies conventional virtues that conceal the moral disease of a dysfunctional society. Gothic images of darkness and despair undermine bright pieties and notions of moral uplift. Cast as an earnest appeal, *Arthur Mervyn* lampoons the materialism and venality of the new American republic.

*Arthur Mervyn* opens with a first person narration by a Philadelphia physician, Dr. Stevens, who rescues Arthur Mervyn, a young man stricken with yellow fever during the 1793 epidemic. Mervyn at first appears reluctant to allow Stevens to shelter him since that would endanger Stevens' family. Wortley, a friend of Stevens, recognizes Mervyn as a former employee of Welbeck, and accuses Mervyn of having helped to defraud him. Therefore, Mervyn recounts a tale to preserve Stevens' esteem. "I can keep my hold of your good opinion only by a candid deportment" (15), Mervyn tells Stevens.

Initially, Brown's moralistic preface to *Arthur Mervyn* predisposes the reader to favorably view Mervyn:

Men only require to be made acquainted with distress for their compassion and their charity to be awakened. He that depicts, in lively colours, the evils of disease and poverty, performs an eminent service to the sufferers, by calling forth benevolence in those who are able to afford relief, and he who portrays examples of disinterestedness and intrepidity, confers on

virtue the notoriety and homage that are due to it, and rouses in the spectators, the spirit of salutary emulation. (3)<sup>1</sup>

However, Brown frustrates our high expectations of Mervyn. David M. Larson deplores the dissonance between the behavior of the eponymous protagonist and the preface's expression of confidence in humanity's response to suffering (211). Larson overlooks the possibility that Brown did not mean for Arthur to personify virtue or heroism. Though ironic, the preface is nonetheless a call to civic engagement.

At first, Arthur Mervyn appears to the reader as he does to Stevens, as an earnest young man who esteems his benefactor. Alan Axelrod concludes: "Largely because Stevens is the ostensible narrator of the novel (he is actually one of many) and a sympathetically drawn character, we accept Arthur's innocence despite the evidence against it" (137). Stevens' credulity will, as Mervyn says, "render a tale worthy of attention which will not be recommended by a variety of facts or skill in the display of them" (16). Consequently, some readers may initially share Larson's impression of the first part of the novel as a "classic American tale of the innocent country boy gulled by city sharpers" (210). However, many readers will come to doubt Mervyn's veracity since multiple narrators in the second part of the novel contradict his narrative. Just as Arthur fools Stevens with artful tales, so does Brown baffle his readers with multiple perspectives of a protagonist who shimmers like a mirage.

Mervyn tells Stevens that his siblings all died young, that his mother died shortly after the death of her fifth child, and that he was disinherited after his father married a milk-maid, Betty Lawrence. According to Mervyn, these circumstances forced him to leave home. On his way to Philadelphia, innkeepers overcharged him. "I have always regarded with contempt a scrupulous maker of bargains," he assures Dr. Stevens (26). However, Mervyn himself displays avidity at every turn of his narrative, such as when he says that he would have acted just like Betty in her place.

Mervyn's words sound decidedly pecuniary and transactional when Mervyn feigns scruples about his employment: "My peace of mind

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Christophersen notes the ambiguity of 'notoriety' which denotes at once infamy, fame, and monetary tribute, and which is a rather mischievous modifier of 'virtue' (91).

depended on the favourable verdict which conscience should pass on my proceedings. I saw the emptiness of fame and luxury when put in the balance against the recompense of virtue. Never would I purchase the blandishments of adulation and the glare of opulence at the price of my honesty" (71). Were Mervyn in fact indifferent to fame and riches, he would not have to repeatedly insist on it.

Mervyn recounts how, after Welbeck hired him as his personal secretary, he fantasized about being adopted as his new son, confident that Welbeck "will be governed by proofs that I shall give of discernment and integrity" (58). Notwithstanding his protestations of honesty, Mervyn reveals his greed when he describes his thoughts while eavesdropping in a closet in the mansion of the rich merchant Thetford. Overhearing Thetford's intrigue to defraud Welbeck, Mervyn wonders,

Who, thought I, is this nabob who counts his dollars by half millions, and whom, it seems, as if some fraud was intended to be practiced. Amidst their waryness and subtly how little are they aware that their conversation has been overheard! By means as inscrutable as those which conducted me hither, I may be enabled to profit by this detection of a plot. (41)

We learn about Welbeck through Mervyn. What appears to be Welbeck's narrative in the first part of the novel is in fact related by Mervyn who, in effect, ventriloquizes Welbeck, and projects his own depravity on to his former employer. Consider how the following words, attributed by Mervyn to Welbeck, describe Mervyn himself: "My birth and previous adventures it was proper to conceal. The facility with which mankind are misled in their estimate of characters, their proneness to multiply inferences and conjectures will not be readily conceived by one destitute of my experience" (95).

The ostensible words of Welbeck reveal an ironic self-awareness on the part of a sociopath who in effect confesses, at least to a discerning reader, that "shame and remorse had no power over my life... I possessed no means of subsistence. I was unknown by my neighbours, and desired to remain unknown. I was unqualified for manual labor by all the habits of my life; but there was no choice between penury and diligence – between honest labour and criminal inactivity" (88). There is implicit self-recognition in the evil that Mervyn ascribes to Welbeck: "His own gratification was the supreme law of his actions. To be subjected to the necessity of honest labour, was the heaviest of all



evils, and one from which he was willing to escape by the commission of suicide" (199). Russo points out that it is Mervyn who is a skilled penman rather than Welbeck, who has a crippled hand, thus making Mervyn the likely forger of the counterfeit bills (396).

Mervyn changes his life story after being confronted with the testimony of Mrs. Althorpe: "It is true that I took up the spade and the hoe as rarely, and for as short a time, as possible. I preferred to ramble in the forest and loiter on the hill..." (341). He quickly justifies his aversion to work:

My frame was delicate and feeble. Exposure to wet blasts and vertical suns was sure to make me sick... My health was dearer to my mother than to me. She was more anxious to exempt me from possible injuries than reason justified; but anxious she was, and I could not save her from anxiety but by almost wholly abstaining from labor. (342)

Towards those who think ill of him, Mervyn expresses saintly forbearance:

I am not surprised or afflicted at the misconceptions of my neighbors, with relation to my own character. Men must judge from what they see: they must build their conclusions on their knowledge. I never saw in the rebukes of my neighbors, any thing but laudable abhorrence of vice. They were not eager to blame, to collect materials of censure rather than of praise. It was not me whom they hated and despised. It was the phantom that passed under my name, which existed only in their imagination, and which was worthy of all their scorn and all their enmity. (340)

In the first novelistic portrayal of a city in the United States, Mervyn describes Philadelphia as a site of "discords and evil smells, unsavoury food, unwholesome labour, and irksome companions" (24). Nonetheless, Philadelphia presents a magical aspect for Mervyn in the enchanting street lamps on Market Street. In a city rife with opportunity, Mervyn moves easily among Philadelphia's classes, which were described thus in a 1781 article:

The first class consists of commercial projectors: those who make enormous gains of public confidence; speculators, riotous livers, and a kind of loungers... These people are so complaisant to each other as to call themselves the Better Sort of People... The second class are a set of honest sober men who

mind their business; very little regarded at present excepting, as they are the prey of the first and third classes. The third class are thieves, pick-pockets, low-cheats and dirty sots. These are not restrained by principle, but only by want of wealth and public trust, from being of the first class... A fellow who could cheat at cards, or wretch that could betray public confidence, needs only to be entrusted with a few millions of continental property to become, instantly, one of the Better Sort of People. A highway-man, in some situations, would have shone like a star of the first magnitude. (Foner 51-52)

Mervyn shines “like a star of the first magnitude” whenever he morphs into the kind of person that his interlocutor wishes to see. He insinuates himself into other people’s homes and lives and can project himself into any situation. For instance, after experiencing the horrors of a public hospital, Mervyn imagines himself as the ideal hospital administrator:

What qualities were requisite in the governor of such an institution? He must have zeal, diligence and perseverance. He must act from lofty and pure motives. He must be mild and firm, intrepid and compliant. One perfectly qualified for the office it is desirable, but not possible, to find. A dispassionate and honest zeal in the cause of duty and humanity, may be of eminent utility. Am I not endowed with this zeal? Cannot my feeble efforts obviate some portion of this evil? (176-77)

This incessant self-fashioning verges on the marvelous, as Mervyn well knows: “If I tell the tale by the kitchen fire, my veracity will be disputed. I shall be ranked with the storytellers of Shirauz and Baghdad” (35). Storytelling assures swift social ascendance for Mervyn, just as does for Scheherezade in *The Arabian Nights*, in which the young bride tells an unfinished tale to the caliph each night in order to survive and thus remain a queen.

Mervyn claims that he did not regret the loss of his clothes and knapsack on his first day in Philadelphia, but that he did miss a self-portrait of Clavering, a young man whom Mervyn claimed had died at his father’s house. Mervyn states that his mother fancied Clavering since “he was amiable and unfortunate, and chiefly because she fancied a very powerful resemblance between his countenance and mine” (30). Mervyn describes how Clavering “was constantly declaiming in an incoherent manner, about some mistress who had proved faithless. His

speeches seemed... like the rantings of an actor" (29-30). Mervyn too is bizarrely theatrical and has, as James Russo points out, "the ability to see himself from the outside, as if he were someone else" (387).<sup>2</sup>

Mervyn claims that when he returned to Welbeck's house for refuge during the plague, Colvill's voice answered when Mervyn knocked on the locked door of the study. When Welbeck emerged from the study, he improbably told Mervyn that he had faked the voice of his rescuer Colvill, whose voice Welbeck had most recently heard. The counterfeiter would be more likely Mervyn since in all likelihood it was he, Clavering, who had formerly played the part of Colvill.

Welbeck's mansion had formerly belonged to Clavering's parents, who had reportedly departed for Europe in search of their lost son. In Welbeck's mansion, Mervyn lovingly regards a portrait of Clavering: "It was impossible to overlook its resemblance to my own visage. This was so great that, for a moment, I imagined myself to have been the original from which it had been drawn" (82). Russo convincingly argues that Mervyn is in fact Clavering who, under the name of Colvill, found employment in the countryside as schoolmaster, but fled after seducing Mervyn's sister (395). Clavering appears to have stolen the money of Mervyn's father, murdered Mervyn, and then usurped Mervyn's identity.

Welbeck gives Mervyn some elegant French-style clothes that probably once belonged to Clavering. As he gazes into the mirror, Mervyn muses: "I remembered the style of dress, used by my beloved Clavering. My locks were of shining auburn, flowing and smooth like his... I could scarcely forbear looking back to see whether the image in the glass, so well proportioned, so galant, and so graceful, did not belong

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<sup>2</sup> Such is the case when Mervyn describes his sufferings in Welbeck's mansion while stricken with yellow fever: "I felt as if the opportunity of combating such evils was an enviable privilege, and though none would witness my victorious magnanimity, yet to be conscious that praise was my due, was all that my ambition required" (213). Of course, Stevens does, in a sense, "witness [Mervyn's] victorious magnanimity" since he evidently believes Mervyn's performance. Mervyn again hoodwinks Stevens when he sanctimoniously describes his reaction after Welbeck threatened to kill him. Mervyn relates how he "looked at him with an air compassionate and wistful" before sweetly replying, "Would to God I could restore you to happiness and virtue... Death is the inevitable and universal lot. When or how it comes, is of little moment. To stand, when so many thousands are falling around me, is not to be expected. I have acted an humble and obscure part in the world, and my career has been short; but I murmur not at the decree that makes it so" (192).

to another” (51). Russo notes the irony when Welbeck tells Mervyn to “consider this house as your home” (389).

It is very likely Clavering who seduced Clemenza, the daughter of Welbeck. Consider her reaction, as described by Mervyn, when Welbeck introduces Mervyn: “She did not immediately notice me. When she did she almost shrieked with surprise. She held up her hands, and gazing upon me, uttered various exclamations which I could not understand” (52). Mervyn pretends not to understand her distress, leaving Stevens, his auditor, in the dark.<sup>3</sup>

When Mervyn visits the distraught Clemenza in the brothel, she tells him to go away, for it was probably he who fathered her baby, thus sealing her doom. The baby’s death coincides with Mervyn’s visit, suggesting that Mervyn’s tale might well conceal another murder. Soon afterwards, Mervyn visits the ruined Welbeck in the debtors’ prison, verbosely lamenting the death of Clemenza’s new-born:

It is dead. I witnessed its death. I saw it expire in the arms of its mother; that mother whom I formerly met under your roof blooming and gay, but whom calamity has tarnished and withered. I saw her in the raiment of poverty, under an accursed roof; desolate; alone; unsolaced by the countenance or sympathy of human beings; approached only by those who mock at her distress, set snares for her innocence, and push her to infamy. I saw her leaning over the face of her dying babe. (337)

Horried, the grief-stricken Welbeck responds, “curses on thy lips, infernal messenger! Chant elsewhere thy rueful ditty!... Execrable fool! you are the author of the scene that you describe, and of horrors without number and name” (337). These words, as related by Mervyn himself, indicate that Welbeck knows that it is none other than Mervyn who

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<sup>3</sup> It is nonetheless difficult to prove Russo’s thesis that the Arthur Mervyn that Stevens meets is actually Clavering in disguise. For instance, Williams tells Stevens that Mervyn met Mrs. Wentworth, Clavering’s aunt and the owner of the mansion in which Welbeck lived. Williams relates that Mervyn tried unsuccessfully both to convince Mrs. Wentworth that Clavering had died and to get back the portrait of Clavering that he had lost and which had ended up in Mrs. Wentworth’s possession. If Mervyn were indeed Clavering in disguise, how could he fool his own aunt? Unless Clavering colluded with his aunt to defraud Clavering’s parents, whose bodies might be the secret in the attic that Mervyn passed over in silence. Or perhaps it was not Clavering who went to see Mrs. Wentworth, but his accomplice. In any event, Russo’s thesis must remain conjectural, like all criticism on *Arthur Mervyn*.

mocked Clemenza's distress, having ruined her. Mervyn's insufferably prolix discourse on the untimely demise of Clemenza's baby, evokes, at least for Brown's contemporaries, Franklin's sententious essay titled "The Death of Infants," published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1734.

After hearing his life story, Stevens opines that Mervyn "had displayed inimitable and heroic qualities" (219). Mervyn assures his benefactor "that the being whose life you have prolonged, though uneducated, ignorant, and poor, is not profligate and worthless, and will not dedicate that life which your bounty has given, to mischievous or contemptible purposes" (215). While discerning readers might doubt that statement, Stevens trusts the young man: "If Mervyn has deceived me there is an end to my confidence in human nature. All limits to dissimulation, and all distinctions between vice and virtue will be effaced." (248-49). Since Mervyn does appear to deceive him, Stevens' words imply a despairing view of humanity.

Steven Watts, having missed the author's irony, believes that Brown intended Mervyn as a role model: "Brown seemed to make his authorial intentions clear in a February 1799 letter to his brother. 'Arthur is intended,' he wrote, 'as a hero whose virtue, in order to be productive of benefit to others, and felicity to himself, stands in no need of riches'" (103).<sup>4</sup> Far from expressing the author's intentions, Brown's words sound like the sort of inside joke that one would share with a brother. *Arthur Mervyn* is best understood as a house of mirrors in which Brown chortles with private glee, subverting the very values that he appears to affirm.

Mervyn, like his favorite unnamed "darling writer" (who is surely Benjamin Franklin), initially vaunts the charms of agrarian life and virtue (Elliott 147). Axelrod sees the arrival of a penurious Mervyn in Philadelphia as a parody of Franklin's autobiography and his ethic of the virtuous self-made man. Mervyn's self-representation as an *ingénu* recalls Franklin's essay "On Simplicity," which begins: "There is in Humane Nature a certain charming Quality innate and original to it, which is called SIMPLICITY" (229). In this essay, which was first published in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1732, Franklin describes simplicity as "the homespun dress of Honesty," a pose that Mervyn

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<sup>4</sup> As Cathy N. Davidson points out, we tend to "take seriously and absolutely the kinds of statements that we would view more sceptically if uttered by our peers (247).

readily adopts. Franklin tediously belabors the point: i.e., “What relief do we find in the simply and unaffected Dialogues of uncorrupted Peasants, after the tiresome Grimace of the Town!” (229-30).

Franklin has faded somewhat from public memory, making it harder for readers today to appreciate Brown’s ferociously funny satire. In a subtle dig, Brown eulogized Franklin a year before his death in 1790 (Axelrod 151-55). This burying alive of Franklin recalls macabre instances in Brown’s novel, such as when Mervyn (and supposedly Welbeck) buried the dying Watson in the basement while he was still breathing, and when, during the height of the plague, coffin bearers tried to put an unconscious Arthur Mervyn in a coffin.

Names in *Arthur Mervyn* are strangely evocative. Malverton, the name of the village where Mervyn stays with a Quaker family, recalls the word ‘malversation’ (say it fast!) which denotes fraud, trickery, and corruption. Brown italicizes the place name “Malverton’ whenever Mervyn uses it, hinting at its dark connotations. The name of Stevens recalls a historical figure, Dr. Edward Stevens, who nursed yellow fever victims using gentle remedies and adequate nourishment, and who opposed the harsh treatments recommended by Dr. Benjamin Rush, which included bloodletting, forced vomiting, reduced diets, and the use of calomel, a mercury compound. Rush’s methods, which were widely used by doctors in Philadelphia, only weakened yellow fever patients, hastening many deaths (Eiselein 219-21; Nord 28).

The name of Thetford, the merchant who swindles Welbeck, is also the place name of the market town in Norfolk where Thomas Paine was born. Paine arrived in Philadelphia from England in 1774 and he remained deeply involved in the city’s politics. Paine sided with Robert Morris, the powerful Philadelphia banker who amassed a fortune during the Revolutionary War. Eric Foner notes “the apparent inconsistency between Paine’s advocacy of the most democratic state constitution of the era and his defense in the 1780s of the Bank of North America in league with anti-democratic Philadelphia business interests” (xiii, 27). The allusion to Thetford recalls the betrayal of a compelling vision of justice.

Many small farmers were unable to repay loans when the value of commodities steeply declined after the end of the Revolutionary War. The lack of currency forced merchants to either barter or issue personal

promissory notes. Farmers wanted the states to print currency to help repay their loans, but big merchants demanded instead bank currency that only destabilized commodity values (Foner 25, 27; Tompkins 76-79). Powerful financial institutions emerged as the number of corporations in United States grew tenfold between 1781 and 1790 (Bakan 9). In 1816, Thomas Jefferson sounded a prescient warning: "I hope we shall crush in its birth the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations which dare already to challenge our government in a trial of strength, and bid defiance to the laws of our country" (Meyers 2).

Mervyn personifies the brash energetic spirit of the new American republic, basking in the bright future of a world shaped by providential design. "I must build a name and a fortune for myself," Arthur muses upon arrival in Philadelphia, "Strange if this intellect and these hands will not supply me with an honest livelihood" (25). Mervyn's words suggest that his very name is a construct, an invention that helps him attain a fortune. Mervyn's awareness of the dark side of success belies his seeming resolve to succeed through hard work:

Wealth has ever been capriciously distributed. The mere physical relation of birth is all that intitles us to manors and thrones. Identity itself frequently depends upon a casual likeness or an old nurse's imposture. Nations have risen in arms, as in the case of the Stewarts, in the cause of one, the genuineness of whose birth has been denied and can never be proved. But if the cause be trivial and fallacious, the effects are momentous and solid. It ascertains our portion of felicity and usefulness and fixes our lot among peasants or princes (57-58).

Mervyn's identity depends on such "a casual likeness" and indeed "trivial and fallacious" causes gave birth to the United States, such as the unwillingness of powerful merchants to pay high taxes and the reluctance of rich landowners to give up their slaves.

Bill Christophersen notes that Mervyn, the young *arriviste* who claims to be eighteen years old, is about the same age as the new American republic (103), suggesting a parallel between the rise of Mervyn and that of the United States. In an article published the same year as the first part of *Arthur Mervyn*, Brown wrote: "A more mercenary and speculating nation than our own hardly at this day exists" (qtd. in Christophersen 112). Like a certain present-day empire that remains



undaunted by catastrophes, Mervyn dashes about, ostensibly to save others. His voice echoes the sanctimonious tone of national discourse.

Donald J. McNutt sees *Arthur Mervyn* as a synecdochical reflection on the Constitution's entrance into the national imaginary. For his tale to become licit and enter a discourse of shared meanings, according to McNutt, Mervyn must write down his testimony to "experience a transformation from speaker to textual creature, from an 'unknown and unthought of' character to a public subject" (87-88). Though founded on lies, Mervyn's narrative heralds a new order, much like the United States Declaration of Independence, which was penned by Thomas Jefferson, a slaveholder who celebrated the equality of men.

The secrecy surrounding the debates on the new United States Constitution parallels the motif of darkness in *Arthur Mervyn*. Mervyn relates that after his arrival in Philadelphia, he was led into a courtyard where he could perceive only the dim outlines of a mansion. This physical darkness prefigures the figurative darkness surrounding the persons and situations in which Mervyn is involved. He recalls his initial meeting with Welbeck thus: "I was not without hopes that at some future period I should be able to comprehend the allusions and brighten the obscurities that hung about the dialogue of last night" (58). Mervyn describes to Stevens in similarly murky terms, and with apparent naiveté, his misgivings about his employment: "I began to form conjectures as to the nature of the scheme to which my suppression of the truth was to be thus made subservient. It seemed as if I were walking in the dark and might rush into snares or drop into pits before I was aware of my danger" (70).

In a defining scene, Mervyn describes how, with angry creditors besieging Welbeck's mansion, he crawled into a dark nook in the attic.<sup>5</sup> Mervyn relates that he saw something remarkable there but that it was his duty to pass over what he saw in silence. As McNutt points out, "his way of deferring description of its 'wonders' is perhaps just as important as what he may have seen there" (60). The literal and figurative darkness of the scene represents, not an incomplete narrative,

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<sup>5</sup> Mervyn claims that he had noticed the trap door during his earlier stay in Welbeck's mansion. The fact that Mervyn had worked only briefly for Welbeck and that the discovery of the trap door was not mentioned earlier in Mervyn's narrative, suggests that Mervyn is Clavering in disguise and therefore lived in the house prior to his employment with Welbeck (Russo 389).



but a dark and hidden truth.<sup>6</sup> Feigning unspecified scruples, Mervyn withholds information, forcing readers to project their imaginings into unlit spaces, to create meaning, and thereby co-author *Arthur Mervyn*.

Arthur's foreboding nightmares belie the ostensible triumph of virtue at the conclusion of the novel. As he anticipates his marriage to the rich widow Ascha Fielding, Arthur describes his body and spirit as a mansion, an image that reveals his hidden motives (McNutt 89). The irony heightens in tandem with Mervyn's transports of rapture: "Love her as I *do* as I love my God; as I love virtue" (431), which is to say (as the italics suggest) not all.<sup>7</sup> Mervyn tells us that Stevens tried to dissuade him from marrying Ascha (whom Stevens called "unsightly as a night-hag"). In response, Mervyn dramatically hushed Stevens, rather ironically calling him a blasphemer (432). Near the end of the novel, Mervyn echoes Shakespeare's *MacBeth* when he describes his nightmare: "I was roused by a divine voice that said: –Sleep no more: Mervyn shall sleep no more." The nightmare presages more crimes (Axelrod 140), including the possible murder of Ascha, and is hardly the dream of a man who anticipates a happy marriage.<sup>8</sup> Mervyn's future, like his past, is shrouded in ominous darkness.

This spiritual and ethical darkness finds metaphorical expression in yellow fever, about which Brown wrote, in a letter to his brother, that "we fear it as we are terrified by dark," comparing it to "imaginary spectacles which... grow into gigantic dimensions" (qtd. in Ferguson 304). The cause of yellow fever remained unknown until 1901, when Walter Reed showed that mosquitoes transmitted the disease. The lack of effective treatments in 1793 only added to the terror of yellow fever,

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<sup>6</sup> Some critics regard this deferral as an artistic flaw on the part of Brown. Donald A. Ringe claims that *Arthur Mervyn* "lacks clarity of structure" since Brown "did not handle successfully the stories within the stories" (66), while Caleb Crain alleges that "Brown wrote slipshod plots, and *Arthur Mervyn* contains one of his worst" with various "narratological offenses" (119). Those critics fail to see that the ostensible improbabilities in Brown's narrative are in fact improbabilities in Mervyn's dubious tale.

<sup>7</sup> Leland S. Person notes Mervyn's halting syntax when he speaks to Ascha, suggesting hidden reservations about marrying her (43).

<sup>8</sup> Mervyn's nightmare recalls Franklin's 1786 essay "The Art of Procuring Pleasant Dreams," which concludes, not unexpectedly, with the observation that the key to pleasant dreams is a good conscience (Franklin 341). And Mervyn's marriage to the widowed Ascha recalls Franklin's "Old Mistresses Apologue." In that essay, unpublished during his lifetime, Franklin advises his readers to choose old women over young ones "Because there when Women cease to be handsome, they study to be good" and "Because there is no hazard of Children" and also because "They are so gratefull!" (Franklin 245).

which claimed the lives of five thousand residents of Philadelphia that year.

Mervyn shares the invasive character of yellow fever, “intruding into churches; and diving into alleys” (61). Like his fellow entrepreneurs, Mervyn “must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere” (Marx and Engels 38). Mervyn’s narrative exculpates numerous violations of privacy such as when Mervyn prowls Mrs. Wentworth’s residence: “I had opened doors without warning, and traversed passages without being noticed. This had arisen from my thoughtlessness” (355). Mervyn intrudes on Clemenza in Mrs. Villar’s house of prostitution, ostensibly to rescue her: “The door was ajar. I entered it on tiptoe. Sitting on a low chair by the fire, I beheld a female figure, dressed in a negligent, but not indecent manner” (324).

For Brown, yellow fever conveyed the social dissolution of a corrupt society. Andy Doolen notes that “contagion was an elastic metaphor throughout the 1790s because of its utility in articulating the spread of a variety of social, economic, and political threats” (84). During that decade, for instance, John Adams derided egalitarian ideas as “Paine’s yellow fever” (Foner xviii). Along with yellow fever, Brown deploys the Gothic to undermine the optimistic pieties then in vogue. According to Cathy N. Davidson

the Gothic connoted the barbaric, the archaic, the unspeakable... [and] challenged the Age of Reason’s ruling premises about the purposes of discourse, the status of knowledge, and the limits of both realism and rationality and thus consistently undermined the cherished complacencies of emerging bourgeois culture. If humans cannot decide for themselves what is good and what is evil, or, worse, if they cannot master their propensities for the latter, then what is the basis of human society? (237)

Christophersen relates the spread of yellow fever to the schemes of counterfeiters, and the horrifying conditions at the presciently named Bush-Hill Hospital to those at the brutal debtor prison where Stevens finds his friend Carlton living in filth (113). Carlton’s parents have died and his two sisters are helpless. Stevens senses the injustice in the new American republic, remarking that Thetford’s “coffers were supplied by the despair of honest men and the stratagems of rogues” (227). Wortley reassures Stevens that he is lucky to be “a stranger to mercantile

anxieties and revolutions” since his “fortune does not rest on a basis which an untoward blast may sweep away, or four strokes of a pen may demolish (227).

Gena Mackenthun observes that Brown’s discourse translates “the themes of financial greed and racial fear into the language of contagious disease [and] counters the optimism of national mythical models with the themes of amnesia and anxiety” (348). The yellow fever epidemic and the ensuing disorder caused many Philadelphians to fear that their slaves would rob or even murder them (Doolen 84-85). This fear is reflected in Mervyn’s startled reaction to an African American carter who is transporting the dead during the epidemic. It is also reflected in the momentary glimpse in a mirror of the African American servant dressed in French livery who knocks Mervyn unconscious as he intrudes into Thetford’s home during the epidemic. Mervyn projects his own criminality on to the servant who was likely defending his master’s house against looters.

In 1793, the year of the Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which made it a crime for anyone to assist a fugitive slave. Despite their heroic efforts on behalf of the sick and dying, African Americans were maligned in the immediate aftermath of the epidemic. In his *Short Account of the Malignant Fever* (1794), Matthew Carey alleged that African Americans profited from the epidemic. In response, two African American clergymen, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, wrote a history describing how African Americans dug graves, transported the sick, and served as nurses during the epidemic. Allen and Jones point out that it was the whites who drove up costs by outbidding one another for black nurses (Lapsansky 63).

The United States Constitution, which was adopted in Philadelphia in 1787, just six years before yellow fever devastated that city, failed to prohibit slavery. This ethical blind spot in the founding document of the United States government underlies a novel in which the main character casts victims as criminals, and African American slaves as looters and murderers – the Other as mirror image. *Arthur Mervyn* encourages us to read against its text, which resonates in our own age of massive fraud and wretched public health care. As Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds observes, the novel conjures “the specter of a market community [that] interiorizes the market’s story of virtue,” foregrounding the

“inextricable relation of capital and storytelling” (80-81). Embodying the enterprising spirit and manic moralism of his time, the character of Arthur Mervyn foretells the murderous trajectory of a country in darkness.

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# **AGAINST THE GRAIN: IRELAND, MYTH, AND GLOBALIZATION IN W. B. YEATS'S DRAMA**

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## **Abstract**

From a political perspective, critics usually associate the drama of W. B. Yeats with Irish resistance to English colonization, grounding such an association on Yeats's striking interest in Irish culture and nationalism, for the bulk of his drama revolves around the "Irishness" of Ireland, though himself not a hardliner. This study proposes that it is Globalization which Yeats fears and tries to warn the Irish people about, not the English colonization, for the former, according to him, is the real enemy to Irish culture.

As the wheel of Globalization starts to turn and before it gains its momentum, Yeats warns his people about its obliterating effects on their culture. He employs Irish myth, in his drama, as a vehicle to have his message conveyed, believing that it is the rallying flag around which the Irish would unite to protect their identity. Unfortunately, his endeavor, as he admits, proves to be an unequivocal defeat, due to the fading interest in myth among the "modern" Irish, on the one hand, and to his inability to create a thrilling and functional supernatural in his plays, on the other. Against Yeats's will, twentieth-century Ireland willingly continues to receive Globalization in its economy as well as culture, including the theater, to the extent that it is nowadays labeled as the "icon" of Globalization.

**Keywords:** Yeats, globalization, drama, modern, Ireland, myth, nationalism, England, colonization, identity.

## A LA CONTRA: IRLANDA, MITO Y GLOBALIZACIÓN EN EL DRAMA DE W. B. YEATS

### Resumen

Desde un punto de vista político, la obra dramática de W.B. Yeats a menudo ha sido asociada por la crítica con la resistencia de Irlanda a la colonización inglesa. Tal asociación se ha basado en el notable interés que el autor, aún sin manifestar una actitud rígida, muestra por la cultura y el nacionalismo irlandeses y en el hecho de que parte considerable de su obra dramática gira alrededor de la *'Irishness'* (o *'Irlandesidad'*) de Irlanda. Este estudio propone que lo que Yeats en realidad teme, y sobre lo que intenta prevenir al pueblo irlandés, es la Globalización y no la colonización Inglesa, ya que la primera, de acuerdo con el autor, es el enemigo real de la cultura irlandesa.

Cuando el círculo de la Globalización empieza a expandirse y antes de llegar a su punto álgido, Yeats advierte a sus connacionales sobre sus demoledores efectos para la cultura. Utiliza el mito irlandés en su drama como vehículo para comunicar su mensaje, ya que lo considera como el punto de partida alrededor del cual el pueblo irlandés se uniría para proteger su identidad. Lamentablemente, su propósito, tal como el mismo admite, se revela un evidente fracaso, en parte debido a la disminución del interés por los mitos entre los irlandeses *'modernos'*, y en parte por su incapacidad de crear lo sobrenatural de modo atractivo y funcional en sus obras dramáticas. En contra de los deseos de Yeats, la Irlanda del siglo veinte deliberadamente continua absorbiendo la Globalización tanto en su economía como en su cultura, incluyendo el teatro, hasta tal punto que hoy en día se la conoce como el *'ícono'* de la Globalización.

**Palabras clave:** Yeats, globalización, drama, moderno/a, Irlanda, mito, nacionalismo, Inglaterra, colonización, identidad.

## I

Although W. B. Yeats was a modern playwright, he chose to set his plays in the remote mythical past of Ireland, employing Irish myth



in its supernatural elements, rituals and extraordinary heroes as the embodiment of his thought. Some critics, such as Ashock Bhargava and T. R. Henn, associate his employment of myth with his distrust in the ability of modern literature to express emotions effectively. According to Yeats, emotions sometimes seem “vague” or “extravagant” when they are expressed through modern plots and settings. Yeats saw that this problem could be overcome by using Irish myth and legend as a vehicle for the ideas he wanted to convey, thus freeing himself and his text from the limitations of modern literature. In “A General Introduction for My Work,” Yeats tells us, “somebody ... told me of Standish O’Grady and his interpretation of Irish legends” (511). Here we see where the seeds of the decision to work with mythological characters and themes came from. Estella Taylor adds that Yeats believed that “Irish legends” (16) were close to the hearts of the Irish. The innate characteristics of myth and legend naturally lead to the introduction of the supernatural. And in the essay entitled “Magic” Yeats makes it very apparent that he believed in, accepted, and was unafraid of the supernatural. Moreover, for Yeats, the existence of the supernatural and its involvement in the world of the natural result in transcending man in all aspects of life, including art, giving man a high status. These two points make it inevitable that the supernatural be a factor in his works.

Critics have advanced the idea that Yeats used traditional Irish myth as a rallying flag around which the Irish community was supposed to unite to protect Irish culture and identity from English Colonization. Brian Singleton in “Challenging Myth and Tradition” says that Yeats employed myth “to form part of a cultural resistance to British Home Rule” (265) and, inferring political connotations in plays like *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), remarks that Yeats made the theatre “highly politicized” (265). Rob Doggett argues, in *Deep Rooted Things*, that “the Yeatsian nationalism is ... based on fundamental desire to create an Ireland that is modern ... without being a mirror image of England” (5). Mary Trotter apparently agrees with Doggett when she asserts that the products of the Irish cultural nationalist movement were “designed to rid Ireland of English influence” (15).

Taking into consideration that Yeats was “highly allusive” (Smith 57), the current study proposes that it was not the English colonization which Yeats feared and tried to warn the Irish people about, but rather Globalization. According to Yeats, this “enemy” was much more

substantial and the process had already begun at the time when he was writing. However, the aim of this essay is two-fold. Firstly, I argue that Yeats's efforts to use Irish myth in his drama were to protect the Irish identity from the encroachment of Globalization on Ireland, rather than from the hegemony of the colonizer's culture. Secondly, I argue that Yeats was unable to create a functional supernatural in his drama, which contributed to its lukewarm reception, the failure of his project to revive Irish myth, and, eventually, the failure to have his message, regarding Globalization, conveyed. For space limitation the essay focuses on four exemplary plays— *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *Deirdre* (1907), *At the Hawk's Well* (1917) — with reference, when informing, to other plays.

The opinion that England is the threat represented by hostile characters in Yeats's plays can be argued against when we examine Yeats's own life. Despite undeniable pain and suffering inflicted on the Irish by the English, Yeats himself did not consider English culture to be a threat to Irish identity. His own childhood and youth had been divided between London and Dublin. He wrote exclusively in English and never supported the revival of old Gaelic. Furthermore, he was as equally concerned to stage his plays in London as in Dublin. Yeats's attitude toward England, to use Estella Taylor's words, "became [even] warmer as he reached maturity" (40) to the extent that he, at a later stage of his life, "accepted a pension from the British state" (Brown 223). As a matter of fact, being a Protestant, Yeats, in contrast to his Catholic countrymen, was ambivalent in his attitude towards the English colonization of Ireland. Even though he was proud of his Irish identity and always laid a claim to nationalism, he never called for or supported violence to bring an end to English occupation. This formed a division between him and his contemporaries who legitimized all necessary means of resistance to force the English out of Ireland. Yeats's perception of Irish nationalism was one that gained support among very few. On the death of his close fellow worker John O'Leary, Yeats declined attending the funeral because, as he explains in his essay "Poetry and Tradition," he "shrank from seeing about his grave so many whose Nationalism was different from anything ... [he] could share" (246). He considered their brand of nationalism, in Doggett's terms, as "regressive" whilst his was "progressive" (3). A major problem for Yeats, and many others, is a failure of consensus as to what constitutes Irish

nationalism. David Cregan, seventy years after Yeats, underscored the necessity for limited and exclusive definitions of Irishness" (Fricker and Singleton 562).

In "The Celtic Element in Literature," Yeats argues that most of the great tragic characters in European literature have their roots planted firmly in Celtic legend. Focusing on English literature, Matthew Arnold, as Yeats quotes him, asserts that it got much of its "melancholy" from a Celtic source, and he has no doubt the self-same source gives it nearly all the "magic" (173). Having said this, Yeats and other Irish writers wrestled with the concept of Irishness—in Irish literature—and nobody seems to have found a way to fully encapsulate or represent it in their work. What was declared by the founders of the Irish National Theatre as a grand project to revive Irish nationality was at its best a regional one, and theatrical productions which were labelled as national were most of the time no more than local phenomena. The regionalized or localized nature of theatrical productions was always a serious obstacle in the way of producing a real national dramatic work. For instance, Yeats's *Catheleen ni Houlihan* (1902), which was seen as a national play in its scope and goals, was received with enthusiasm by Dublin audiences in whom it roused national sentiments, whereas it got cold reception in Belfast, where the audiences showed no such feelings.

Yeats's motto that "all art is national" was undermined by his belief in regionalism. His view of the national, as Mark Phelan points out, was limited to the South and sometimes even reduced to a locality in the South, as small as "Connaught," and according to him, the national theatrical productions were exclusively those produced by the Irish National Theatre (later called the Abbey Theatre) whereas the Ulster Literary Theatre, in Belfast, was excluded from Yeats and his comrades' national project. As a matter of fact, Yeats himself turned down Bulmer Hobson and David Parkhill, two pillars of the Ulster Literary Theatre, when they came to Dublin asking permission to perform *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in Belfast and was furious when he learned, later, that it was performed without his permission. In their turn, the theatre companies of the North did not acknowledge the declared right of the Abbey Theatre to represent the nation. In other words, no theatre in Ireland was agreed upon as national and what was taken for granted as national turned out to have been not as national as imagined. Localism in Ireland, as Phelan observes, had "an extraordinarily powerful and

pervasive purchase on the socio-geographic formulation of identities” (595). Yeats’s stand from the North shows that regionalism, or even localism, was the more important for him, and when he said “all art is national,” he probably meant that arts of different locales play integral roles to form the one national identity, not that one work could represent all Ireland. Yeats seemed to have believed that each locality is Ireland by itself, and the Irish should preserve and protect the peculiarity of the different localities. It is one of the aspects that make his perception of the Irish national project different from that of his fellow writers. The distinctive identity of each locality is what is usually referred to as the first sacrifice a nation has to introduce at the altar of Globalization; it is what Susie O’Brien and Imre Szeman call “the eclipse of traditional ways of life” (604).

With regard to Globalization, people vary in their perception of and reaction to it. Some people see Globalization as a positive transformation of the human society underscoring the “triumphant coming-into-being of global democracy,” whereas others see it as the embodiment of all wickedness lamenting, in its triumph, not only the loss of cultural identity, but also “the end of nature” (O’Brien 604). For instance, Fredric Jameson, as Clare Wallace explains, views Globalization as a destructive force of “local differences” (57). A third school maintains ambivalent feelings towards it, seeing it as a combination of goodness and evil. The “declining monopoly of the state” and the increasing power of “international governmental and quasi-governmental organizations” (Connell 305), which is one of the outcomes of Globalization, could be a positive thing in some countries and negative in others, depending on the political system of the country. The term Globalization itself is a slippery one and its debate remains, as Eric Cazdyn notes, “marred by many of the same blind spots that have marred similar debates in the past” (331). The ultimate goal of Globalization is, virtually, to turn the globe into a small village: one economy, one culture, and eventually, one language.

However, the association of Globalization to early twentieth-century life might seem an odd thing since the term itself is relatively new. But Globalization, as a concept and process, had been there as early as the middle of the nineteenth century; it started with the invention of the telegraph, as Tom Standage points out in his book *The Victorian Internet*, and was energized by the invention of the telephone,

television, and modern means of transportation until it reached its peak with the invention of the internet. It is important here to remark that the concept at that time did not mean the Americanization of the world, as some like to define it nowadays; rather, it meant the exposure to the modern civilization without having any choice as to what to admit and what to reject, for modern civilization had its “demons,” as some believe, demons that threaten the cultural identities of nations.

For Yeats, Globalization was the real threat to the cultural identity of the Irish, not the English culture. It is the danger he could see whereas the vast majority could not and, therefore, labored to implant this sense of danger in audiences. He believed that the early manifestations of this danger were already conspicuous in the Irish society, for the young generations, as he complained in his essay “Ireland and the Arts,” showed little interest in the arts and became increasingly obsessed with material ends (203). He also asks in astonishment, “Was modern civilization a conspiracy of the sub-conscious?” (Qtd. in Henn 167).

Hence, in his poem “A Prayer for My Daughter,” Globalization is actually the “storm” which has been “howling” and growing in power at the sea, with nothing to stand in its face “But Gregory’s wood and one bare hill,” insinuating that the Irish are in the way of this violent storm, standing vulnerable and unaware of its dangers. A prominent theme in Yeats’s plays is that of danger coming in from the sea. Since Ireland is an island, it is therefore prone to external threats from all sides, approaching over the choppy waves, poised to undermine all that is Irish. This is one of the ways in which Yeats depicts Globalization. In the poem he anticipates that the future generations would be “dancing to a frenzied drum” alluding to the possible loss of the Irish cultural identity. The storm has already reached the Irish shores, for he could hear “the sea-wind scream upon the tower / And under the arches of the bridge” but probably has not reached to a full swing yet (2107). Ireland is turning to a country in which “An aged man,” as he says in his renowned poem “Sailing to Byzantium,” is “a paltry thing” and in which the “young” are detached from the intellectual legacy of humanity and “caught” in physical gains (2109). He views this as an alarming change and that is why he wishes, in “A prayer for My Daughter,” that the groom of his daughter would “bring her to a house / Where all’s accustomed, and ceremonious,” where the old are valued and respected. This Storm cannot be England and this change was not owing to the

English because they had been in Ireland for centuries and Yeats was aware that the change was new to Ireland, and after all, the English are well-known to be a people of great “custom” and “ceremony.”

Yeats’s answer to this growing power of Globalization was to vitalize the distinctive feature of the Irish culture, which is myth. Unlike his younger colleague, J. M. Synge, who “believed the stage was for reality” (Deitz 480), Yeats insisted that the stage was for myth. Reviving myth in the minds of the Irish became the weapon by which, he thought, the Irish would be able to stand in the face of this storm because myth was their common heritage. According to Yeats, as Henn puts it, “If Ireland could be awakened to natural heritage of the heroic ages ... a unity both spiritual and political would follow” (153). Being a highly allusive dramatist as he is a highly allusive poet, Globalization, in his drama, is reflected in the forces of evil that try to create chaos and disorder in the Irish home. These symbols and images, for Yeats, are vehicles “in which truths are concretely embodied” (Smith 57).

## II

*The Countess Cathleen* (1892) introduces two demons in the guise of Eastern merchants who trade, rather than in land or produce, in human souls. The peasants are starving due to famine sweeping the land. So, in ignorance and desperation, they are prepared to do business with the merchants that “buy men’s souls” (I, i, 10). Contrary to what is expected from the colonizer, who usually benefits much but gives little to the colonized peoples, the two merchants give the peasants so good a price that they will be able to ride out the famine, on condition that they promise their souls to the devil when they die. The soul is what gives the body its essence and ability to keep existing; by the same token, culture is the soul of the nation; it’s the identity that preserves the entity of that nation. Here the peasants forsake their souls and focus on gaining material goods, the first prize of modern civilization, no matter what price they pay for them. It is the very danger that Yeats warns against in “A Prayer for My Daughter” and in “Sailing to Byzantium.” Asserting his fears that Ireland has been drifted by the winds of Globalization, Yeats quotes Mr. Arnold Toynbee, in “A General Introduction for My Work,” when he says “Modern Ireland has made up her mind, in our generation, to find her level as a willing inmate in

our workaday western world" (517). Yeats, thus, is urging the people of Ireland not to sell their souls, thereby losing their cultural identity for the material trappings of modern civilization, a natural consequence of Globalization.

The character of Mary in *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) functions as the defender of Irish cultural identity when she resists temptation, and despite her efforts to convince her husband and son that no good can come of this trade with the strangers, she goes unheard and a number of peasants seal the deal with the merchants. Mary's failure to stem the tide represents Yeats in his hopeless endeavors to warn the Irish against transforming Ireland into a country, in Doggett's terms, "dominated by the Western consciousness he so reviled" (8).

We now meet the Countess Cathleen, who represents the Irish elite, and by putting the solution into her hands, Yeats clearly indicates that any resistance of Globalization could only be fruitful if it were led by the Irish leadership of the country. The fact that the savior of the peasants is a woman, prepared to sacrifice her soul for those of the peasants, leads Doggett to suggest that "The unspoken assumption is that Irish women should serve as spiritual guardians of the home" (38). The home and family are the cornerstone of traditional Irish life, and the focus on them here is no less than a call to preserve the Irish cultural identity. However, the marvelous symbolism and noble theme are downplayed by Yeats's inability to present a functional supernatural.

Yeats creates the atmosphere for the supernatural, in the play, by having characters relate tales of strange creatures they have heard about: the story of a woman who met a man "with ears spread out" moving like "a bat's wings," a herdsman who met a man with no eyes, no mouth, no ears and a story about a bird that has a "human face" (i, 2). We neither see any of these creatures, nor do they serve any function on the stage; they are merely figments of the imagination, conjured up either by the fourteen-year-old Tigue, or by the peasants at large. They do, nevertheless, pave the way for the supernatural figures that do engage in the action of the play.

The two demons, in the guise of Eastern merchants, possess a mysterious book which reveals the flaws of each peasant and on that information they put a price to each soul. There is no immediate visual effect on the peasants that part with their souls, for they only lose them



when death comes to them naturally. The first indication that all is not well is when the Old Woman screams out in pain after mentioning God's name, and the First Merchant remarks, "That name is like a fire to all damned souls" (v, 26). After the Countess sells her soul, the Second Merchant tells his fellow that they must now wait for her to die, "waiting as many years as may be" (v, 28). But the First Merchant replies that their wait will not be long: "She has only minutes. / When she signed / Her heart began to break" (v, 28). Thus, we see that the demons albeit given the job of buying up souls for their Master, have no supernatural power in bringing about deaths of their clients. Again, Yeats employs supernatural characters who are rather impotent in their effect on the other characters and on the plot as well.

In *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), the theme of destruction of families brought about by strangers is continued. The unfriendly supernatural takes the shape of a female child who comes to the Bruin family home from the forest, deemed in Irish culture to be the dwelling-place of evil. The supernatural child targets Mary, the discontent "newly-married bride" (45), who represents the youth in Ireland. The child, as she indicates, is not interested in the old, but in the young who "sigh through many a dream and hope" (42), and who are sick of their monotonous life. She tempts Mary with promises to take her to the land of heart's desire where life is full of excitement, "where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood" (45), once again, promises of the advertisers' commercials— one of the symptoms of Globalizations. However, like the two merchants in *The Countess Cathleen* (1902), the child asks for a price in return for the new life she promises Mary. Mary, as the child tells her, has to abandon her "mortal hope" (46), the most precious thing one could have.

This "mortal hope" can be viewed as her identity, both as an individual being and as the symbol of Irish youth. By accepting the child's invitation, Mary is essentially lost to her husband and family, and, following the symbolism, she is lost to Ireland. In reality, as the youth of Ireland are lured by the prospect of a better life offered by outsiders, the country loses its vitality, its ability to perpetuate its culture. The child clearly represents Globalization and its temptations, for Father Hart— Yeats's voice in the play— warns that these "spirits of evil," as he calls the creatures coming from the forest, "day by day their power is more and more" (46). Seeing these supernatural creatures coming



frequently to the town, Father Hart reveals deep concern; the result, as he witnesses, is that “men and women *leave old paths* (emphasis added)” (46), meaning that when people succumb to the forces of Globalization, they change their loyalties and switch to new life styles.

The effectiveness of the supernatural in *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894) is not better than that in *The Countess Cathleen* (1892). The child tells Mary that she can take her where nobody gets old and where she can ride the winds and dance on the “mountain tops.” Mary apparently agrees when she says “O, take me with you” (45, 46), but she dies before she leaves her home, with no clear cause for her death. Her death at that moment is supposed to be understood by the audience as an effect of the supernatural, that in order to be able to accompany the child she has to abandon her mortal body. But even with this supportive interpretation, the action of the supernatural does not mount to the expectations of the audience. Once again, like what happens in *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), the supernatural action lasts only for a few moments (the moments of Mary's death) and comes at the end of the play. The child herself does not show, on the stage, any supernatural power or action that can be linked to the death of Mary. Being dressed in “faery” green is not enough to satisfy the audience's eagerness for a supernatural manifestation. When the child dances, no one but Mary hears “Other small steps beating upon the floor” and “Invisible pipes giving her feet the tune” (43), for Shaun, her husband, says that he does not hear what she claims to hear. It is not obvious, in the play, whether the audience should hear the beating of other steps or the tune of the unseen flute, no stage direction to indicate that. Thus, what she hears can easily be confuted as mere creation of her imagination.

In *Deirdre* (1907), Yeats makes the musicians his mouthpiece. They warn against the catastrophe, the destruction of the youth embodied in Deirdre and Noise at the hands of an evil power, embodied in Conchubar, the High King and his guards (Globalization). The First Musician wonders if Deirdre and her lover are “tired of life” (114) to come willingly and put themselves under the power of the High King. In so doing, according to the musicians, they essentially give their lives away. As David Clark points out, the musicians in the play are “the Tiresias or Cassandra whose warnings, unheeded, prove to have the deepest truth” (106). It is not surprising to find out that Conchubar's men are dark-faced; they do not belong to the country they assume

power over. They are outsiders and their mission is to kill Naoise (the youth of Ireland, the future of Ireland) so that Conchubar can have Deirdre (Ireland). The murder of Naoise, the young lover of Deirdre, leads to the destruction of Deirdre herself, who symbolizes here the free new Ireland Yeats had always longed for.

Yeats took the myth of Deirdre, the daughter of a royal storyteller, and transformed her into a mysterious girl-child of unknown origin; all we know of her is that she is raised in a house upon a hillside in the woods “with an old witch to nurse her” (112-13). The Musicians who relate her story tell the audience that nobody could tell “if she were human / Or of the gods” (113). This mention of old witch is the solitary flimsy link between Deirdre and the supernatural; there are no extraordinary traits to her character, nor does this supernatural link play any part in developing the plot. None of the events of her life seem to have link with the supernatural.

What Yeats’s Deirdre does and says remains within the capabilities of ordinary people. Yeats employs Fergus, the mediator between the King and Naoise, to cast an abnormal nature on her. Fergus attributes Deirdre’s suspicion in the intention of King Conchubar to the queer environment she was raised in, that she had lived, as he says, in the “hole of the badger and the den of the fox” (17) and that is why she does not trust the High King. Her discomfort is a feeling that any ordinary woman might feel if she were to meet the man she had once betrayed by eloping with another. Yeats also tries to present Deirdre as a woman who can foresee things by interpreting natural phenomena. But her reading of nature does not live up to the expectations of the audience, for viewing the clouds as a bad omen does not reveal any supernatural attributes. However, the first real sign of the presence of the supernatural is when she tells Naoise that she has heard “magical horrors and spells of wizards” (120). Even this is of minimal importance since, on the one hand, it has no effect whatsoever on the development of the plot, and on the other, neither the audience nor any other character witnesses these “horrors and spells.” They do not go beyond being words spoken by Deirdre. Fergus easily refutes what she says as hallucination caused by the psychological problems brought about by the stories she has heard from the traveling minstrels.

Also in *Deirdre* (1907), Yeats attempts to introduce a supernatural element by referring to the “ominous” chess-board, the one which Lugadh

and his wife, who spent half of the year in the form of a sea-mew and the other half as an ordinary female human body, “played at the chess upon the night they died” (117). However, in Yeats’s play, neither Lugadh’s wife’s supernatural state nor the event of her and her husband playing chess on the board (now present in Conchubar’s guest house) add anything to the plot. Their mention may increase the ominous mood to some slight degree, but on a practical level, nothing is contributed on the stage. Yeats seems to have been determined to refer to Irish mythical characters whenever possible, whether their involvement had any bearing on the work in hand or not is immaterial.

Deirdre’s feeling that King Conchubar plots to kill her husband does not put her on the same footing with Aeschylus’ Cassandra, in *Agamemnon* (458 B.C). Cassandra’s foretelling of her death is based on a gift given to her by a god (Apollo) whereas Deirdre’s spring from a natural distrust in the King, whom she has wronged in the past. Knowing that she is about to be murdered, Cassandra’s cry to Apollo that he is the cause of her ruin is a salient manifestation of this supernatural trait in her. When she descends the chariot and enters the palace, she is fully aware that she is walking to her own demise, the fate she has already bewailed before the people of Mycenae.

Globalisation is also present in *At the Hawk’s Well* (1917). Richard Taylor views the well, in the play, as a “symbol of supernatural intervention in the natural world” (150), indicating to the old Celtic myth of Connla’s Well and Tree where those objects symbolized regeneration and prosperity. I rather see the well as Ireland, its being barren and full of dry leaves to reflect the ignorance and poverty that was rife in the country, just as Ireland is represented in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) by the Poor Old Woman to confirm the country’s antiquity and its need for the Irish youth to protect it. Nevertheless, the hope of renewal and improvement is to be found in the prospect that the water of the well, said to be imbued with magical powers, may bubble up at any time. The Old Man has made his abode by the well for fifty years in the hope of drinking from its miraculous water and never lost hope in its prospective bounties. He can be seen as the defender of Ireland, patiently waiting by the well, faithful and constant in his faith that better things are to come.

Contrastingly, the young Cuchulain, symbolizing the youth of Ireland, is easily lured away from the well. He has come, like the Old

Man, desiring to drink from the waters which will supposedly render him immortal. However, he misses his opportunity to drink when he chases the woman of the Sidhe, the unfriendly supernatural element of this drama. Taylor, referring to the chase, says that “There is no need for this” and calls it “the least satisfactory element” (152) in the play. We can better appreciate the action when we view the Woman as the embodiment of Globalization and Cuchulain’s chase of the Woman as an attempt to put an end to its hegemonic claim over the well (Ireland). We may see the occasions when the water bubbles up as windows of opportunities for real progress in Ireland, but the Woman diverts the attention of those who wait. The Old Man is always overcome by sleep, whereas Cuchulain, being bolder and more vigorous, chooses to chase away the woman. Either way, the window of opportunity opens and closes again before anyone can benefit from it. There is a feeling of threat from the Woman of the Sidhe (Globalization) but there is also an element of attraction in her for Cuchulain, who represents the youth of Ireland here. Herbert Levine says, “[he] abandons the water that plashes in the well to pursue instead the sexually alluring image of the hawk-woman” (90-91). His failure to kill her springs from his fascination by her nature, and it is easy here to find a parallel with the relationship between people and Globalization; they find it threatening because it seems to want to change everything they are used to, yet it is attractive because it promises new exciting prospects.

Pertaining to the chronology of the legend of Cuchulain, *At the Hawk’s Well* (1917) is the first in the Cuchulain cycle, which consists of five plays: *On Bail’s Strand* (1904), *The Green Helmet* (1910), *At the Hawk’s Well* (1917), *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919), *The Death of Cuchulain* (1939). It is a play with great potential for supernatural action on the stage. Cuchulain’s arrival on the island to drink from the “miraculous water” of the well is the first real sign of the presence of the supernatural in the play. The water of the well, as Cuchulain reveals, grants immortality to the one who drinks from it. It is not ordinary water; it transfers the natural into the domains of the supernatural, at least in one aspect—immortality. The Old Man augments the audience’s curiosity when he says that the water appeared in the dry well three times only in the last fifty years. But the power of this water is never brought into action because no mortal so far has been able to partake of it. This attribute of the water is never given the opportunity to appear,

so its ability to grant immortality remains unconfirmed in the minds of the audience. The same thing happens in *On Bail's Strand* (1904) when Cuchulain says that the cloak of his father, which he has, was woven by "women of the Country-under-Wave / Out of the fleeces of the sea" (176) to indicate that it is abnormal, and this cloak does not play any role whatsoever in the play. Moreover, the dancers supposedly belong to the Sidhe, the underworld of faeries in Gaelic mythology. The power of those creatures is brought into question when Cuchulain is not put to sudden sleep by the Woman of the Sidhe as the water bubbles up like the Old Man, just as the power of the Shape-Changers in *The Green Helmet* (1910) is put into question when king Conall says that he has killed hundreds of them even though they are referred to as so powerful supernatural creatures. It is true that Cuchulain "grows pale and staggers to his feet" (143), but he does not fall asleep; rather, he recollects his power and chases the Woman of the Sidhe away from the well.

The Woman of the Sidhe, who appears to Cuchulain as a hawk, gazes at Cuchulain, and he gazes back at her declaring that he is not afraid of her, calling her "bird" and "witch" to indicate that she is not an ordinary woman. The Old man has told him that "there falls a curse / On all who have gazed in her ... eyes" (143). The curse, as he explains, ranges from the inability to keep a woman's love to killing one's children without knowing it. None of these things happen to Cuchulain in this play per se. It is true that he unwittingly kills his own son unaware of the young man's true identity, but this happens in *On Baile's Strand* (1904), which was performed thirteen years before this play. This means that the spectators of *At the Hawk's Well* (1917) have to go back, in time, thirteen years and recall what happens in *On Baile's Strand* and deem Cuchulain's killing of his son in that play as a result of the curse put upon him by the Woman of the Sidhe in this play. Obviously, in so doing, Yeats has complicated things and asked for too much from his audience.

On another level, The Woman of the Sidhe, even though, referred to as a supernatural being, is reduced to an alluring object; her job is to lure people away from the well or lull them to sleep by her dance. She does not display any substantial supernatural action since her dance is not powerful enough to put Cuchulain to sleep. If we assume that she could not do that because Cuchulain's father, as King Conchubar remarks

in *On Baile's Strand* (1904), "came out of the sun" (167), a hint that Cuchulain is like Hercules, a demigod, the problem remains that Yeats does not present him in *At the Hawk's Well* (1917) as such. Cuchulain here is a mortal and that is why he seeks immortality at the hawk's well. Besides, Cuchulain, for Yeats, is the embodiment of the natural that stands as a strong rival to the supernatural, Yeats's mistake in the Cuchulain cycle. The spectators are more fascinated with Cuchulain's bravery than they are with the power of the Woman of the Sidhe. Her image as being supernatural is eclipsed by Cuchulain's boldness and courage. D. Maxwell observes that Cuchulain's ability to meet "her gaze" springs from him being a "haughty, material, [and] amorous" young man (41), confirming his rivalry to her. In the Cuchulain cycle, in particular, Yeats's attempt to present man, the natural, as a qualified rival to the supernatural leaves no room for the supernatural action to appear on the stage.

### III

Yeats says in "A General Introduction for My Work" that Irish "mythology and ... legends differ from those of other European countries" in the sense that both Irish "peasant and noble" had "unquestioned belief" in them (512). He relied on this assertion when he used Irish mythology as his vehicle for drawing the people of Ireland together to withstand the threat of Globalization. According to Henn, Yeats hoped that the "heroic ages of Cuchulain, Finn, Conchubar, Deidre and the rest" would unite the Irish politically as well as spiritually (153). It is true that Yeats was successful in incorporating both "nationalism" and "occultism" (Ellman 119) in his plays and poetry, but his drama, in the main, "did not command a sufficiently wide acceptance" among the Irish (Bhargava 54). Herbert Levine, likewise, remarks that "the beggars and fools that Yeats chose as mouthpieces did not bring him any closer to solidarity with the general middle-class Irish community" (12-13). Yeats seemed to have erred when he assumed that the Irish were, in Estella Taylors terms, "mere Irish," when they, in fact, were "modern Irish" (47).

Undoubtedly, Yeats was fascinated with ancient drama, for not only did he rewrite some of the Greek plays, but also adopted the Greek pattern of tragedy. Unlike the supernatural in ancient drama, Yeats's

supernatural leaves the audience, most of the time, dissatisfied—questioning whether there is really a need for its presence in the play. In other words, his supernatural seems dysfunctional (void of any supernatural manifestations) or, at its best, limited to a momentary supernatural action. Aesthetically, Yeats's employment of myth did not live up to ancient form (Greek and Roman) as it did not live up to the expectations of his audiences. Richard Taylor, on his part, attributes the lukewarm reception of Yeats's drama partly to Yeats's assimilation of NŌ technique which "in the western sense of the word," as he remarks, "is not really dramatic" (142). Sadly, Yeats seems to have miscalculated how well the general public knew their mythology and to what extent they still held it to their hearts, for it turned out that "Irish kings and Irish legends and Irish countrymen," as Estella Taylor says, "were nothing close to the heart of the twentieth-century Irish people" (16).

Yeats was aware of his failure both in convincing his Irish audiences of the importance of Irish myth to national identity and in alerting them against the dangers of Globalization; he described his dramatic movement in his essay "A People's Theatre," as "a discouragement and a defeat" (qtd. in Doggett 8). Doggett says it was so because "it had achieved not the organically unified nation he had imagined, but an Ireland dominated by the mechanical Western consciousness he so reviled" (8). As a reaction to the lukewarm reception of his drama, Yeats accused the Irish of being an "unappreciative nation" (Levine 1), and in his preface to "Unicorn from the Stars," as Estella Taylor infers, he deplores "the poor taste of the Irish in the arts" (30). His insistence on myth was, actually, more a question of imposing his taste on the Irish audiences rather than presenting these audiences with the material they liked and were interested in. For instance, *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) was denounced "for its heresy and mysticism" (Brown 133), but Yeats, in defiance of those who labeled it as such, continued to explore the Irish heroic age claiming that an author or an artist should pursue the subject that pleases him and should not succumb to the taste of his audience.

The poverty-stricken people would certainly be more interested in plays that address their cause, their need for food and medication, than in myth and legends. For instance, a health report of 1913 shows that the number of those who died in Dublin because of health problems caused by poverty exceeded by far the number of those who died



because of violence (Singleton 269). Despite the fact that Yeats resorted to mythological characters, as Shaun Richards remarks, to face what he and Lady Gregory viewed as “misrepresentation” of the Irish on the Irish stage, thinking that his characters were the right exemplary of his people, the attacks of the Irish writers on nationalist mythologies in the succeeding decades show that the Irish had a tendency to associate themselves with modernity rather with antiquity, with reality rather than with myth (Howard 416). But to do Yeats justice, in his attempts to revive ancient myth, he was not trying to isolate Ireland from the rest of the world; he, like his comrades, felt the obligation of creating a new Ireland, but “an Ireland,” as Doggett puts it, “that shapes and is shaped by the interaction with other nations without losing cultural autonomy” (5).

Nevertheless, against Yeats’s will, Ireland put myth behind her back and opened her doors widely for Globalization with its ramifications. In an article published in 1922, James Stephen, with a clear reference to the formidable influence of Globalization on the Irish, says, “we have entered the world. More, the world has entered us” (qtd. in Estella Taylor 23). Thus, appearing as the “fate of the world” (Loneragan 641), Globalization entered Ireland from its different doors. Yeats witnessed with bitterness the transformation of the Irish into a nation not built on its original foundations but rather based on a global culture, and he mourned “the corrupting influences of foreign cultures” on the Irish (Clare 660).

Nowadays Ireland is, par excellence, a Globalized country; the dramatic social and economic transformation it underwent in the 1990s made some commentators view it as “the icon of globalization process” (qtd. in Wallace 659). Singleton reminds us that “in 1998, economic analyses flagged Ireland as the fastest growing economy ... throughout the world” (266). On the literary level, Irish drama has found its way to other countries and captured the attention of non-Irish audiences and critics after abolishing the tiring inheritance of myth and national identity. In Wallace’s words, “the dust appears to be settling on the Celtic Tiger phenomenon” (Singleton 266). In its contents, modern Irish drama is not any more about the uniqueness of Irish culture and identity; it expanded to settings outside Ireland, dramatizing sometimes “alternate cultural identity.” Moreover, Irish critics nowadays call for placing “the study of Irish theatre in the context of contemporary global capitalism”



and to refrain from the “exclusive focus on the country’s long colonial concussion” (Fricker 563).

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# LA ESTÉTICA DE LA FRAGMENTACIÓN Y EL COLLAGE EN *MY LIFE* DE LYN HEJINIAN<sup>1</sup>

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## Resumen

Este trabajo se centra en el modo en que Hejinian utiliza la fragmentación y el collage para explorar los límites de los parámetros convencionales de la poesía tanto respecto a su forma como a su contenido. Al resaltar la importancia de estas dos técnicas, pretendo llamar la atención sobre la ruptura de las normas que afectan al lenguaje, a la voz y al sujeto poéticos. La fragmentación y el collage no sólo subvierten cualquier expectativa de representar un sujeto lírico coherente y sólido, sino que también cuestionan la posibilidad de transmitir la experiencia vital mediante el lenguaje y ponen en duda la autenticidad de la representación autobiográfica. Además, este artículo analiza la escritura experimental de Hejinian como método para romper las barreras formales y componer estructuras caleidoscópicas que centran la atención sobre el proceso creativo abriendo el espacio textual a la participación del lector.

**Palabras clave:** fragmentación, collage, escritura experimental, sujeto lírico, Hejinian.

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## THE AESTHETICS OF FRAGMENTATION AND COLLAGE IN LYN HEJINIAN'S *MY LIFE*

### Abstract

This paper focuses on how Hejinian resorts to fragmentation and collage in *My Life* in order to explore the limits of the conventional parameters of poetic form and content. By stressing the importance of both techniques, I wish to call attention to Hejinian's disruption of the traditional rules of poetic language, voice and subject. Fragmentation and collage not only subvert any expectation of total coherence or of a consistent lyrical subject, but also question the possibility of transmitting personal experience through language and distrust the authenticity of autobiographical representation. Moreover, this paper analyzes the way in which Hejinian's experimental writing breaks formal barriers to compose kaleidoscopic structures which draw attention to its own procedures and open up the text to reader's involvement.

**Keywords:** fragmentation, collage, experimental writing, lyrical subject, Hejinian.

Hejinian se considera representante de la contracultura poética experimental debido a que su poesía se propone fragmentar y subvertir el lenguaje, el sujeto y la voz poética. Tanto su obra poética como sus textos críticos se plantean como tema principal la representación de la subjetividad y la limitación del lenguaje para trasladar la experiencia del sujeto lírico. La poesía de Hejinian refleja claramente la estética posmoderna, ya que no sólo cuestiona el lenguaje como medio de representación y percepción, sino que también carece de una voz poética definida, insiste en considerar las palabras como significantes distanciados de su uso referencial, celebra la ambigüedad e indeterminación de los significados y, por último, contribuye a crear la sensación de arbitrariedad en el ensamblaje de los materiales. El propósito de este trabajo es analizar el uso de la fragmentación y el collage en *My Life* (1980) como estrategias textuales mediante las cuales Hejinian cuestiona las normas convencionales que afectan tanto a la forma como al contenido de su poética. Se pretende, además, explorar el uso auto-consciente que Hejinian hace de ambas estrategias en relación

con la preocupación posmoderna por cuestiones como la referencialidad, la subjetividad, el lenguaje, el proceso creativo y la construcción del significado.

La adhesión de Hejinian al movimiento poético denominado como *Language poetry* hace que su poesía presente una superficie fragmentada que se resiste a ser referencial. De hecho, los poetas del lenguaje utilizan una serie de estrategias textuales “such as procedural writing, uses of found material, parataxis, rejection of narrative, and fragmentation, all of which undermined the notion of a bounded and coherent ‘I’ whose experience could be directly accessed through poetic language” (Olshen 374). En la poética de Hejinian el collage funciona como en el arte abstracto en cuanto a que la abstracción no pretende ser referencial ni mimética. El concepto que tiene del collage refleja no sólo su visión de la realidad como un universo inestable compuesto de signos, sino también subraya la arbitrariedad del proceso creativo. En este sentido, las palabras de Hejinian en *My Life* resultan ser claramente reveladoras: “If reality is trying to express itself in words it is certainly taking the long way round” (105). Hejinian se adhiere a una poética que destaca tanto la materialidad del lenguaje como los procesos de creación de los significados siguiendo la estética de los *language poets*. Este grupo de poetas, al que pertenece Hejinian, se propone hacer “the structures of meaning in language more tangible and in that way allowing for the maximum resonance for the medium” (Bernstein, “Semblance” 114). Esta forma de experimentar con el lenguaje es también un aspecto significativo que enmarca la poética de Hejinian dentro de la estética de la poesía posmoderna que se resiste a naturalizar el lenguaje del texto.

*My Life*, publicada por primera vez en 1980 y revisada en 1987 añadiendo ocho capítulos adicionales, es una autobiografía poco convencional, escrita como un largo poema en prosa, que utiliza estrategias formales para desafiar de forma irreverente las convenciones del género lírico. En este texto las técnicas de fragmentación y yuxtaposición anacrónica abren el espacio poético al mismo tiempo que resaltan la materialidad del lenguaje y los procesos de creación del significado. Si, como afirma Ellen Dissanayake (190), el collage es el arte emblemático para la estetización de una forma de entender el mundo, entonces quizás se podría definir la autobiografía de Hejinian como un intento de reflejar su vida de una manera más artística que mimética.

La técnica del collage le sirve a Hejinian para contar su vida de forma aleatoria y sin orden cronológico y esta arbitrariedad expande el texto permitiendo la libre combinación de los elementos ensamblados. Este poema autobiográfico se convierte en un mosaico de ideas, imágenes y clichés que se van asociando y repitiendo con ligeras variaciones. Esta forma de composición sirve para resaltar la creatividad con que su autora va recordando y seleccionando los detalles que van dando forma a la historia de su vida. Lyn Hejinian construye su autobiografía como un texto reversible donde tienen cabida múltiples identidades y como espacio de auto-invenición.

*My Life* se plantea como preocupación esencial la cuestión de la representación del sujeto y, especialmente, se centra en las convenciones del género autobiográfico. Para Hejinian, la función de la autobiografía posmoderna debería ser explorar la subjetividad al mismo tiempo que las posibilidades y limitaciones del género para construir o representar dicha subjetividad. De hecho, *My Life* no representa una subjetividad concreta y bien definida, puesto que, como afirma Spahr,

what is central to her approach is a willful refusal to adopt any stable subject position as she writes her autobiographies, her refusal to indulge in a rhetoric of self-promotion or self-restoration. Instead *My Life* is a mutating product centered around the way life and practices of representing subjectivity change from moment to moment. (142)

Este poema supone un desafío a la concepción esencialista de la subjetividad y por ello el yo poético no es unívoco, sino plural y heterogéneo. En este sentido, el uso del collage, al desestabilizar las nociones de unidad y coherencia del sujeto poético, pretende expandir nuestra concepción de la identidad. Se diría que esta voz lírica cede el paso a una serie de fragmentos intertextuales que conforman un texto polifónico en el que la voz de Hejinian se diluye en otras voces. De esta forma, esta autobiografía se niega a revelar una verdad unívoca y evita el carácter confesional que habitualmente tienen los textos autobiográficos. Este poema representa una identidad fluida, de naturaleza eminentemente dialógica. Hejinian juega con la estructura del poema construyendo formas caleidoscópicas que fluctúan y varían de igual modo que la identidad que pretenden reflejar. Se podría decir que el collage contribuye a crear un espacio lingüístico “in which ‘identity’ is less a property of a given character than a fluid state that takes on



varying shapes and that hence engages the reader to participate in its formation and deformation” (Perloff 166).

La centralidad de visión propia de las autobiografías se convierte en descentramiento en *My Life*, ya que la voz poética que asume la presencia de una realidad unívoca o de un significado transparente es desplazada a lo largo del poema por múltiples voces y discursos fragmentarios que impiden dar coherencia a este mosaico verbal. Hejinian refleja una identidad fragmentada, “I am a shard” (52), diseminada en el tejido textual y que se niega a presentarse como un sujeto concreto e inmutable. *My Life* es una autobiografía de la multiplicidad que incluye una serie de retazos incompletos y de perspectivas simultáneas de una identidad fluida y cambiante que afirma: “one is growing up repeatedly” (24). Parece obvio que la identidad en este poema se concibe como una combinación de actos, acontecimientos, aspectos culturales y de historias que van perfilando la voz poética mediante procesos recurrentes de auto-reflexión. Porque “a person is a bit of space that has gotten itself in moments” (114), como comenta la autora de forma auto-reflexiva. En ocasiones, Hejinian se refiere a sí misma en tercera persona: “She lay in bed pretending to be a baby or a wounded soldier” (25), “It was there that she met the astonishing figure of herself when young” (22). A veces, se describe como un cuerpo y una profesión: “The movement of the poet’s body as it goes down the street to its car telling its children to hurry” (105). Otras, se presenta como una conciencia incorpórea que describe objetivamente lo que observa: “I’ve been a blind camera all day in preparation for this dream” (115). O nos describe el proceso de la reconstrucción de una identidad que es a la vez particular y genérica: “Our unease grows before the newly restless. There you are, and you know it’s good, and all you have to do is make it better” (12-13), “A person is intrigued sometimes by breakdown and sometimes by waterspouts” (106). Y, casi siempre, se resiste a encasillarse afirmando: “As such, a person on paper, I am androgynous” (105) y resalta que el yo poético puede considerarse pura textualidad. La vida de la autora se nos presenta como un discurso refractado que refleja las contradicciones del sujeto que lo produce. De esta forma nos damos cuenta de que la identidad y la biografía personal no son estables para Hejinian, como se puede ver en la confusa alternancia de pronombres de algunas secciones del poema (9, 43), sino procesos abiertos, en continuo movimiento, que únicamente pueden plasmarse mediante un collage fragmentario

de perspectivas e interpretaciones heterogéneas. Este concepto de la identidad como fluctuante e inestable le permite, además, plantear al lector la cuestión de la artificialidad del sujeto autobiográfico:

I live within a few blocks of the scenes of my childhood and yet they evoke nothing, they are neither alien nor hilarious nor sweet nor familiar nor awful, but merely local streets and an asphalt schoolyard –but now I see that in my memory of the streets, where I walked home alone from school, there is no ‘I’ as such, while in the schoolyard I remember myself as a burgeoning personality and feel anew its nightmarish sincerity, oppressive and claustrophobic but energetic and openly candid though completely inaccurate, an effort, which makes me dread school in retrospect where I liked it so much in actuality ... You have always known we wanted us. The speaker begins with the observations that a person makes looking up through the wind into trees whose lives flash on a summer day. Permanent constructedness. (93-94)

Esta fragmentación de la voz poética se da también a nivel narrativo, ya que, aunque se emulen las convenciones del género autobiográfico, en realidad se está enfatizando el carácter arbitrario del mosaico de acontecimientos descritos. De hecho, la observación “we had to wash the windows in order to see them” (23) nos obliga a reflexionar sobre los marcos de referencia, en general, y el modo autobiográfico en particular. En ocasiones Hejinian utiliza las convenciones del género al emplear expresiones que intentan ordenar cronológicamente los acontecimientos narrados: “just four years later, when my father returned home from war” (7) o “A few months earlier I had taken a creative writing class, and now I was painting on 3 by 3 canvases” (56). Sin embargo, esas expresiones temporales empleadas en fragmentos inconexos, lejos de fijar los hechos y experiencias en un tiempo definido, contribuyen a percibir la simultaneidad temporal con que Hejinian los rememora. La autora no pretende respetar el orden cronológico en que sucedieron los acontecimientos, sino investigar el funcionamiento sincrónico de la memoria. La técnica del collage permite a Hejinian organizar sus recuerdos no en el orden cronológico en que ocurrieron, sino en el que los va recordando. Hilary Clark defiende que en el poema las referencias a la vida de la autora “are arranged in an overall chronological movement. However, there is some overlap or temporal reversibility, references to later points in the life sometimes popping up before or beside references

to earlier points, on the basis of synchronous-associative links” (320). De esta forma, va construyendo una composición caleidoscópica en el que desaparece la separación entre presente y pasado, pero también la diferencia entre lo real y lo imaginado. Texto y vida se entrelazan y se construyen al mismo tiempo.

En lugar de ser una autobiografía centrada en acontecimientos importantes en la vida de Hejinian, este poema pretende reconstruir la vida de la autora a partir de actos cotidianos, anécdotas sin importancia y simples experiencias que se repiten y van componiendo el día a día. Marjorie Perloff considera que incluso los acontecimientos importantes que se narran, como la referencia a la muerte del padre de Hejinian (75), “remain shadowy, peripheral –events that take place, so to speak, at the outer edges of the screen whose real focus is on something else” (166). Además, la ausencia de una estructura coherente y bien definida permite a Hejinian liberarse de las restricciones del género autobiográfico para construir un texto polifónico que ofrece múltiples lecturas y significados. Este heterogéneo mosaico va yuxtaponiendo y acumulando imágenes, percepciones, sensaciones, detalles, reflexiones, digresiones y todo tipo de experiencias cotidianas por nimias que parezcan, con el fin de desafiar las imposiciones de las autobiografías convencionales. En opinión de Lazer,

While the title of *My Life* has the ring of fact and contemporary confession about it, it evades and deconstructs such a limited view of autobiography in favor of a life, our life, as emerging from acts of composition, perception, and construction. It is a life lived within and of language that becomes the subject for *My Life*. It is “my life” as a user of language, a composer in language, a subject within the terrain of language. (29)

En este poema autobiográfico los huecos temporales y espaciales adquieren una importancia especial, ya que apuntan a la función radical del collage como disgregador de los bloques de significado al desafiar la naturalidad del lenguaje y el desarrollo secuencial de los acontecimientos. La vida de Hejinian se compone de momentos discontinuos en el tiempo recordados de forma aleatoria: “a moment yellow, just as four years later, when my father returned home from the war, the moment ... was purple” (7). Incluso algunas experiencias, como la visita al zoológico, han sido dinamitadas para posteriormente distribuir sus fragmentos por todo el texto. Utiliza los recuerdos de esa

visita realizada en su infancia para expresar sentimientos más propios de la reflexión de la edad adulta. Los miedos, “afraid of the bears” (22); las frustraciones, “I wanted to see a mountain lion but had to content myself with a raccoon” (27), y las reflexiones, “The zebras were not at all like horses and could not serve as a substitute in his tale of Africa. Any photographer will tell you the same. Hence, lacking not in authenticity, but in reality” (43), ayudan a organizar el desarrollo de los hechos más que el orden cronológico. Además, la afirmación “That was the most interesting thing I have ever seen at the zoo” (34) queda en el aire sin que se pueda descubrir realmente lo que más le interesó de la visita. La propia autora resalta la importancia de estos lapsos de la memoria en su composición: “There was a garden, a hole in the fence, a grandfather who had no religion –one can run through the holes in memory, wearing a wet hat, onto the sidewalk covered with puddles, and there are fingers in them” (30). Este estilo fragmentado invita al lector a disfrutar de este espacio anárquico donde proliferan los significados sin sentir la necesidad de dar coherencia o de unificar las piezas del mecano en que se ha convertido el texto. Los vacíos pasan a formar parte de la textura del poema y nos invitan a leer el texto en distintas direcciones. De hecho, este texto parece construirse como “a pattern of small roses” (7) sugiriendo la posibilidad de ordenar la propia vida como una serie de ramificaciones que subrayan la apertura y la versatilidad de su composición. En opinión de Dworkin, “the patchwork form of *My Life* is expandable. Rather than extend her narrative from a single end, she has opened her text from within. Like Penelope, she deconstructs her garment in order to reweave it with new thread” (61).

La estética del collage permite a Hejinian liberarse de la progresión lineal y secuencial propia de las autobiografías para construir un texto dominado por patrones espaciales y metafóricos más adecuados al medio poético. Parte de la esencia del poema deriva en cierto modo de la desaparición de la distinción entre tiempo y espacio. El tiempo sincrónico impregna todo el texto permitiendo percibir una miríada de experiencias múltiples que representan la universalidad de las experiencias de la vida de la autora. En *My Life* la fragmentación contribuye en cierta medida a aplanar el tiempo presentando el pasado en el mismo plano que el presente, como si no existiera disyuntiva entre ellos. Hejinian combina sus recuerdos de forma aleatoria sugiriendo la sutilidad y versatilidad de la memoria, ya que, en su opinión, “what follows a strict chronology

has no memory” (13). Así, se intercalan percepciones concretas con reflexiones más abstractas, que se asocian a la niñez y a la madurez respectivamente, presentando una estructura porosa y permeable que impide al lector “take as straight lines the chords of the bounding circle” (43) o encontrar “the spot at which the pattern on the floor repeats” (14). La experiencia y la memoria se conciben aquí como procesos cíclicos no lineales. Los retazos que componen *My Life* se van incorporando gracias a la asociación, para dar lugar a una disposición caleidoscópica en la que fluctúan las emociones, experiencias, sensaciones, imágenes, clichés y repeticiones que invitan a centrar la atención sobre la superficie del texto.

El carácter fragmentario y discontinuo de sus frases parece sugerir que no importa el orden en que aparecen, ya que quizás podrían haberse insertado en otro lugar, y subraya que importa más su efecto estético que su significado. Los detalles y las imágenes son intercambiables y se van permutando a lo largo de esta autobiografía. Una característica esencial de este ensamblaje autobiográfico es su estilo modular “where various units –sentences, phrases, words– are permuted or, more importantly, permutable: the sort of disjunctive collage or serial ordering that characterizes much recent poetry” (Bernstein, “Optimism” 832). Esta yuxtaposición aleatoria obliga al lector a depender de su intuición para construir el significado y refuerza el efecto de imprecisión característico del collage. De hecho, la desconexión entre las frases subraya la existencia de espacios vacíos que contribuyen a dispersar el significado dando la impresión de que el significado se nos escapa por esas ranuras existentes entre cada fragmento. Cada frase ofrece diferentes significados, ya que los nexos de unión, en lugar de aglutinar las ideas, sólo contribuyen a fragmentarlas. La respuesta del lector va a depender especialmente de la imagen objeto de atención y del modo en que establezca las conexiones entre las distintas imágenes. De hecho, el lector se convierte en co-creador en un espacio poético teñido de subjetividad y que se presta a múltiples lecturas debido a la continua variación del centro de atención. Un buen ejemplo de ello es la sección 19 del poema al que pertenece el siguiente párrafo:

I am a shard, signifying isolation –here I am thinking aloud  
of my affinity for the separate fragment taken under scrutiny.  
Yet that was only a coincidence. The penny disk, the rarer  
dollar disk. Her hair is the color of a brass bedstead. We were

proud of our expertise, distinguishing the ripe ears of corn from the green, speaking knowledgeably of tassles and the breeds of corn: Butter & Sugar, Country Gentleman, Honey & Cream, silver Queen. The old dirt road, broken into clods and gullies, or clods and ruts, over which I was walking under some noisy trees, had been reversed in the dark. And so I was returning. For such words present residences on a brown ground. A pause, a rose, something on paper. When I was a child, the mailman, Tommy, let us walk his route with him until we reached the busy streets, and then he sent us home, dragging the dog. (52)

Este poema autobiográfico entrelaza experiencias personales, imágenes abstractas y elementos prestados para componer un tejido textual que parece expandirse en diferentes direcciones. El mosaico que compone Hejinian contribuye a crear un efecto caleidoscópico en la superficie textual debido a que las múltiples asociaciones y repeticiones de los fragmentos nos permiten visualizar unas composiciones dinámicas y fluctuantes. Hejinian se sirve de la técnica del collage para representar su concepción del poema como un espacio pictórico y aprovecha la repetición con ligeras variaciones para crear un texto poliédrico que subraya ese aspecto visual. Las imágenes y elementos verbales parecen ser reversibles y admiten ser colocados en diferentes posiciones para crear nuevos patrones artísticos. La espacialización de las formas permite comunicar la experiencia vital utilizando estructuras de forma parecida a la de las artes plásticas. Por otra parte, el efecto del collage en *My Life* despoja al texto de su profundidad. De hecho, cada párrafo parece ofrecer una nueva perspectiva en lugar de contribuir al desarrollo de la historia relatada en las secciones que lo preceden. Copeland afirma que “collage abandons the illusion of depth we associate with single-point perspective ... In collage, the eye of the spectator tends to fluctuate freely between disparate points on the same shallow plane” (21). Esto mismo puede observarse en *My Life*, ya que se nos presenta como superficie construida de fragmentos fluctuantes que obligan al lector a moverse por la superficie textual y le impiden penetrar en profundidad en la mente de su autora.

Además, Hejinian utiliza la fragmentación y el collage para centrar la atención sobre el proceso creativo y, de esta forma, subraya la artificialidad de su texto. Como afirma Beach, “her writing attempts not

only to transcribe or capture experience, but to interact on a textual or metatextual level with that experience and the process of remembering and re-creating that experience” (59). Muchas de sus reflexiones, “of course this is a poem, that model of inquiry” (105), “a pause, a rose, something on paper implicit in the fragmentary text” (41), “an ‘oral history’ on paper” (8), “The lobes of autobiography” (21), “My life is as permeable constructedness” (93) resaltan la construcción simultánea de su texto y de su vida. El collage subraya así el carácter auto-reflexivo de un poema en el que las experiencias vitales de la autora se entrelazan con sus reflexiones sobre el lenguaje, la percepción y el proceso de escritura. “Those birds are saying, over and over, this tree, my branch, my field of seeds, my herds of worms ... It was at this time, I think, that I became interested in science. Is that a basis for descriptive sincerity” (52). *My Life* nos describe el proceso de la reconstrucción textual de una biografía y al mismo tiempo se plantea como un acto de auto-creación. En opinión de Jacob Edmond, “such self-referentiality ... highlights the text’s status as language and so its mediating position, its difference from the world it describes” (260).

La forma en que Hejinian entreteje el texto no es homogénea, sino que más bien presenta una textura que permite identificar claramente las partes y elementos que lo componen. Se subvierten las convenciones poéticas manipulando la relación entre las unidades sintácticas para componer un poema caracterizado por su naturaleza fragmentada y fractal. Hejinian se divierte resaltando las puntadas que unen los elementos ensamblados y subrayando el carácter aleatorio de su disposición. Al igual que muchos pintores abstractos se apropian de fragmentos de materiales cotidianos y los incorporan a sus obras, Hejinian utiliza fragmentos y clichés del lenguaje cotidiano para componer un texto absolutamente personal y dinámico. Los fragmentos de este mosaico se insertan en contextos desconcertantes con el fin de subrayar su ambigüedad y polisemia. De hecho, *My Life* se convierte en una composición casi cubista donde se superponen frases heterogéneas y temas dispares cuyos significados entran en contradicción con el fin de subrayar el deseo de la autora de experimentar con el lenguaje y con la estructura del texto. Además, esta disonancia con el contexto contribuye a subrayar la arbitrariedad de los elementos ensamblados y a mantener su autonomía de objetos que se resisten a ser integrados en el tejido textual. Las palabras parecen liberarse de sus significados para



adquirir autonomía y autosuficiencia dando lugar a una composición caleidoscópica que centra la atención sobre la estructura del texto y pone de relieve la materialidad del lenguaje. Estos experimentos con el lenguaje son típicos de la poesía posmoderna, pues “Postmodern poetics foregrounds the text’s ability to explore the material and signifying possibilities of the language medium” (Hinton y Hogue 2).

La técnica del collage también permite a Hejinian jugar con el lenguaje desafiando los usos comunes de los clichés y frases hechas. Como afirma Marsh, para Hejinian “to explore and expand the limitations of language is to explore and expand our experiences of life itself” (72). Aunque no cite directamente, muchas de las frases de *My Life* nos resultan muy familiares por utilizar la estructura sintáctica de los adagios: “See lightning, wait for thunder” (7). Con frecuencia inserta palabras nuevas o sustituye partes de las expresiones hechas, otras las modifica inventando rimas y en numerosas ocasiones deja partes incompletas invitando al lector a usar e interpretar el lenguaje de forma diferente. Algunos ejemplos de estos juegos verbales, “Rubber books for bathtubs” (17); “A man is tall, a mountain is high, the sky’s the limit” (45); “supper was a different meal from dinner” (23), sugieren nuevas interpretaciones. El rechazo al realismo procede de su concepción del lenguaje como una realidad más que como un medio de plasmar la realidad (Hejinian, “Two Stein Talks” 129). Para ella las palabras poseen el mismo valor de realidad de los objetos y, en su opinión, las palabras que componen este collage verbal deben considerarse tanto por lo que son como por lo que podrían significar. De ahí que fragmente el lenguaje de forma radical para separar los bloques de significado y desafiar así la naturalidad del lenguaje cotidiano. Consigue así que las palabras adquieran significados evocadores y sugerentes. El poema se convierte en un espacio reversible que, como la mayoría de la poesía del lenguaje, enfatiza la naturaleza heteroglósica y dinámica de la construcción del significado. La afirmación que hace la autora, “Only fragments are accurate” (55), confirma su negativa a presentar una historia coherente y su interés por construir un texto cargado de incertidumbre y polisemia. Parece que para Hejinian, “A *Life* that plays with the dominant language and accepted modes of life-writing creates erotic possibilities, mystery clinging to the fragments of the familiar” (Clark 331). Y verdaderamente el texto se compone de fragmentos arrancados de la cotidianidad y de retazos de experiencias que no constituyen un todo coherente, sino más



bien subrayan el carácter abierto de la progresión de su vida y de su texto. *My Life* se construye como un collage de fogonazos incompletos de experiencias que no pretenden llevar a una *Gestalt*, sino más bien destruir el significado silogístico y evitar la estructura cerrada para su texto. Este poema es fruto de una poética que ensalza la apertura del texto y que invita al lector a involucrarse en el proceso de construcción del significado. Esto se hace patente en las palabras de la propia autora incluidas en su ensayo "The Rejection of Closure," donde afirma:

The open text, by definition, is open to the world and particularly to the reader ... The writer relinquishes total control and challenges authority as a principle and control as a motive. The open text often emphasizes or foregrounds process, either the process of the original composition or of subsequent compositions by readers, and thus resists the cultural tendencies that seek to identify and fix material, turn it into a product; that is, it resists reduction and commodification. (272)

En el texto de Hejinian es importante resaltar la naturaleza dialógica del collage debido a que los diferentes elementos de su composición se resisten a formar un todo homogéneo. El collage subraya la oscilación entre arte y realidad y, al mismo tiempo, ataca también la idea de mimesis. Al yuxtaponer fragmentos de la realidad con formas imaginadas, el collage otorga una cierta paridad al arte y a la vida, presentando la intersección entre ellos. El texto de Hejinian se sitúa precisamente en la línea fronteriza entre arte y realidad para describir experiencias vividas o soñadas que ella describe como espejismos: "Summers were spent in a fog that rains. They were mirages, no different from those that camelback riders approach in the factual accounts of voyages in which I persistently imagined myself" (21). La estética del collage nos plantea, por tanto, cuestiones como la autenticidad y la representación fidedigna de la experiencia. Hejinian concibe su vida como una miríada de experiencias y reflexiones que a veces han sido vividas y otras son imaginadas. De hecho, la utilización del collage en *My Life* subraya el carácter arbitrario de toda composición autobiográfica al diluir el sujeto poético en el espacio lingüístico y permite a su autora yuxtaponer elementos ficticios con otros reales convirtiendo el poema en un acto de auto-invencción. Un ejemplo de este deseo de subvertir la relación entre el yo poético y su representación y de cuestionar la autenticidad de su

propia autobiografía es el episodio que Hejinian incluye sobre su tía con el fin de establecer cierto paralelismo con su propia narración:

My old aunt entertained us with her lie, a story about an event in her girlhood, a catastrophe in a sailboat that never occurred, but she was blameless, unaccountable, since in the course of the telling, she had come to believe the lie herself. A kind of burbling in the waters of inspiration. Because of their recurrence, what had originally seemed merely details of atmosphere became, in time, thematic. (13)

El collage verbal resalta la incapacidad del lenguaje para reflejar la realidad y para explorar la relación entre el arte y la realidad. Hejinian manipula la línea entre artificio y experiencia manifestando su preocupación por la representación de la subjetividad. Esta autora yuxtapone la realidad cruda junto al producto de su propia creatividad poética con el fin de componer un texto heterogéneo que fluctúa entre la realidad y la ficción, estableciendo conexiones indisociables entre ambos. De hecho, una de las funciones del collage en *My Life* es establecer una relación dialógica entre arte y realidad, de forma que el poema no nos permite identificarlo con ninguno de los dos. En este sentido, las palabras de la propia autora resultan sumamente esclarecedoras:

The person is the described describer of what it knows by virtue of experience ... The idea of the person enters poetics where art and reality, or intentionality and circumstance, meet. It is on the neurotic boundary between art and reality, between construction and experience, that the person (or my person) in writing exists. (Hejinian, "The Person and Description" 167)

Hejinian se caracteriza por su adhesión a una poética fragmentada que desafía las nociones de unidad, de coherencia y de síntesis y se preocupa por explorar las posibilidades de la experimentación textual. *My Life* se ha construido como un collage abierto y multidimensional que proyecta estructuras caleidoscópicas con el fin de resaltar su condición de artificios verbales y de centrar la atención sobre el proceso de construcción del significado. La fragmentación y el collage contribuyen, además, a plantear cuestiones sobre el sujeto y su representación, la relación entre arte y realidad y la ambigüedad e indeterminación del lenguaje. Finalmente, se podría afirmar que ambas estrategias permiten a Hejinian experimentar con el lenguaje y con las estructuras poéticas tradicionales abriendo el espacio poético e involucrando al lector en el proceso creativo.

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# **“NOVEL GLOBALISM,” THE TRANSNATIONAL EXOTIC AND SPECTRAL COSMOPOLITANISM: DAVID MITCHELL’S FICTION**

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## **Abstract**

This essay argues that David Mitchell’s *Ghostwritten* and *Number9Dream* present exoticism of a particular kind, one where the exotic takes the form of the uncanny and its inherently “foreign” component. The uncanny, it argues, renders the everyday itself exotic because the foreign is embedded within the everyday, unlike the traditional exotic. Mitchell also maps the interconnectedness of cultures and the breakdown of the Cultural Self/Other boundaries, of categorizations such as “native” and “exotic.” Through this incorporation, or intersection, of the cultural Other as uncanny encounters and doublings, Mitchell offers, I argue, a *spectral cosmopolitanism*. This spectral cosmopolitanism is not really an intellectual project but one of randomness and chance encounters.

**Keywords:** David Mitchell, exoticism, uncanny, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism.

## **“LA NUEVA GLOBALIZACIÓN,” EXOTISMO TRANSNACIONAL Y COSMOPOLITANISMO ESPECTRAL: LA FICCIÓN DE DAVID MITCHELL**

## **Resumen**

Con el presente trabajo se intentará demostrar que las obras de David Mitchell, *Ghostwritten* y *Number9Dream*, presentan un cierto tipo de exotismo donde lo exótico se distingue por su carácter misterioso,

y por su componente más característico: lo ‘extraño’ o ‘foráneo.’ Este carácter misterioso convierte lo cotidiano en exótico, ya que lo extraño es en sí mismo inherente al día a día, a diferencia de lo que se considera como tradicionalmente exótico. Mitchell además planifica los entrelazamientos entre culturas, y la caída de las fronteras entre el ‘Yo’ y el ‘Otro’ cultural, de categorizaciones tales como ‘nativo’ y ‘exótico.’ Con esta incorporación, o intersección, del Otro cultural entendida como una serie de encuentros o desdoblamientos misteriosos, quisiera proponer que Mitchell ofrece un cosmopolitanismo espectral. Este cosmopolitanismo espectral no es en realidad un proyecto intelectual, sino uno de contingencia y de encuentros fortuitos.

**Palabras clave:** David Mitchell, exotismo, misterioso/extraño, transnacionalismo, cosmopolitanismo.

A Western writer writing about non-Western regions or cultures invariably runs the risk of being immediately accused of exoticization and “orientalism.” So what about an author who situates his novel in eight countries? Would that constitute some kind of pan-orientalism, a globalized orientalism? Even if it is situated in European cities, besides Hong Kong, Tokyo, Mongolia?

Pico Iyer described David Mitchell’s 1999 novel, *Ghostwritten*, as embodying a “novel globalism,” a descriptor that, I think, best captures Mitchell’s work in *Ghostwritten* and *Number9Dream*, especially if we pay attention to the multiple connotations of the term “novel” here. Mitchell’s fictional worlds in *Ghostwritten* (which moves from St Petersburg to Mongolia to Hong Kong to Japan to Ireland to London) and *Number9Dream*, present a particular kind of exoticism, while *Cloud Atlas* and more recently in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* Mitchell offers us yet another form. My paper deals with Mitchell’s exoticism in two specific novels, *Ghostwritten* and *Number9Dream*. Before I go on to discuss Mitchell’s brand of exoticism, a brief note on how I am employing the idea of the exotic itself.

Exoticism results from the intrusion of the distant, the foreign (in terms of space, culture and time) into the present and the everyday. The exotic is the “realization of the fantastic beyond the horizons of

the everyday world" (as G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter defined the Enlightenment exotic, 15). It is an aestheticizing process through which, in Graham Huggan's definition, "the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar" (ix). "At a time of unstable boundaries, imaginary portrayals of that which is outside familiar perimeters ... [became] a means of understanding the changing demarcations between inside and outside," writes Christa Knellwolf of eighteenth century European exoticisms (10). The exotic was at once fantasy and the historical response to otherness and difference (11). Thus the exotic is primarily about the foreign, difference and the distant as these impinge upon a culture. If we take the culture as the Self, the exotic is its Other.

With globalization, the distant Other is no more distant. Beamed into drawing rooms, downloadable onto hand-held devices and consumed at eateries, the distant and different are commonplace. The exotic is consumed and encountered every day. In such a context, where does one seek, or find, the exotic? David Mitchell's transnational exotic in *Ghostwritten* and to a limited extent *Number9Dream* is necessitated by globalization itself, where there are no more exotic places to be experienced and frontiers have vanished. The exotic messes up, in Mitchell's fiction, the everyday.

Mitchell's early work, this paper argues, is an exploration of the exotic in the age of globalization. Mitchell, however, refuses to simply situate the exotic at the peripheries of the known world (as the traditional exotic always is). Instead, the exotic constantly impinges upon, and intersects with, the everyday. Such a process of exoticisation takes recourse, in Mitchell's work, to the uncanny. The exotic manifests *as* the uncanny for, as we shall see, *the uncanny is about the foreign* as well. Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* and *Number9Dream* situate the exotic alongside, and as, the fantastic and the foreign (whether an individual's or as the cultural Other) within the everyday, even as it addresses transnationalism and transculturation. Reality, the worlds in video games, dreams, flesh-and-blood people and spirits merge (most powerfully in the form of the "noncorpa" in *Ghostwritten*, whose "life" is woven into the cultural revolution in Mongolia, and who hopes to stop wars, end corruption and prevent ecocide). As long as the uncanny, and its "foreign" stays within the domain of an individual's dreams, nightmares and illusions, the tale is just another cyberpunk (and *Number9dream* is such a text). It

is when Mitchell proceeds to make the uncanny a *cultural* uncanny, in what approximates to the politics of the uncanny, that the text becomes something else altogether.

Through the uncanny's ghosting and doubling, the merger of the home with the foreign, Mitchell also maps the interconnectedness of cultures and the breakdown of the Cultural Self/Other boundaries, of categorizations such as "native" and "exotic." Through this incorporation, or intersection, of the cultural Other as uncanny encounters and doublings, Mitchell offers, I argue, a *spectral cosmopolitanism*.

There are, as can be seen, two key stages here: (i) the uncanny and its spectralizations that bring the exotic "home" and thereby transform our sense of "home" and (ii) the cumulative effect of such spectral encounters and engagements is the rise of a cosmopolitan self, and a cosmopolitanism that is spectral. Eventually the two combine to produce a spectral cosmopolitanism that is a posthuman vision about a new heuristic — of the interconnectedness of life and a *sense* of companion species.

### Uncanny Ghostings

The uncanny, as Sigmund Freud famously demonstrated (1919), is about the human sense of "home and "not-home." It is about the human's *perception* of a place as akin to but not quite home. Hence, a certain hesitation, or epistemological uncertainty, leading to a "crisis of perception" marks the uncanny event/place (Weber 1132). This makes the uncanny a neighbor of the fantastic (Tatar). The uncanny mixes form, defies easy boundary-marking and distinction (embodied, as Rodney Giblett points out, in the topos of the wetlands, with their shifting borders, the mix of water and land, the absence of clear boundaries, etc, 32-4). The uncanny in its Scottish etymological origins, Nicholas Royle points out, offers us "uncertainties at the origin concerning colonization and the foreign body, a mixing of what is at once old and long-familiar and what is strangely 'fresh' and new; a pervasive linking of death, mourning and spectrality" (12). This definition, in one pithy sentence, captures Mitchell's *Ghostwritten*. Death, mourning and spectrality are precisely what make up the tale.

What we can therefore suggest, immediately, is that the uncanny is a space of uncertain perceptions, of feelings (Freud in fact opened his



essay with a reference to the uncanny as something to do with qualities of feeling) of ghostly events and places, of epistemological ambiguities and borderless worlds. It is a space of suspected secrets, of the familiar within the strange, of strained perceptions, of resemblances and doublings. The foreign as uncanny could be either fantasy (which, we must remember, was a mode of exoticism as well), or historical/real. The foreign as uncanny could be dreamworlds or alternate realities, or even a cultural Other.

In *Ghostwritten* Marco, by turns a Marxist, a Christian and a Buddhist, is the ghostwriter: "I really am a writer. A ghostwriter" (270). Does ghostwriting make him less than a "real" writer? That our lives are scripted by those we might never know is a central premise here: "Our own lives ... are pre-ghostwritten by forces around us" (296). This theme of lives being scripted by unknown people is something I shall return to later. Others seem to somehow *converge* on to us, for as Nicholas Royle puts it, the uncanny "may be construed as a foreign body within oneself, even the experience of oneself *as* a foreign body" (2, emphasis in original). This experience of the foreign as a part of our-selves, the figure of the foreigner as a part of our life, at least in a fleeting moment, is the uncanny that makes up the spectral cosmopolitanism of *Ghostwritten*.

The ghostly, the dream, the supernatural are not external, but central to the everyday. The uncanny resides at the heart of the everyday — the premise on which *Ghostwritten* works, but a theme visible in other texts as well. "Trust what you dream. Not what you think," says a character in *Number9Dream* (389).

Eiji of course lives in two worlds — the concrete, real one, and his own fantasies and alternate worlds. Two points need to be made here. The first point is, the everyday and the real are not clearly set apart from the alternate world. Mitchell's uncanny shows the alternate intersecting with, or doubling, the real, informing the real. In Mitchell's often breathless prose the alternate world does seem more real than the William Gibson-like, cyberpunkish world of glass-and-steel Tokyo that Eiji lives in. Second, the alternate reality that Eiji occupies also changes in each of the eight parts of the novel (part nine is blank, suggesting it is unwritten). Eiji's way of coping with his life is to escape into other worlds.

Benjamin Hagen has pointed out presciently that ghosting and doubling are constitutive of the self in Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* (2009).

For example, as Marco does the ghost writing for Alfred, one of the stories Alfred wants him to record is his, Alfred's, encounter with the ghost of himself (*Ghostwritten* 285-88). But the uncanny is not just a ghosting or doubling: it is the persistence of dreams *as* foreign within the heart of the real. I propose that the uncanny is the recognition that the foreign, the alternate and alterity, occupy at least one corner of existence. Hagen comments: "by equating the self with a ghost or double [Mitchell] questions the origin of the subject through a duplication of subjectivity in which the self is a simulacrum of the self" (85). Ghosts, dreams, myths and figures —the foreign and the exotic— from video games are as much characters in Eiji's real-life perceptions as are the memories of his "lost" sister, his missing father and some vague memories of his mother. While on the one hand it might be simpler to dismiss Eiji as psychotic for his over-reliance on the ghostly and the shadowy, on the other, Mitchell keeps us guessing whether these other worlds are merely figments of the boy's imagination or they intersect with his reality.

I want to advance the argument that the perception of alternate realities, ghosts, doublings —the uncanny, in short— renders the self exotic to *itself*. Software, alternate realities, dreams and video games become constitutive of the self. Indeed the self seems to be programmed by something other than it-self. Christopher Johnson has pointed to developments in engineering and techno-science that give us a technological uncanny. The self is not an autonomous self anymore: "We are animated and agitated by a power or program that seems to violate our most intuitive sense of self-determination" (131-32). Feelings —affect— are manipulated by programs and codes. Or, stories. And Mitchell's work is situated within such a technologized, globalized world in *Number9dream*. The world, whether real or generated by a computer program, or the immersive environment of a story, impinges on to the self, the self incorporates the world. The foreign is not "out there," distant and unreachable, it is within. Eiji, for example, is unable to separate the stories he reads in the "study of Tales" section (which has a "Goatwriter") and his own life.

If the uncanny, as Freud has argued, is something one does not know one's way about in, the characters in *Ghostwritten* and *Number9Dream* are in perpetual quests: the worlds they inhabit are unstable, borderless, at once home and not-home. Eiji's quest for his father —it doesn't get

more Freudian, does it?— his memory of his drowned twin sister, his surreal dreams of visiting his father, the bio-borgs—who are uncanny look-alikes of humans, and function as body doubles of important people in Mitchell’s Japan— of the metropolis all lend an eerie atmosphere to the characters’ lives.

The non-corpa, which occurs as a disembodied voice in one chapter of *Ghostwritten* and then a voice on the radio as well as an omniscient eye in the sky, is the ur-uncanny, if one wants to conceptualize it. The *OED* defines the uncanny as being of a “supernatural character,” and the non-corpa corresponds to that.

If our stories, realities and selves are “pre-ghostwritten” by somebody else, then it is possible that we figure in somebody else’s story as well. This is precisely what Mitchell explores.

### **From Uncanny Encounters to Spectral Cosmopolitanism**

The uncanny in the Victorian period was linked, if Allan Lloyd Smith is to be believed, to “specific features of culture, such as imperialism and the fear of what is brought back from the colonies” (285). In the globalized world the cultural uncanny is the presence of such “foreign” features within the everyday, at once familiar and strange. The cultural uncanny that generates the exotic in Mitchell is these ghostly presences intersecting with the everyday life of people.

Berthold Schoene correctly points out that Mitchell

imagine[s] globality by depicting worldwide human living in multifaceted, delicately entwined, serialized snapshots of the human condition, marked by global connectivity and virtual proximity as much as psychogeographical detachment and xenophobic segregation. (50-51)

Moving from crowded metropolises like London to Hong Kong to Mongolia and the “last” corner of Ireland, Clear Island, Mitchell does indeed represent the world as “open” and interconnected in a clear imagining of globality. However, Schoene’s argument about Mitchell’s cosmopolitan imagination ignores a significant mode through which this interconnection is achieved.

Exoticism is characterized by a decontextualization (Huggan 16), when an object is isolated from its “original” context and made to circulate

within other frames of reference. This implies a recontextualization in a wholly new context. During the colonial period the Other culture was a commodity situated “out there” and then reframed within imperial exhibitions simultaneously underscoring their distant difference as well as their incorporation within a metropolitan discourse (see Barringer and Flynn, on colonial exhibitions) as the exotic. In the age of globalization, the Other culture is not distanced or framed as singular. Instead it is messily plunged into a circuit of consumption, as part of the great cultural “flows.” A reterritorialization of the Other occurs where the Other is constitutive of global flows. Mitchell does not posit pockets of Otherness, rather he shows how Otherness intersects with the global producing a new aesthetic. The exotic, in this reading, is the imagining of multiplicities all aligned along a continuum in a fetishizing of difference.

I am working “exoticism” through both its meanings: as radical otherness and as a *process* through which this otherness can be brought into the experience of the traveler.<sup>1</sup>

I propose that Mitchell’s cosmopolitanism is itself exotic, for it presents and imagines multiple foreign cultures and places as interconnected. That is, cosmopolitan thinking in Mitchell acknowledges and recognizes difference — a hallmark of the exotic — but does something more. The exotic in Mitchell’s cosmopolitanism essentially deploys and engenders a sentimentalism. By this I mean to suggest that tragic circumstances, accidents and coincidences rather than conscious attempts to meet or “face” the Other throw people of different cultures together. People (Caspar and his Australian girlfriend Sherry) meeting on trains, the fortuitous rescue of Marco by Mowleen from a certain road accident (273-76), a random military operation, and conspiracies bring people together. The transnational exotic is the *process* of random, nearly metaphysical, uncanny meetings through which Otherness enters the worlds of the characters. We are struck by the randomness of meetings, chance encounters and cultural negotiations in *Ghostwritten*. To read these random acts of the contact zones is to engage in wishful thinking that all of want to be “citizens of the world” (cosmopolitans).

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Fosdick has argued that exoticism as process implies translation, transportation and representation where the potentially threatening is domesticated (14).

This randomness constitutes Mitchell’s transnational exotic and produces a cosmopolitanism that creates, and preserves, pockets of difference, but also suggests the possibilities of random, unconscious, sentimental and *spectral* connectedness between these pockets. The foreign in this transnational exoticism does not negate difference, but it also does not suggest a “global soul” (to borrow the title of Pico Iyer’s work), actively seeking to understand or assimilate difference. This transnational cosmopolitanism does not try to frame difference either.

The exotic, as Christa Knellwolf has argued, is primarily about contexts: where is the object being observed located and from which vantage point is it being viewed? In Mitchell’s fiction, I argue, the different is being viewed not from a vantage point like an omniscient god-like eye but from a horizontal, randomized and planar point. This means, simply, that the different, the Other, is *adjacent* to the viewing point, even if this proximity is accidental. In other words, what I am proposing is that in the transnational exotic, the different is not out there, or unique: the difference is *proximate* with us. I am invoking the image of proximate and adjacent exotic to suggest a planar, leveled exoticism where the multicultural lives led in metropolises do not always generate a cosmopolitan consciousness, but does not situate the exotic “out there” either. The uncanny is the presence of the Other in proximity producing a spectral cosmopolitanism.

The transnational exotic is the accidental cosmopolitan, or more accurately, a *spectral cosmopolitanism*. The spectral, as Pheng Cheah points out, is a form of “inhuman culture,” between nature and culture (388). This adequately describes, I think, the kind of cosmopolitanism we can discern in Mitchell’s fiction. As early as 1999 John Tomlinson had argued that “the paradigmatic experience of global modernity for most people ... is that of staying in one place but experiencing the displacement that global modernity brings to them” (9). Benedict Anderson in his influential work had written:

Why are these events so juxtaposed [in reportage, on TV]? What connects them to each other? Not sheer caprice. Yet obviously most of them happen independently, without the actors being aware of each other or what the others are up to. The arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition ... shows that the linkage between them is imagined. (33)

Anderson, I believe, is far more accurate in his evaluation of the cosmopolitan condition, and approximates to what I have termed ‘spectral cosmopolitanism.’ In an earlier work I have argued that the cosmopolitan outlook is an *intellectual* project, characterized by the co-existence of multiple identities and cultures and the inclination to, and desire for, the absorption and understanding of new cultures (Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 178-79). The point I want to make, at the risk of perhaps downplaying Mitchell’s narrative and stylistic achievement, is that no character in *Ghostwritten* tries to consciously seek to understand or absorb an Other culture. There is no intellectual project here, neither for the characters nor for us. What we see are various differences laid out on a more or less equal/level playing field and rhizomatically interconnected with each other purely by chance. True, it is cosmopolitan in the sense there is no hierarchic organization or ranking of cultures in Mitchell. But suggesting that differences meet by accident rather than through *agential* effort is to show cosmopolitanism as a result of chaos rather than consciousness (a defect somewhat remedied in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*). There is no attempt at a cosmopolitan outlook or attitude.

This means *Ghostwritten* might be an embodiment of a “novel globalism,” but to rate it as an attempt to either create a world novel or as signifying a cosmopolitan outlook, as Schoene suggests, is to willfully ignore the exoticism inherent in merely preparing a mosaic of differences — which is what both these novels ultimately become. The transnational exotic is this mosaic where cultures meet and separate, meet and separate, in an endless proliferation of uncanny accidental encounters. The contact zones are ephemeral. Thus, when Marco saves Mowleen from being hit by a cab, there is the ephemerality of an encounter, loaded with angst and sentiment, but nothing more. Mowleen proceeds to Ireland and her family, to be eventually taken away, under duress, by the American military to aid in their missile program, and Marco goes his way.

While Mitchell resists the temptation to offer “authentic” accounts of difference or cultural iconicity —which would attract the charge of exoticism, of course— by aligning all cultures along a great chain of coincidence, he manages to offer us an anecdote- or incident-based exoticism. This is a *theatrical* strategy, where people run into each other, mysterious encounters bring people face-to-face with the (cultural)

other, and so on. The characters therefore become players in Mitchell’s decentralizing, postmodern exoticism.

Exoticism is the surprising conjunction of random elements, but does not approximate to a conscious, political cosmopolitanism. Another interpretation of this play of exoticism is possible. Exoticism emerges, as commentators have noted, around times of cultural anxieties (Gallini). Mitchell’s postmodern, transnational exoticism with interconnecting, cross-cultural flows appears at a time when critics of globalization have been crying themselves hoarse about cultural homogenization, Americanization and McDonaldization. By producing narratives where worlds, rather than stay apart, collide and intersect while preserving their differences, Mitchell generates an exoticism of chiasmic encounters. He does not propose assimilation, rather he suggests a mutuality of several streams running alongside each other, intersecting at points, and then diverging again. In short, what I am proposing is that Mitchell’s transnational exoticism is a response to threats of homogenization by showing different cultures being separate yet with the inherent possibilities of intersection. If, as Charles Fosdick notes, a “postcolonial exoticism [is] dependent on processes of reciprocity and exchange ... [and] postcolonial mobility has opened up previously unimagined spaces of heterogeneity, cultural interaction and diversity” (21), Mitchell’s brand of transnational exoticism cleverly presents interactions and heterogeneity, but in minimal, non-threatening ways.

Mitchell does not suggest an assimilative apparatus of globalizing cultures (which Huggan sees as generating the postcolonial exotic, 28). Rather he sees exoticism as the inevitable product of the supernatural, metaphysical cultural economy. Understandably, this randomized intersection of different cultures, the accidental cultural encounters and contact zones produced hints at something metaphysical —“supernatural” is a word that has often been used to describe Mitchell’s work, with good reason— and surreal.

What we do not see in Mitchell is the spectacle of differences retained in their pristine uniqueness. What we see is a spectacularization of *intersecting differences*, an exoticism of rhizomatic connections. Unlike the routine exoticism of the global north, there is no emphasis on marginality. What Mitchell does is to show how events in Mongolia or Tokyo somehow have resonances in London or Hong Kong. Spectral



cosmopolitanism is the strange, ghostly and inexplicable connections that constitute everyday life in a spectral globality (or is it a globalization of the spectral?).

Spectral cosmopolitanism does not always entail a knowledge of the other. The domain that lies beyond comprehension and knowledge is that of the other, standing in opposition to empirical, rational and “modernized” knowledge systems. Conversely, one cannot fully “know” the other, as David Punter has argued, because it is incommensurable (Punter 74). The uncanny is itself about a crisis of perception, an *epistemological uncertainty*, as every single commentator on the uncanny has pointed out. The move from the uncertainty of the uncanny to the canny is via knowledge (the word “canny” itself implies knowledge). Spectral cosmopolitanism in Mitchell is precisely this: the epistemological uncertainty of perception, of ghostly encounters that leave us uncomprehending of the Other, of events and people that do not fit into our scheme of things. It is in these uncertain, unstable (uncanny) encounters with the Other that the spectral cosmopolitanism emerges. If the uncanny is the space of uncertainty, then this same space is at once created by, and inflects, the cultural encounter with Others. Spectral cosmopolitanism is the ephemeral yet powerful experience of the Other, leaving fleeting impressions of who or what one has encountered, which does not enlighten us about the Other in any significant ways, but has had some impact upon us. It is between nature and culture, governed by laws we do not understand (the uncanny is adjacent to the fantastic).

Mitchell’s spectral cosmopolitanism suggests, I argue, a vision of companion species, of co-existence and hyperconnected lives. In a globalized world with an increasing sense of hyperconnected lives (in the digital domain), we experience uncanny connectivity, influence and impact. Our lives ghostwritten by somebody else, somebody we might never meet, gives us a cosmopolitanism that is at once felt but not knowable. It is in this gap between a *feeling* of connectivity (a *ghostly* feeling, like *déjà vu*) and an uncertainty about what happened that the spectral nature of cosmopolitanism’s connected lives arises. Mitchell’s spectral cosmopolitanism is essentially, therefore, a posthuman vision about companion species.

Mitchell’s spectral cosmopolitanism, of uncanny encounters with strangers, is a posthuman vision of the need for a new heuristic, of the



world's interdependency. His fiction echoes the recent work of Donna Haraway, in the cognitive sciences and in the posthumanities. Haraway in her more recent work has been proposing the idea of "companion species," symbiogenesis (from the work of biologist Lynn Margulis, whose ideas have also been taken up by African American sci-fi writer, Octavia Butler) and dependency. Haraway argues that the very word "species" etymologically proposes response, respect and responsibility, proceeding from the word "specere," meaning both "to see" and "respect" (17-23). Thus to behold a species is to respond with respect, to acknowledge that this Other is a part of us. This in no way negates the Other, neither does it assimilate the other. "Species" is about the acknowledgement of difference, and the recognition that the difference is what makes us, and what we must respond to, with respect. If there is an ethics to Mitchell's exoticisation, it would be this: the Other intersects with us in ways we cannot understand, nor predict. Judith Butler has proposed that once I recognize that my life and death are connected to yours in ways I do not understand, that my death could be the result of a random act on the part of somebody I do not know (or will), then it becomes difficult to see the Other as anything less than "connected" to me, as constitutive of *my* world (20). When in *Ghostwritten* Mitchell writes that "our own lives ... are pre-ghostwritten by forces around us" (296) he is proposing such an uncanny linkage. We become cultural and individual companion species, adjacent to, constitutive of the Others. This itself becomes a response to globalization. The world evolves in a symbiogenesis, in unexpected, uncanny ways because of these random, metaphysical connections.

Cognitive scientists Francisco Varela et al in their *The Embodied Mind* demonstrate how the mind is not a homogenous unity but a "disunified, heterogeneous, collection of processes" (106-07). More importantly, "what counts as an agency ... a collection of agents, could, if we change our focus, be considered as merely one agent in a larger agency" (107). Mitchell's distributed agency theme in both *Ghostwritten* and *Number9Dream* is a posthuman vision. Minnesota University Press in 2007 has launched a new series, *Posthumanities*. The write-up on the series is illuminating and captures much of what the discipline, of the posthumanities, is likely to become:

Posthumanities situates itself at a crossroads: at the intersection of "the humanities" in its current academic

configuration and the challenges it faces from “posthumanism” to move beyond its standard parameters and practices. Rather than simply reproducing established forms and methods of disciplinary knowledge, posthumanists confront how changes in society and culture require that scholars rethink what they do—theoretically, methodologically, and ethically. The “human” is enmeshed in the larger problem of what Jacques Derrida called “the living,” and traditional humanism is no longer adequate to understand the human’s entangled, complex relations with animals, the environment, and technology. (<http://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/series/posthumanities#>, 22 July 2011)

Series editor Cary Wolfe points to a “wet” version of posthumanism in which the “human is enmeshed in the larger problem” — at once biological, ecological, and ontological ([http://www.carywolfe.com/post\\_about.html](http://www.carywolfe.com/post_about.html), 22 July 2011). I have elsewhere proposed that the humanities itself needs to be reinvented as the posthumanities, whose discipline I defined as the

theoretico-political examination of the human in the age of technology; the rights of posthumans; the arts, literature and poetics of posthuman thought; the history of notions of *life* in its various inclusions, exclusions and hybridizations that distinguish between ‘bare life’ and political life, or human and animal; and the question of species and species-borders. (Nayar, “Posthumanities” 7)

Mitchell’s is a text that offers us a vision of this posthumanized, hybridized, interconnected world where human agency is dependent upon the agency of several others, many of which might be non-human.

In human and social geography in the age of globalization and electronic linkages we see a similar trend, as posthumanism speaks of the interconnectedness of human-non-human linkages. Mitchell, in the figure of the non-corpa and the “zoo-keeper,” questions the limits of the human by showing how the “human” is configured only through close imbrications with the non-human. The human life, or fate, is, in this posthuman vision, the result of an “infolding of the world” (qtd. in Panelli 82). Posthumanist commentator Neil Badmington suggests that we “attend to what remains of humanism in the posthumanist landscape”

(15). Mitchell's uncanny leading to a spectral cosmopolitanism is an argument for a "‘vital topology’ that extends far beyond us, and that is not of our making alone ... it is focused ... on displacing the hubris of humanism so as to admit others into the calculus of the world" (Panelli 82). Ruth Panelli refers to this as the "dynamism of a more-than-human world" (82), a phrase that captures Mitchell's agenda in his early fiction. What Mitchell calls for, I suggest, is a new heuristic, a *sense* of the world's interconnectedness.

In *Ghostwritten* several tragedies, for example, are connected: the Aum sect killer, Neal, the old woman in Mongolia, her niece in Hong Kong. Latunsky, the art thief, is connected to Jerome (who is Alfred's friend, Alfred being the man for whom Marco is doing the ghostwriting in London). Latunsky is based in Petersburg, and is left there for the police to find there by Subahtaar, the Mongolian secret police officer. Before leaving her Subahtaar informs her that her boyfriend Rudi was money-laundering for a Mr Gregorski, and the money-laundering firm's operative, Neal, had died (259). Nick's maid, with whom he has an affair, is the old woman's niece. The London publisher Tim Cavendish, who Alfred hopes will publish his book, is the brother of the guy who runs the Hong Kong based law firm where Neal worked. After the law firm collapses, Cavendish declines to publish Alfred's book — which Marco is ghostwriting (303. Marco also goes to bed with Katy, Neal's ex-wife). Cavendish is also the guy who publishes the writings of Serendipity, the cult leader. The subway gas attack is engineered by this cult. And then there is the non-corporeal being that/who inhabits information channels and communications satellites, and wishes to kill evil humans but cannot because the principles of its race (of ghosts?) prohibit it from doing so.

While it might seem far-fetched to propose that Mitchell's work seems to rely upon a metaphysical concept of fate, *Ghostwritten* comes close to this suggestion. This commonality of "fate" is the *exoticisation of interconnected cultures*, worlds, people and places across geographical spaces and times. Mitchell thus proposes an exoticism of connections, not of separations. In a sense, therefore, Mitchell is offering a new form of globalism, where fate and tragedy link all of us.

If, as Hardt and Negri have argued, "Empire" is now decentered, fluid, mobile and without limits —not unlike spectrality— then spectral

cosmopolitanism is the cultural arm of this globalization. Exoticism works with fragmentation and dismemberment, where fragments of a culture, or particular objects, are synecdochic of a culture as a whole (Fosdick 21). Mitchell's postmodern play ensures that the fragment of any culture is the best we can hope to see. Thus violence is the synecdoche for Mongolia and China, the CIA-FBI ruthlessness for the USA, spiritualism for Japan, music and romance for youth anywhere etc. But what is significant is that this form of transnational exoticism is itself a code for the simultaneous fragmentation-dismemberment and interconnectedness of a globalized world. That Mitchell chooses to show this via the metaphysical-supernatural is a different matter. Perhaps the uncanny is a descriptor of all contemporary lives, as companion species, in the world of spectral cosmopolitanism.

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## THE LANDSCAPE AS METAPHOR IN EAVAN BOLAND'S *AGAINST LOVE POETRY*

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### **Abstract**

Eavan Boland's poetry has been the focus of attention of literary critics greatly interested in the significance of landscape in her muse, but the aim of this paper is not to analyze the importance of place, as it has already been studied in depth. Instead, this work seeks to consider landscape as an informing metaphor which enables a sustaining approach to Boland's poetics in general and to *Against Love Poetry* in particular. Landscape proves to be a suitable trope when examining multiple layers within Boland's poetic universe, as landscape entails for Boland's creative muse a deep and private understanding of the self, the world, and the poetic art.

**Keywords:** Eavan Boland, Landscape, *Against Love Poetry*.

## EL PAISAJE COMO METÁFORA EN *AGAINST LOVE POETRY* DE EAVAN BOLAND

### **Resumen**

La crítica literaria con frecuencia ha centrado sus esfuerzos en analizar la importancia del paisaje en la poesía de Eavan Boland. Sin embargo, el objetivo de este trabajo no es estudiar la significación del lugar, puesto que este aspecto ya ha sido estudiado en profundidad. Por el contrario, se pretende demostrar que el paisaje puede funcionar como una metáfora continuada que permite un acercamiento a la poética de Boland en general y a *Against Love Poetry* en particular. El paisaje resulta ser un tropo apropiado para examinar distintos estratos

dentro del universo poético de Boland, dado que el paisaje implica una comprensión profunda y privada de su yo, del mundo, y la Poesía.

**Palabras clave:** Eavan Boland, Paisaje, *Against Love Poetry*.

Any reader looking over the titles of Eavan Boland's poetry volumes will soon become aware of the poet's main aesthetic concerns: *New Territory* (1967), *The War Horse* (1975), *In Her Own Image* (1980), *Night Feed* (1982), *The Journey* (1987), *Outside History* (1990), *In a Time of Violence* (1994), *The Lost Land* (1998), *Against Love Poetry* (2001), and *Domestic Violence* (2008)—plus the prose book *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Times* (1995)—suggest her commitment to the scrutiny of violence and dispossession, of women's role, and of land in relation to the past, among other issues. Yet for the faithful reader of her poetry, coming across terms associated with land is commonplace: *territory*, *journey*, *land*, *place*, *ground*, *map*, or *cartography* sound familiar soon. Literary criticism is greatly interested in the significance of landscape for the poet, but the aim of this paper is not to analyze the importance of place. Instead, this paper seeks to consider landscape as an informing metaphor which enables a sustaining approach to Boland's poetics in general and to *Against Love Poetry* in particular. Landscape proves to be a suitable trope when examining multiple layers within her poetic universe, as landscape entails for Boland's creative muse a deep and private understanding of the self, the world, and the poetic art. To be precise, four main notions of landscape are applied: first, the place of Boland within the landscape of Irish poetry; second, *Against Love Poetry* as a poetic landscape in itself which, in turn, depicts the different types of landscapes informing Boland's poetics in the volume; third, the poem as a landscape of personal and artistic reflection; and finally, the influence of painting techniques on Boland's views about poetry.

## 1. The place of Eavan Boland within the landscape of Irish poetry

In an interview conducted by critic Pilar Villar-Argáiz, Boland acknowledges her awareness of the changing literary landscape in



Ireland ("The Text of It" 62). Long in the past remains the criticism made to her poetry based on the idea that certain topics should never inhabit the high place of poetry. Quite the opposite, two of Boland's greatest achievements are: first, to question the inclusiveness of the received Irish History, Cartography, Literary tradition, Historiography, etc. which, she understands, erase the truth of the events and/or the places;<sup>1</sup> and second, to widen Irish literary boundaries with women's ordinary experience. This goal is accomplished through her employment of domestic and suburban images.<sup>2</sup>

Boland has repeatedly referred to her struggle as a woman poet in the early sixties in a literary environment dominated by a male literary tradition in which women were mere obsolete metaphors. Boland argues that "the nation is an old woman and needs to be liberated. But she's passive; and if she stops being passive and old she becomes young and ornamental" (Wright and Hannan 10). Yet the poet further tackles the problem: "But basically this community dominates women as the receptors of other people's creativity and not as the initiators of their own" (10). In this long tradition of silence, Boland's poetry has prepared the ground for next generations of women poets who recognize her effort.<sup>3</sup> The poet believes that including new women poet voices leads to a redefinition of the centre in the received Irish literary tradition due to the enlargement of its borders:

There are younger women now, new poets ... and they are dealing with all kinds of themes and experiments, and this just has to refresh the whole basis of Irish poetry. ... this goes back to Eliot's old idea of the tradition and the individual talent: this table where everybody sits around and when you make a space, everybody else has to move. Once you bring new voices and new energies into a tradition, that whole tradition

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<sup>1</sup> Villar-Argáiz explains Boland's dilemma: "there is a reality that stands on the margins of representation, outside any science of cartography. ... What remains unrecorded on the Irish map is the past itself, the marks and wounds left on the land by those 'starving Irish' making famine roads. It is this very exclusion that makes Boland call cartography into question" (*Eavan Boland's Evolution* 203).

<sup>2</sup> Debrah Raschke remarks Boland's belief that poetry should not reject the ordinary, together with the sublime, as an appropriate raw substance for poetry in particular, and for art in general. Raschke affirms that the poet "conjoin[s] these" in her verse (141).

<sup>3</sup> Poet Mary O'Malley acknowledges that "[s]he did much to define the space in which I was able to grow as a writer, often in ways I neither engaged in nor fully understood" (255).

shifts on its very foundations. It's not just one little vacancy.  
(Tall 39)

But what is striking is that Boland comments on such phenomenon in terms of maps and cartography:

The map of Irish poetry, which for ages has been drawn by men, was one on which I did not find my name written, nor did I know, when I was starting out as a poet, if it were possible for my name to be written there. I now know that maps change all the time, that maps were made *because of* difficult and dangerous journeys. (O'Connell 34-35)

The poet recognizes to have felt contradictory feelings regarding the Irish literary tradition: great admiration for W.B. Yeats and other contemporary male poets, yet the lack of an aesthetic place where to stand as a woman and a poet. Due to the absence of female models within the received heritage, Boland quenched her thirst for aesthetic guides in other traditions and turned to Sappho, Anna Akhmatova, Adrienne Rich, Elizabeth Bishop and Sylvia Plath as literary guides which helped her in her distinct blending of public and private spheres. However, Boland did not claim ownership of foremothers in the Irish literary tradition. Instead, as Anne Fogarty explains, she re-imagines “the lyric poem as an open space that allows movement from inside to outside and permits thereby the forging of connections between the ordinary world of private experience and the public forms of the artistic text” (260). Fogarty believes that Boland “renegotiates her relationship with the male system of literary privilege”, and she achieves it by “tracking movements between the domestic interiors of the houses and apartments that she inhabits and the exterior urban and suburban streetscapes” (260).<sup>4</sup> With the publication of *The Journey* Boland openly rejected the “fixed space where the poet was expected to stand and speak. Right in the middle of the poem” (Allen-Randolph, “A Backward Look” 299). The poet asserts that for her the only way to re-situate herself within the poem, not at the center, but shifting her location in the poem, was by “trying to unlearn something” (300).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Villar-Argáiz insists upon the same idea of Boland's constant movement: “She is never at the origin or at the destiny of her trip, but always in the middle of a literal or imaginary journey” (*Eavan Boland's Evolution* 211). The critic concludes that Boland's poetry “should be read as a series of boundary crossings, beyond fixed geographical, national, and cultural borders” (261).

<sup>5</sup> Boland mentions this notion some years later in the interview conducted by Villar-

The last few years have been witness to an increase of critical studies dealing with the sense of place and/or landscape in Eavan Boland's poetry and prose. Already in 1994, Patty O'Connell acknowledged that "[t]he concept of geography comes up frequently in Boland's conversation, as do the mapping of space and the psychological, political, and cultural effects of such cartography" (32). Katie Conboy explored *Object Lessons* and *In a Time of Violence* to show differences in contrast to the work of Seamus Heaney.<sup>6</sup> For Conboy, Boland tries to find a place for women within the larger cultural and historical context of Ireland and "continues to reconsider Ireland's topography—both literal and poetic" (191). Besides, Ana Rosa García García scrutinizes different concepts under the term *place* in her analysis of *Object Lessons*.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, there is a close link for Boland "between poetry and place" (191). Sara Sullivan studies the domestic interiors displayed in Boland's poetry. Finally, a recent doctoral dissertation by Rebecca Elizabeth Helton specifically devotes a chapter to the examination of space in Boland's art. However, these are just examples of specific analyses, but references to the prominence of place for Boland's poetics remain scattered in numerous critical pieces. Boland continues to express her interest in exploratory journeys throughout the real and imaginary land and to test the suitability of maps, as demonstrates the publication of her latest collection in 2011, significantly entitled *Journey with Two Maps*.

## 2. Landmarking the landscape of *Against Love Poetry*

Villar-Argáiz has shown that Boland's perception and description of Irish landscape has evolved in her poetry.<sup>8</sup> In her poetic beginnings,

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Argáiz: "It's hard to unlearn the way you've learned to be a poet" ("The Text of It" 56). The poet also refers to finding a new place within the tradition: "I wondered what would happen if you shifted to the margin, if you displaced that center" (56).

<sup>6</sup> She concludes that there is an indispensable divergence between both poets, due to Boland's literary struggle to find the place of women in Irish culture, and to reconstruct or re-landscape her nation so as not to feel an outsider in the literary map where she lives.

<sup>7</sup> The critic is mainly interested in "place as a bridge between the ordinary and the poetic as inspirational motifs for a poem; and the hologram of the common area where the public and the private meet", as well as in "the literary and metaphysical relation between the poet and the place, and how a place is the origin of varied reactions to it." Finally, the scholar analyses "the concept of belonging to a place" (81).

<sup>8</sup> These ideas are available in both Villar-Argáiz's "The Perception of Landscape in Eavan Boland's Poetry: From a "Romantic" Pilgrimage to a World of Constellations and Suburbs"; and *Eavan Boland's Evolution as an Irish Woman Poet*.

Boland employed natural landscapes in an idealized way, very much in the wake of W.B. Yeats. However, the scholar clarifies, from understanding the role of the poet as a romantic pilgrim in *New Territory*, Boland moves in *Against Love Poetry* towards a different stance: whereas “perceiving the landscape ... remains essential,” the landscape entails a more complex concept for the poet since “her national identity and her womanhood are united in the same struggle to achieve a poetic voice” (Villar-Argáiz, “The Perception of Landscape” 273).

*Against Love Poetry* exhibits the multifold nature of human relationships spanning from romantic love to lasting spiritual friendship. The overall tone of the collection is that of celebration: the volume is devoted to her husband Kevin Casey. It is structured in two main sections: the first, “Marriage”, displays eleven poems listed in Roman numerals; and the second one, “Code”, contains sixteen poems without any figure defining the perimeter of this lyrical area. The latter section makes reference to the primal essence of materials upon which she intends to reflect. The poem “Limits 1” sets a cornerstone, as it portrays the creation of the alphabet, the raw substance of poetry. The poem “Code” deals with the same topic, but the piece is devoted to Grace Murray Hopper, the maker of a computer language: “Poet to poet. I imagine you / at the edge of language, ... / writing code. / You have no sense of time” (1-4). Boland understands that the female scientist is also a poet because of her ability to re-create reality with another language, an alternative *code*.

The Irish poet successfully portrays lovers, husbands and wives throughout the lifetime of their marriages. The only prose poem—the second in order of appearance sharing the title of the volume<sup>9</sup>—is directly addressed to Boland’s husband:

We were married in summer, thirty years ago. I have loved you deeply from that moment to this. I have loved other things as well. Among them the idea of women’s freedom. Why do I put these words side by side? Because I am a woman. Because marriage is not freedom. Therefore, every word here is written

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<sup>9</sup> The title coincides only with the American edition of the volume, published by W.W. Norton. In the Irish edition, by Carcanet Press, the title is *Code*. For more information, see Pilar Villar-Argáiz. “‘The Text of It’: A Conversation with Eavan Boland.” *New Hibernia Review* 10.2 (2006): 59. [Short citation form; the complete information appears in bibliography]

against love poetry. Love poetry can do no justice to this. Here, instead, is a remembered story from a faraway history: A great king lost a war and was paraded in chains through the city of his enemy. They taunted him. They brought his wife and children to him—he showed no emotion. They brought his former courtiers—he showed no emotion. They brought his old servant—only then did he break down and weep. I did not find my womanhood in the servitudes of custom. But I saw my humanity look back at me there. It is to mark the contradictions of a daily love that I have written this. *Against love poetry.* (5)

To my mind, this excerpt brilliantly exemplifies Boland's artistic *credo*. Boland establishes a connection between her enduring love for her husband—left outside the limits of literary conventions—and her love for women's freedom. She particularly highlights that, contrary to received history, freedom permeates her love for both. Therefore, she is committed to publicly re-establishing the past as a scene of elements privately chosen, as well as to inhabit such scene with her own feelings as a woman in a tradition which has traditionally silenced her kind.

She undertakes the task of delving into the past of Ireland in search for forgotten instances in order to show evidence of a realistic vision of human love, far from tight and fictional aesthetic codification in poetry. Poems in *Against Love Poetry* leaning on such conception are "Quarantine", "Once" and "Thanked Be Fortune." In "Quarantine" the poet reconstructs a historical event, refusing "the inexact / praise of the easy graces and sensuality of the body" (14-15). She only allows "this merciless inventory: / the bare facts of their death in 1847" (16-17). The genuine love of "Quarantine" is not appropriate material for such tradition. Love poetry proves to be inadequate to express such history in its worn-out artificial code. Therefore, a new terrain has to be explored or, at least, the edges of this well-known place need broadening. "Once" clearly states "I do not want us to be immortal or unlucky" (11), actively refusing to fit her feelings and life into such pre-established doom. In "Thanked Be Fortune" Boland adopts an intimate tone when showing her gratitude for not personifying the "epic glory of the star-crossed" (4). The poem continues: "I would have said / we learned by heart / the code marriage makes of passion — *duty dailyness routine*" (5-8). But such routine is regarded in very positive terms.

Ireland also becomes a main character in Boland's volume, for both Irish nature and urban landscapes are hosts of such stories. Boland excels at portraying highly sensorial landscapes: not only does she frequently refer to the act of perceiving through verbs, or employs the device of onomatopoeia, as in "Limits 2": "If there was / a narrative to my life / in those years, then / let this / be the sound of it— / the season in, season out / sound of / the grind of / my neighbors's shears" (1-9). Boland also suggests strong associations of images with wild animals in Irish land. An excerpt from "Limits 1" provides a good example as she identifies Irish wolves with the alphabet of Irish language: "their vowels / clung on with / talons and the thin / ribbed wolves / which had gone north / left their frozen winters / and were lured back / to their consonants" (13-20). Likewise, in "Once" the married lovers are compared to "Irish wolves: a silvery man and wife. / Yellow-eyed. Edged in dateless moonlight. / They are mated forever. They are legendary. They are safe" (21-23). The lovers thus fully integrate within the Irish landscape as its natural inhabitants.

Distance or perspective, so crucial for landscapists, is at the basis for the mental/imagined landscapes within *Against Love Poetry*. They are codified both in time (history) and space (the earth and the sky with women below and stars above seem to be distant yet mirroring each other). But space also significantly points out towards the Irish migration to the American country. This fact is reflected upon in "Emigrant Letters", a poem placed in Detroit airport where the poetic persona hears an Irish accent tempered by the years spent away from Ireland. Boland evokes Dublin city in "The Old City" by going back in the past and revealing the nuances which distinguish it from the present: "Small things / make the past. / Make the present out of place" (1-3). These mental landscapes are highly dependent on memory as a poetic device, that is, Boland feels the need to do justice to those spaces—and its inhabitants—suffering the violence of silence and oppression. Therefore, she rescues from oblivion histories of the Irish past muted by the lack of interest by the social and political circumstances. Inés Praga Terente states Boland's commitment with *real* history as well as with a past full of private lives (252). In this light, the poem "Called" becomes an essential piece, because the poet unsuccessfully attempts to find her grandmother's grave. So, the Irish poet sets herself an appalling task: "For once, I said, / I will face this landscape / and look at it as she was

looked upon: / Unloved because unknown. / Unknown because unnamed” (7-11). Furthermore, Boland reaches further in her consideration when linking constellations to women to make their existence noticeable and meaningful: “as the constellations rose overhead, / some of them twisted into women” (20-21). The ships, the compasses and night skies owe their being to these women in the sky: “All the ships looking up to them. / All the compasses made true by them. / All the night skies named for their sorrow” (25-27).

Besides, the collection is also pervaded by physical/real landscapes as domestic, urban, and natural depictions. Urban sketches unfold under Boland's close examination in order to show traces of past events which have left an indelible mark in the place. The aforementioned poem “The Old City” as well as “Making Money”, which paints the city of Dundrum at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, show a city still in close contact with nature:

And the mill wheel turned so the mill  
could make paper and the paper money.  
And the cottage doors opened and the women  
came out in the ugly first hour. (10-13)

Yet Irish natural landscapes are portrayed from the reverence of the literary mode of nature poetry. Boland, however, describes herself as nature poet portraying indoors and her poetry is frequently labeled as *domestic*. That reverence to nature poetry lies in the fact that Boland, like other nature poets, attempts to delve into the sight before her eyes in order to experience it by transcending the barriers of time and place. The poem “How We Made a New Art on Old Ground” meditates on nature poetry as an artistic creation emanating from the landscape itself only when proper attention is rendered:

A famous battle happened in this valley.  
You never understood the nature poem.  
Till now. Till this moment—if these statements  
seem separate, unrelated, follow this

silence to its edge and you will hear  
the history of air: the crispness of a fern  
or the upward cut and turn around of  
a fieldfare or thrust written on it. (1-8)



War and nature poetry seem antonyms, but the bridge uniting them is the revelatory silence, which unfolds the truth behind both the poem and the rendered landscape.

### 3. The poem as a landscape of personal and artistic reflection

Understanding the poem as a landscape entails that the poem transforms into a place in which the poet portrays herself as she experiences it, checking whether the poetic terrain needs widening its frontiers. Albert Gelpi records Boland's characteristic way of setting her poetic landscape: "a domestic or familial incident is localized by the speaker, almost always the poet herself, and by time, year or season or hour, and by place, most often her house and garden" (212). After setting the scene, the critic continues: "and the reflection on the incident reveals its 'secret things' and invests it with figurative significance, at once personal and historic" (212). Michael Thurston describes the very same shape of her poetry in different yet complementary terms since "Boland's poems invite us to inhabit a problem" (245). The scholar understands that "if we accept their invitation we work through a problem with some social and political significance" (245-46). However, Thurston acknowledges "one of Boland's strengths": "she insistently leaves questions unanswered and problems unresolved" (246).

Boland has generously referred to her views of what a poem is pristinely made for: "I don't write poems to express an experience: I write them to experience it. Because of time and loss and language, only a fraction of that experience will be re-experienced in the poem" (Bertram 15). Boland concludes: "So in the lyric ... something is lost and something is powerfully reshaped" (15). And it is in this reshaping that a fresh approach to the received reality takes place. Yet, not only history but myths are used in her poetic forging. Shara McCallum believes that myths in Boland's poems become "malleable and that our interpretations of them, individually and culturally across small and vast spaces of time, not only do, but *should* change" (39). For the Irish poet "the defining circumstance of a poem is not the experience it's founded on, but who the poet is. The poet's identity, in turn, is a highly complex series of layers (Bertram 14). Boland puts the emphasis on such multiplicity: "It's the sophistication and power of those negotiations, which really determine the angle of experience in the poem" (15).



Likewise, Boland has deeply considered on the notion of the double nature of *place* in "The Woman The Place The Poet": "There is a duality to place. The place which existed before you and will continue after you have gone. ... There is the place that happened and the place that happens to you" (154). The poet further describes her understanding of place in its identification with the self: "What we call place is really only that detail of it which we understand to be ourselves" (155).<sup>10</sup> García García points out that for Boland the term *place* bears very different meanings: place denotes a physical space, but it connotes also a metaphysical place, that is to say, the way in which a person can relate to the place through "personal preconceptions and experiences, conscious and unconscious relations" (76). Symbolically belonging to a place, García García explains, occurs when the poet re-creates the place and makes it her own. Yet, the critic adds, the Poem is such place where she represents and recognizes herself (80).<sup>11</sup>

Boland has explained that her radical act of saying all the ambiguities and strange relations taking place in Ireland "require a series of engagements and assessments with the place and the time and the poem" ("Turning Away" 94). The aforementioned reshaping, recreation and assessment lead to the idea of *reconstruction* within Boland's poetry, introduced by Fogarty: owing to the poet's skepticism of received discourses and her distrust of "figments that memory invents, her poetry is underwritten by a skeptical epistemology that eschews simplified attempts to reconstruct the undocumented lives lost to history" (271). Gelpi mentions an analogous notion when he affirms that within her poetry remains the chance of witnessing the lost land she particularly retells in her lines (227). In fact, one of the sources for her need to reconstruct lies in her early discovery that history and past were not synonym terms. History "is an official version of events ... but the past ... is a place of silences and losses and disappearances"<sup>12</sup> (Villar-Argáiz, "The Text of It" 53). Such reconstruction crystallizes in a place that "can happen at the very borders of myth and history" (Boland, "The

<sup>10</sup> Or as she explains to Villar-Argáiz: "I'm interested in the individual—in the self as it encounters the event or the experience" ("The Text of It" 61).

<sup>11</sup> Gelpi put it another way two years earlier: "the poem's interior is an extension and expression of the poet's stance in the world" (221).

<sup>12</sup> Shara McCallum also describes Boland's recognition that history "is often a site of forgetting, then retelling myths, legends, and other culturally shared stories in poetry becomes an act of recovery" (39).

Woman The Place The Poet” 172), as representations unfaithfully betray reality. As Villar-Argáiz puts it, “any form of representation ... runs the risk of misrepresenting real images, because of its desire to capture and define them as solid and fixed entities” (*Eavan Boland’s Evolution* 206). The question of representation is also approached by Catriona Clutterbuck, who explains that “the role of the poet is to confront the representation of the self by exploring the *processes* of both representing herself and representing through herself” (282). Stef Craps calls the attention on the importance of Boland’s conversation with the Achill woman, who taught Boland “to read the despair and the suffering of past generations as they are inscribed in the landscape, whose natural beauty is no more than a subtext” (168). The landscape that Boland reconstructs through her verse is not the suburb of Dundrum, not even the past as received from history; it rather springs to life thanks to her *re-landscaping* poetic vision.<sup>13</sup>

In this sense, the so-called feminist poetry, which she has repeatedly rejected, has constantly highlighted her preoccupation with giving voice to poetic encounters not codified as poetical stock by the Irish tradition. But Boland resists the labeling as *feminist* together with *poetry*:

Feminism is an enabling perception but it’s not an aesthetic one. The poem is a place—at least for me—where all kinds of certainties stop. All sorts of beliefs, convictions, certainties get left on that threshold. I couldn’t be a feminist poet. Simply because the poem is a place of experience and not a place of convictions. (Allen-Randolph, “An Interview with Eavan Boland” 55)

This illuminating remark about her adherence to feminism as a personal conviction expunges it from her poetic stance. Nevertheless, Boland concedes what became so important for her when commenting on the poet Sylvia Plath: “the map of the territories that include poetry and womanhood” (Bertram 14).

Not only do past and present love stories and reflections about nature poetry embellish the landscape of her book, but also mature insights about Irish verse and language as a means to deepen in truth.

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<sup>13</sup> Gelpi recovers the words in the dust jacket of *The Lost Land*, to affirm that the lost land does not mean a country to her, not a state of mind, not a place defined in terms of history, love, or memory. Rather, it is the poet’s personal elucidation of the territory as the holder of human experience (226).

In her recreation of "The Old City", Boland uses speech in order to create: "Now say *dinner* for *lunch*. / And *teatime* instead of *supper*. / And see how it comes again-" (23-25). In addition, "How We Made a New Art on Old Ground" adds: "I try the word *distance* and it fills with / Sycamores, a summer's worth of pollen / And as I write *valley* straw, metal / blood, oaths, armor are unwritten. / Silence spreads slowly from these words / to those ilex trees" (25-30); and it continues: "... what we see / is what the poem says" (34-35). Thus poetry has the power to display a landscape perceived anew, freed from both the real place and the "torment of the place" (39).

"Irish Poetry", the poem closing the collection, centers on the absence of a great tradition in Ireland which encompasses the *real* Irish landscape fully:

We always knew there was no Orpheus in Ireland.  
No music stored at the doors of hell.  
No god to make it.  
No wild beasts to weep and lie down to it. (1-4)

Yet it is that very same literary tradition that didn't provide a place for her craft which now listens to her poetry "in silence" (23), "[a]s if to music, as if to peace" (26).

#### **4. Poetry and other arts: painting techniques in Boland's poetic stance**

Boland has repeatedly compared poetry to other arts. In addition, photographs, paintings, engravings, sculptures, or other artworks commonly appear in her poetry. The poet believes that poetry is a "relatively deprived method of expression. Photography, painting, music certainly excel as methods of expression. Not poetry. It's arcane and rule-bound" (Villar-Argáiz, "The Text of It" 64); or as she already expressed in 1998: "Although no one likes to admit it, poetry is not a superior form of expression. Others, like photography for instance, are much better. But poetry is a superb form of experience" (Bertram 15). However, Boland recognizes the advantage that poetry has over other arts:

It is an odd paradox of art that it can only work by fixing the moment—whether it's painting or poetry or fiction ... In a truly good poem the experience is alive, unfinished, set there

by sound and meaning. What's so thrilling about that is that the reader can finish it out of their own experience. That's the real power of poetry. (Villar-Argáiz, "The Text of It" 64-65)

The poet is aware that she has borrowed a compelling and distinct perspective when contemplating reality: "my mother and my husband, Kevin, have been the two great influences on my way of looking at things. They both have—in quite different ways—a sense of the geography of the imagination" (Allen-Randolph, "An Interview with Eavan Boland" 52). Boland further comments on her mother's role for her creative imagination: "my mother's view has always been to paint with the light, beginning when the light is there and stopping when the light disappears" (O'Connell 39). This fact seems for Boland "an extremely sane way to organize your appreciation of the potential of each day's work" (39).

In the same line, Boland employs the metaphor of painting landscapes when expressing nuances of her poetry: "because he painted only what he saw, in the end he saw only what he could paint" (O'Connell 37).<sup>14</sup> The poem "That the Science of Cartography is Limited" shows the contradiction between the real landscape of Ireland and its unrealistic representation on maps. Likewise, Boland herself has reflected specifically on the significance of maps in her life as crucial metaphors:

There were no maps in our house when I was growing up, none that I remember. ... But there were maps at school. ... This poem begins—or at least I intended it to—where maps fail. ... I was certainly aware, long before I wrote this poem, that the act of mapmaking is an act of power and that I—as a poet, as a woman and as a witness to the strange Irish silences which met that mixture of identities—was more and more inclined to contest those acts of power. ("A Question" 23-25)

Thurston describes some painting techniques within Boland's poems. He highlights that any kind of distance —physical, temporal, intellectual and affective— supplies the background setting in which the poet works out the imperfect and imprecise meaning of things (232-33). But such play with distance or empty spaces between the portrayed objects is the mechanism which provides, as in painting, the perspective

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<sup>14</sup> A twin declaration is her famous statement: "If I don't write a poem, it isn't that I've failed to express that experience, it's that I've failed to have that experience" (Tall 40).

in the poem, by allowing a specific placing of the poet within the poetic space together with her distinct wording. Thurston significantly speaks of these distances (or absences between objects) as if of a painting:

These enable objects not only to mean but to be, for without separation there can exist no distinction, no identifiable individuality. But such spaces are not simply absences. They are paintings' negative space, the figure's ground, room occupied not by nothing but by something, rendered conventionally invisible, which enables us to see something else against it. (Thurston 233)

Perspective shifts, as Mary O'Connor points out, are carried out in her poems also to explore the limits of the poet and of the poem. Indeed, the limits of paintings are surveyed as well. In *Night Feed* Boland uses some paintings as poetic matter: "Degas's Laundresses", based on Edgar Degas's oil painting "The Laundresses", is a poem which deals with the "painter watching the toil of these two laundresses. And how much control ... is needed to turn these living, shiftless, struggling women into fixed images" (Villar-Argáiz, "The Text of It" 64); Jan van Eyck's "The Arnolfini Wedding" is used in "Domestic Interior"; "Fruit on a Straight-Sided Tray" is based on a still-life painting used by Boland's mother. In *The Journey's* "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening" or "Chardin's Woman", Boland becomes both the author and the object when pondering on Chardin's art. In relation to this last poem, O'Connor explains that "[t]he poem leads to the eye first, as does the painting, in a serene sweep across the landscape" (60).

In *Against Love Poetry*, the overlapping of painting and poetry is especially significant. The front cover significantly shows Rembrandt's "The Jewish Bride." In the poems, there is a constant reference to images of light and darkness in her descriptions, as well as the quite frequent framing of landscapes within the geometry of windows: "when we settled down / in the big bed by the window, over the streetlight" ("First Year" 12-14); "Take my hand. Stand by the window: / I want to show you what is hidden in / this ordinary" ("Once" 13-14); "Maker of the future, if the past / is fading from our view with the light / outside your window" ("Code" 40-42); "I leaned on the windowsill. The sky was still light" or "And should have felt them, should have entered them. Instead / I stood at the open window / ... I watched the tops of the Dublin hills burn out" ("Hide This Place from Angels" 21, 29-30, 33).

Boland, already holding a significant place within a tradition which has shifted its center and outer limits, depicts in the poem an interconnected visual, sonorous and meaningful poetic landscape which portrays her particular consideration of Irish scenes and sceneries, always sifted through her own self. In this mission, silence and the invisible haunt her when contemplating inherited fixed terrains. This leads her to poetically *re-landscape*—re-create, reshape, reconstruct—the past which remains out of history and out of maps and to meaningfully link it to the present. She employs memory as a means to particularly rescue disregarded instances of oppression and injustices from the past and again link it to the present. Pictorial landscaping of these poetic concerns results in an appropriate metaphor for approaching the very many nuances of her craft, as well as it is for her, who continues to use these images liberally.

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**“A PERFECT SEAM:”  
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TRAITS  
IN TONI MORRISON’S FICTION**

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**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to analyze Toni Morrison’s fiction from an autobiographical standpoint. Although the workings of imagination play a crucial role in Morrison’s novels, it is an undeniable fact that her fiction is deeply rooted in and indebted to the milieu from which she comes. Numerous traces from the author’s life can be found throughout her fiction, as well as a special concern with ethnogenesis and identity politics, which is intimately connected to her own lived experience as an African American woman in the United States. As an example, Morrison’s own family genealogy appears interspersed in the pages of *Song of Solomon*, one of her most autobiographical novels. Morrison’s own contention that “the subject of the dream is the dreamer,” points to the blurry line that separates—and links—autobiography and the novel and attests to the implicit self-reflexivity and self-revealing enclosed in works which are not originally conceived of as autobiographical.

**Keywords:** Toni Morrison, autobiography, novel, African American literature.

**“UNA COSTURA PERFECTA:”  
RASGOS AUTOBIOGRÁFICOS EN  
LA NARRATIVA DE TONI MORRISON**

**Resumen**

El presente artículo pretende analizar la narrativa de Toni Morrison desde una perspectiva autobiográfica. Aunque el papel de la

imaginación tiene un lugar preponderante en las novelas de Morrison, su ficción está profundamente enraizada en el entorno étnico-cultural del que procede la autora. En su obra se pueden encontrar numerosos elementos extraídos de su vida, así como un especial interés por la política identitaria y la etnogénesis, todo lo cual está estrechamente conectado a la propia experiencia vital de la autora como mujer Afroamericana en los Estados Unidos. Un buen ejemplo de obra autobiográfica es *Song of Solomon*, en cuyas páginas se plasma la genealogía familiar de la propia Morrison. Su afirmación de que “el tema del sueño es el soñador” alude directamente a la borrosa línea que separa—y une a la vez—la autobiografía y la novela, evidenciando además la auto-reflexividad implícita en obras de ficción que no fueron concebidas inicialmente como autobiografías.

**Palabras clave:** Toni Morrison, autobiografía, novella, literatura afroamericana.

Relying on memory and her own resources, she cobbled  
together neglected rites, merged Europe medicine with  
native, scripture with lore, and recalled or invented the  
hidden meaning of things. Found, in other words, a way to be  
in the world.  
Toni Morrison, *A Mercy*

Throughout her writing career, Toni Morrison has been often asked whether her novels can be analyzed from an autobiographical standpoint. From her earliest interviews, she has steadfastly disavowed any conscious use of autobiography in her writing, on the grounds that the core of her writing lies mainly in the realm of imagination, combined with personal and collective recollections and some research.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in some of her essays, she points to a not so clear-cut distinction between fiction and an underlying autobiographical component. In her essay “The Site of Memory,” Morrison delves into the symbiotic relationship between fiction and autobiography and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the interviews with Bessie Jones, Jane Bakerman and Elissa Schappell.

acknowledges that her own novels partake of autobiographical elements. Likewise, as a member of the African American community in the United States, she feels indebted to autobiography as a genre since it represents the origins of written African American literature in her country. The process of "literary archaeology" which she lays claim to "both distinguishes my fiction from autobiographical strategies and ... also embraces certain autobiographical strategies" (Morrison, "Site" 111-12). Literary archaeology is described by Morrison in the following terms:

On the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image—on the remains—in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of a truth. By "image," of course, I don't mean "symbol"; I simply mean "picture" and the feelings that accompany the picture. ("Site" 112)

In "Memory, Creation, and Writing," Morrison insists on the crucial role memory plays in her works: "I depend heavily on the ruse of memory" (386). Notwithstanding the indisputable weight imagination has on Morrison's fiction, by claiming memory—both personal and collective—as the literary scaffolding she relies on to create fiction, Morrison is appealing to what can be described as the foundation of autobiography, namely memory. As a matter of fact, the recollections Morrison uses in her narrative usually hark back to her own African American community—their socio-cultural dimension together with their ethnic lore—her family and even herself. Her novels are about the community she belongs to, but they are also about the author's own childhood in Lorain, Ohio and her life as an African American working-class woman. Interestingly enough, after explaining her conception of literary archaeology and referring then to her father, her grandmother and great-grandmother, Morrison tellingly states that "these people are my access to me: they are my entrance into my own interior life" ("Site" 115). Thus, her endeavors to explore the interior life of her ancestors, her family and the world she came from, imply an ensuing self-knowledge and encounter with her own self in what is clearly an implied autobiographical drive. This certainly corresponds with the idea of "self-reflexivity" which Henry Louis Gates, Jr. attributes to

African American literature and which William L. Andrews borrows to expose the relevance of autobiography in the African American literary tradition, to the point that autobiography and fiction are actually closer than it would seem. As William Andrews contends, “the history of African American narrative has been informed by a call-and-response relationship between autobiography and its successor, the novel” (1). In the same light, other literary critics have warned about the fine line that delimits fiction and autobiography. While Northrop Frye argues that autobiography and the novel merge “by a series of insensible gradations” (307), John N. Duvall claims the interconnectedness between both genres which sometimes escapes the conscious intentions of the writer: “I want to insist on fiction as a form of symbolic autobiography, a supplement that challenges and complements the author’s very limiting sense of how her writing might represent issues of her identity” (48). At this point we should bear in mind Morrison’s own contention that “the subject of the dream is the dreamer” (“Playing in the Dark” 17), which attests to the implicit self-reflexivity and self-revealing enclosed in works which are not initially conceived of as autobiographical. Interestingly, despite Morrison’s outright stand against an interpretation of her work as autobiographical in an interview with Bessie W. Jones she leaves the door open to a deeply close connection between what is actually autobiographical and what is not. Morrison expresses this in-between position as follows:

It is difficult always for me and probably any writer to select those qualities that are genuinely autobiographical because part of what you are doing is re-doing the past as well as throwing it into relief, and what makes one write anyway is something in the past that is haunting, that is not explained or wasn’t clear so that you are almost constantly rediscovering the past. (Jones 127)

Although none of Morrison’s works are a first-person autobiography, it is an undeniable fact that her fiction is deeply rooted in and indebted to the milieu from which she comes. All throughout her fiction, she explores and claims her African American culture and numerous traces from Morrison’s life can be found in them. Her childhood and upbringing weigh heavily on all her works, as well as a special concern with ethnogenesis and identity politics, which is intimately connected to her own lived experience as an African American woman in the United States. Music, the oral tradition of storytelling, myth, dream

interpretation, the supernatural and spirituality, African and African American folklore marked her early years and established a solid basis from which Morrison could evolve as a person and as a writer.

Of all her literary production, there is one short piece which can be surely described as autobiographical in the traditional sense of first person account of a life. In 1973 the *New York Times Book Review* published "Cooking Out," in which Morrison narrates a family gathering, a cookout at Turkeyfoot Lake "in honor of the eldest member of the Alabama wing of the family" (4). This is an autobiographical sketch of part of her family, some of whom appear in her novels. Although this piece has generally been overlooked, "Cooking Out" is a highly relevant sample of Morrison's autobiographical writing. The focus of this essay is placed on Morrison's uncle Green, son of Ardelia and John Solomon Willis, her maternal grandparents. Morrison presents her uncle as an ethno-cultural hinge between the Southern and the Northern parts of her family and as a true beacon or milestone who signifies the past endeavors of a family and the whole community of African Americans in the United States: "he carried with him, on those annual visits North, like the light from a communion cup, the spirit, the recollection, the character, I suppose, of the whole tribe. A grandeur, a cohesiveness, a constant reminder of what they all had done to survive and even triumph over ... He spoke the language in the old way ... " ("Cooking Out" 4). Interestingly enough, uncle Green will appear later on in Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon* (1977) in the song that Pilate sings at the beginning of the book and which encloses the family story and roots of Milkman Dead. As a matter of fact, the actual song that Morrison remembers being sung in her own family begins "Green, the only son of Solomon," as Morrison recounts in an interview:

The song in *Song of Solomon* is a song from that wing of the family in Alabama. The song that my mother and aunts know starts out, 'Green, the only son of Solomon.' ... It's a long sort of a children's song that I don't remember. But Green was the name of my grandfather's first son and it was a kind of genealogy that they were singing about. So I altered the words for *Song of Solomon*. (Jones 130)

As we can read in "Cooking Out," Green had married a woman called Sing and Sing is also Pilate's mother in *Song of Solomon*, as Milkman himself learns at the end of his journey. Thus, there is a

striking parallelism between Morrison's family history and this novel. Morrison's grandfather, John Solomon Willis, a former ex-slave, went from Greenville to Birmingham (Alabama) where he worked as a musician and from where he sent money to his wife and children in Greenville. Although both Solomons leave their families behind, one does so in order to escape slavery and fly back to Africa while the other one moves in search of better economic opportunities. As Ousseynou Traore aptly points out, "the sources of *Song of Solomon* are consciously 'autobiographical' and communal, but blended into a highly creative friction that transforms and conceals them almost beyond recognition. Thus, personal, family, and collective ethnic memory merge in the novel" (130).

On the other hand, Green is the surname of one of the main characters in *Tar Baby* (1981), Morrison's fourth novel. Son Green's telling embodiment of, and attachment to the "ancient properties" is most probably one of the many autobiographical elements in Morrison's work and we can infer that it implies a direct reference to her uncle Green. Therefore, the name Son Green in *Tar Baby* appears as a doubly loaded name and attests to undeniable autobiographical connections. Continuing with Morrison's family members mentioned in "Cooking Out," apart from her parents there are direct references to one of Morrison's aunts, whom she calls "aunt Millie." This is one of the female family members *Tar Baby* was dedicated to and there Morrison adds her aunt's surname, McTeer, which takes us back to Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. Its young narrator, Claudia MacTeer bears Morrison's aunt's surname on the one hand and, on the other hand, Claudia sounds quite close to the author's real name Chloe. Moreover, there are other elements that point to a clear identification between young Morrison and this character. Claudia was born the same year as Morrison. Both come from poor but non-self-debased families, unlike the Breedlove family. Claudia has a sister who is not as noisy as her and who is actually inspired by Lois, Morrison's sister, as the author has acknowledged: "I did use my sister. I have an older sister, but our relationship was not at all like the girls in *The Bluest Eye*. But here are scenes in *The Bluest Eye* that are bits and pieces—my father, he could be very aggressive about people who troubled us. ... my mother's habit of getting stuck like a record on some problem ..." (Jones 129). The story line of a young girl who hankers after blue eyes was also taken

from Morrison's own experience and it comes from a girl she knew who wanted to be blue-eyed.

All in all, "Cooking Out" encloses some of Morrison's defining thematic elements which are closely connected to her own life, such as the importance of community, family history and ethno-cultural preservation. The ending is highly revealing in this respect: "We were all there, all of us, bound by something we could not name. Cooking, honey, cooking under the stars" ("Cooking Out" 12). The ideas of togetherness, bonding and community which Morrison grew up with pervade her narrative and certainly stem from the author's own lived experience.

Numerous other traces of Morrison's life appear in her early books. Dealing with her first novel, Morrison's contention that "All of those people were me ... I was Pecola, Claudia ... And I fell in love with myself. I reclaimed myself and the world—a real revelation. I named it. I described it. I listed it. I identified it. I recreated it" (Naylor 19-20) is quite illustrating in this respect. The setting of her second novel, *Sula*, was based on the time her parents spent in the hills of Pittsburgh where, as Morrison's mother tells her "those days all the black people lived in the hills of Pittsburgh, but now they lived amid the smoke and dirt in the heart of that city" (Stepito 12). The theme of female bonding which is at the core of *Sula* came out of the female community of Morrison's childhood in Lorain. She remembers overhearing her mother and other women talk about a woman named Hannah Peace in a way that implied there was some kind of unspeakable secret around her. In Morrison's words, "it was the having-been-easily-forgiven that caught my attention, not growing up Black; and that quality, that 'easily forgiveness' that I believe I remember in connection with a shadow of a woman my mother knew, is the theme of *Sula*" (Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing" 386). Female bonding will reappear as a main thematic line in *Love*.

As the author has confirmed, the character Sula is also based on an outlaw woman Morrison remembers, "an absolute riot" (Stepito 15) who nonetheless kept people together, connected, because they called one another and talked to criticize her, as it happens in the novel. On the other hand, Sula's leaving the community for some years parallels Morrison's moving out of Lorain. It is necessary to point here Morrison's vision of community values. Although she has always claimed the need to keep connected to one's roots and community, she also acknowledges



the importance of finding a balance between community traditions and personal renewal and freedom. This is precisely one of the ideas she puts forward in one of her essays, when she refers to “the critical voice which upholds tradition and communal values and which also provides occasion for an individual to transcend and/or defy group restrictions” (Morrison, “Memory, Creation, and Writing” 389). Or, as she concludes in an interview, “Community, for me, is extremely important, ... communities offer some very positive things and they offer negative things. The tension is between the community and the individual always” (Hackney 134). Morrison’s view of the community in this sense reminds us of *Sula*. It is interesting to point out here the similar way in which Morrison describes herself in Charlie Ross’s interview and the way she defines *Sula* in the novel. While Morrison calls herself “an artist” (Ross), *Sula* is “an artist with no art form” (Morrison, *Sula* 121).

In *Song of Solomon* the author’s own family genealogy comes to the fore. Her family’s migration to the North parallels Milkman Dead’s reversed journey to the South, where he finds his roots. A myriad of autobiographical components are included in this novel, some of the most relevant ones being a family song from the author’s childhood, naming children from the Bible (Pilate and Ramah, Morrison’s mother get their names this way) and, above all, a male story Morrison wrote to fill in the gap her father’s death had left behind (Morrison, “Site” 123). Significantly enough, the novel starts on Morrison’s date of birth and constitutes a double journey to the South and to the ancestors.

The theme of the Great Migration of African Americans to the North at the beginning of the twentieth century will appear again in *Jazz*. Like the author’s mother-side of the family, Joe and Violet move to New York from the South in search of better opportunities and a better life. On the other hand, music and particularly jazz weigh heavily on this novel and thus remind us of Morrison’s grandfather’s job as a violinist and jazz musician.

But Morrison’s autobiographical material goes even further to include an inherited interest not only in music but also in African-based folklore, myth and legends, a part of which are a prevailing concern for the ancestors, the supernatural or spiritual dimension of life and death, the empowering oral tradition of storytelling; and, above all, a theme which is preponderant not only in Morrison’s narrative but also in her own life and that of her African American community, namely



survival. As the author clearly states, "There is always something more interesting at stake than a clear resolution in a novel. I'm interested in survival—who survives and who does not, and why—and I would like to chart a course that suggests where the dangers are and where the safety might be" (McKay 420).

To a bigger or a smaller extent, all of Morrison's novels are about survival, either individual or collective. Many of her characters undergo a literal and/or metaphorical journey with an epiphanic culmination at the end of it. Milkman Dead, Son Green, Sethe, Joe and Violet Trace, Heed and Christine Cosey and Florens are some examples of characters re-born to a renewed identity, after either having confronted a painful past or having acknowledged and claimed a previously disavowed ethno-cultural and ancestral baggage. This idea of survival and re-birth is intimately connected to Morrison's own ethnic identity. Brought up in a working-class family in the steel town of Lorain, Ohio, she soon learned the vital importance of being faithful to oneself and to family. Born to Southern parents and coming from a community which had lived firsthand the devastating effects of racism, oppression and alienation she soon learned at home the meaning of self-righteousness and dignity. To her father, who during his upbringing in the South had lived amidst racism and violence against African Americans, whites were inferior to blacks precisely because of their amorality and inhumanity. Although she was raised in a multicultural town where workers from different European origins lived and there were not actually black neighborhoods, she could still experience some instances of segregation in places which were reserved to whites only. Thus, she soon learned about race and its implications from her parents and grandparents. Whereas her father and grandfather were wary of whites and had no hope of change, her mother and grandmother held a more optimistic view on the issue of racism and oppression. As a matter of fact, some of Morrison's short essays portray these family opposing opinions. Two such essays are "A Slow Walk of Trees" and "She and Me." In these works Morrison relates some lessons she learned from her father concerning issues of belonging, home and racial pride. Dealing with 12-year-old Morrison's distress and uneasiness regarding a cleaning job she held for a white family, she finds reassuring solace in her father's words encouraging her just to do her work as best she could but always remember what house she belonged to:

“Listen. You don’t live there. You live here. At home, with your people. Just go to work; get your money and come on home.”

That is what he said. This is what I heard:

1. Whatever the work, do it well, not for the boss but for yourself.
  2. You make the job; it doesn’t make you.
  3. Your real life is with us, your family.
  4. You are not the work you do; you are the person you are.
- (Morrison, “She and Me” 16)

Morrison remembers that episode as an important vital lesson which would undoubtedly affect her narrative exploration and claim of an identity and a way to belong. As she concludes, “from that moment on, I never considered the level of labor to be the measure of self or placed the security of a job above the value of home” (Morrison, “She and Me” 17). On another occasion, Morrison tells another lesson from her father related to work and dignity. He worked as a ship welder and Morrison remembers how one day he told her he had welded such a perfect seam that he had signed his name on it. When his daughter, Morrison, asked him what the use was of a signed work nobody would ever see, his father provided another sustaining lesson: “Yeah, but I know it’s there” (Dreifus 73).

The idea of survival is very much in keeping with that of ancestral connection. All throughout Morrison’s narrative, the images of the ancestors and spirits or ghosts are ever-present. Conversations with the dead and visitations from the beyond are abundant in her books. Such concern for the ancestors has a lot to do with her background, both with her African American milieu and with her own family, where ancestors and the supernatural were one more element of their daily lives. So we can say that this is another defining trait of her fiction which is undoubtedly autobiographical in its nature, not only because the supernatural was intrinsic to African American culture and its African origins, but also because as a child she fed on that “soul food” her family provided and which would mark her literary career. Therefore, the ancestor is not only “the linchpin character in Morrison’s fictional universe” (Harding 104) but also an intrinsic and essential part of her life. In many interviews Morrison has repeatedly claimed her use of magic and the supernatural in her books, always reminding us that at home “we were intimate with the supernatural” (Strouse 54). Her

concern for the ancestor is such that another one of her essays verses on the subject and is entitled "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." In that essay she recovers and claims this figure and concludes that "When you kill the ancestor you kill yourself" (344). Emblematic Morrisonian characters such as Pilate, Circe, Baby Suggs or Old Thérèse are ancestral figures who perform the role of linking hinge between this world and the world of the dead. Some of them speak from the realm of the dead so that they live side by side with the living on the book's pages. Morrison's own ancestors are ever-present in her life and writing and we can say that one of her missions is to render those ancestors visible, to empower them and to pay them homage. Her family memories and what she learned from her forebears is quite revealing when dealing with the ancestor figure:

And like most black people from my generation, I suffer from racial vertigo that can be cured only by taking what one needs from one's ancestors. John Solomon's cynicism and his deployment of his art as both weapon and solace; Ardelia's faith in the magic that can be wrought by sheer effort of the will; my mother's open-mindedness in each new encounter and her habit of trying reasonableness first; my father's temper, his impatience, and his efforts to keep "them" (throw them) out of his life. And it is out of these learned and selected attitudes that I look at the quality of life for my people in this country now. (Morrison, "Slow Walk of Trees" 8)

Not only does Morrison's personal background prefigure her use of the ancestor in her narrative but it is also deeply connected to the employment of the supernatural and a holistic worldview, where the living and the dead cohabit and interact. Ancestral characters meddle in spiritual matters and provide guidance and solace to others. They are the connection with spirits of the dead. Morrison's penchant for the supernatural is often linked to the image of alienated outlaw women, for whom the author has manifested a particular predilection. In the idea of the black outlaw woman coalesces supernaturalism, mother wit, tricksterism and healing skills. Amongst the most emblematic outlaw women in Morrison's novels we can mention Pilate and Circe, Old Thérèse, Sula, Ajax's mother, Baby Suggs, Consolata, Junior and Celestial. Although some of these women do not actually perform as a literal healer or conjure woman, all of them provoke to some degree

regenerative changes in other characters. At this point, we should bear in mind again some facts about Morrison's life during her early years. Morrison's great-grandmother was a midwife, as she recounts: "Of course my great-grandmother could not read, but she was a midwife, and people from all over the state came to her for advice and for her to deliver babies. They came for other kinds of medical care too. Yes, I feel the authority of those women more than I do my own" (McKay 141).

At home she grew up immersed in the tradition of storytelling, listening to ghost stories told by her parents and her grandmother kept a dream book to interpret the dream symbols. Thus, this being "intimate with the supernatural" (Strouse 54) has undoubtedly marked both Morrison's life and work. Although Morrison converted to Catholicism when she was a teenager (Li 12), she draws on both Catholic religion and African American religious beliefs and her novels are good proof of this hybridity. When living with her family, she could experience that syncretism in her mother's deep religiosity side by side with the African American folk magic and culture. And this attests to Morrison's advocacy of a dual cosmovision which ultimately harks back to African cosmologies. When talking about her novel *Paradise*, the author points to this conscious religious syncretism, resorting once again to autobiographical elements: "My mother had this very intimate relationship with her maker, so that is what I wanted to re-create—and then to take varieties of belief systems and put them in a pot and see what happens with a New Age self-involved woman who learns the spiritual quality of herself, versus the traditional Catholic. And I thought that was wonderful and new" (Houston 254).<sup>2</sup>

The dismantling of dichotomous divisions which were traditional in white Western culture triggers off a conception of the world based on a both-and rather than on an either/or approach. This is in keeping with African cosmologies, where there is a dialogic or "diunital" cosmovision. For Morrison there are not binary opposites such as life/death, natural/supernatural, nature/culture or good/evil. Each term in each binarism complements the other and is necessary for its definition. As Vernon Dixon explains,

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<sup>2</sup> See also Ruas, where Morrison remembers that at home her family "talked a great deal about Jesus—they selected out of Christianity all the things they felt applicable to their situations—but they also kept this other body of knowledge that we call superstitions" (115).

American Blacks rather than Whites are more deeply attuned to a diunital [both/and] existence for two reasons. First, we live in a dual existence. We are American citizens, yet, we are not. ... We have one identity that are two identities, ... Secondly, we may embody a predisposition to diunity that arises from our African identity. (64)

This idea of doubleness or diunity is clearly exposed in Morrison’s alienated outlaw women, who partake of both human and otherworldly characteristics, male and female traits, good and evil features. The religious syncretism she lived in as a child, together with the open-mindedness of her mother paved the path to adult Morrison’s life and literary approach. Moreover, the dismantling of binarisms tackled head-on the concept of “third principle” or synthesis between opposites.<sup>3</sup> The female wilderness embodied by outlaw women transcends borders and unlocks doors to inhabit a realm of liminality or in-betweenness. In anthropologist Victor Turner’s terms,

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwix and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols, ... liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness ... (95)

Pilate and Circe (*Song of Solomon*) who help Milkman Dead in his journey to spiritual and ethno-cultural re-birth; the mud mothers, the swamp women and Old Thérèse (*Tar Baby*), who embody the “ancient properties” Jadine has lost and who act as guides towards a reconnection to the past; Baby Suggs (*Beloved*) who encourages the community to love themselves and their bodies, or Consolata (*Paradise*) who helps the downtrodden women who arrive at the Convent and leads them to a renewed, healed self, are all women who represent the ancestor figure and they are all liminal characters. On the other hand, characters like Sula (*Sula*), Wild (*Jazz*), Junior and Celestial (*Love*) represent Morrison’s idea of licentious wild, wayward or outlaw woman she is so fond of. Like the ancestors, they are in a liminal position and,

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<sup>3</sup> The “third principle” is the result of the synthesis between opposites or dual elements, and is the essence of the god Legba, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. points out (29).

like them, they are all surrounded by a halo of indeterminacy and magic. In fact, their real identity or nature is not always clear and they leave the door open to multiple interpretations by the reader. Behind their mischievous and sometimes evil appearance or behavior lies a powerful ability to exert a positive influence on others or to bring about connection and reconciliation where there was only hate, disconnection and spite. Their marked bodies in most cases hint to a supernatural connection. Sula's birthmark, Pilate's lack of navel, Old Thérèse's blindness, Junior's merged toes and Celestial's scarred face remind the reader of the Yoruba god Legba's limp, due to the fact that he straddles two worlds.<sup>4</sup>

Since Morrison draws on African and African American culture and spirituality, the figure of Legba is highly relevant when dealing with such concepts as liminality and diunity. The symbolism Legba encloses bears striking connections to Morrison's conception of the world. In her interview with Cecil Brown, she states: "I try to stay out of Western mythology, ... I tend to use everything from African or Afro-American sources" (Brown 461).<sup>5</sup> Both in the social and literary arenas the African American woman has traditionally been relegated to a marginal liminal position. Morrison's contention that she wrote *The Bluest Eye* because she wanted to read that book and it had not yet been written is well known and quite revealing. By foregrounding the life experience of the African American woman in the United States as well as that of the liminal figures of ancestors, spirits and conjure women, she recovers, re-creates and re-defines them and in the process she re-creates herself as an African American woman. Thus, by advocating liminality, in-betweenness, paradoxes and defending the merging of different points of view and diverse voices in her work, Morrison is once again taking the cue from the lessons she learned from her family and the richness of her ethno-cultural background.

Although Morrison's novels are peopled by alienated characters, in the end most of them undergo a healing catharsis and encounter a new or renewed identity. Some well-known examples of such characters are Milkman Dead, Sethe, Christine, Heed and Florens. In a similar vein,

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<sup>4</sup> According to Bass, conjurers are usually physically marked by a birthmark or red eyes, for example (381).

<sup>5</sup> See also LeClair 372.

Morrison's life experiences a renewal which is intimately connected to writing. The fact that Morrison's literary career started off in her late 30s, after her divorce from her husband, points in this direction. A single mother, editor and teacher, she plunged into writing "as a way of beating back the loneliness" (Schappell 70). Although Morrison has always tried not to talk about her husband and her divorce, she has nonetheless referred to her married life in the following terms: "It was as though I had nothing left but my imagination. I had no will, no judgment, no perspective, no power, no authority, no self—just this brutal sense of irony, melancholy and a trembling respect for words" (qtd. in Century 38). Writing worked for Morrison as healing salve with true "therapoetic" effects.<sup>6</sup> Imagination, personal and communal memories are as crucial to Morrison as the connection to the past is to her characters. When she is actually asked about her diverse roles in life, she is prompt to assert that nothing is as important to her in life as writing, except her being a mother to her children (Ross).

Morrison has found in writing her safe haven and her life, a path to self-discovery through the recollections and imaginative exploration of her personal experience and that of her family and community. The epigraph from *A Mercy* that opens this essay perfectly fits and summarizes Morrison's conception of literature and life, her life. The epigraph, which concerns Lina, a Native American woman—like Morrison's great-grandmother, could very well refer to Morrison herself. Morrison's literary production goes hand in hand with her lived experience. As we have seen, her fiction does not seem to qualify as "autobiography" at first glance, but if we delve deep down into its pages we will realize that Morrison's life and work intermingle in a nurturing symbiosis and form a truly perfect seam.

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<sup>6</sup>We borrow this term from Kenyon and Randall, who use it to refer to the therapeutic effects of storytelling and autobiographical accounts, which are "a means to personal wholeness" (2).



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# **COMPARATIVE LITERATURE**



# THE RISING COLOUR OF SISTERHOOD IN AFRICAN LITERATURE: *THE PURPLE VIOLET OF OSHAANTU* (2001) AND *PURPLE HIBISCUS* (2004)

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## Abstract

This article tries to show the importance of solidarity in African women's literature. Such a sisterhood, which can be found in a wide range of circumstances, operates as a counterbalance or compensation for the hardness of the personal and social conditions surrounding female characters.

To support this thesis this paper will analyze two African novels which share the same colour<sup>1</sup> in their title: *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) —by the Namibian author Neshani Andreas— and *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In both books this colour shares a similar symbolic meaning that will be explained in the article.

The two novels considered contain numerous examples of this kind of solidarity represented by means of women's friendship, female in-laws mutual help or through women's social and communal support. Hopefully, by the end of this paper, readers will have been shown that sisterhood is an essential element, as well as a repeated behavioral model, in the literature written by African women.

**Keywords:** symbolic colour purple, African literature, sisterhood, African women, female support, womanism, women's solidarity.

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<sup>1</sup> Probably the best known novel whose title includes this colour is Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), which in 1983 received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award. However, as she is not an African but an Afro-American woman writer, I have purposely left it out of my analysis.

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FEMENINA EN LA LITERATURA AFRICANA:  
*THE PURPLE VIOLET OF OSHAANTU* (2001)  
Y *PURPLE HIBISCUS* (2004)**

**Resumen**

El presente artículo intenta mostrar la importancia de la solidaridad en la literatura africana escrita por mujeres. Dicho apoyo, el cual puede encontrarse en multitud de circunstancias, funciona como contrapeso o compensación frente a la dureza de las condiciones personales y sociales que rodean a los personajes femeninos.

Para respaldar la tesis aquí propuesta este trabajo analizará dos novelas africanas que comparten el mismo color<sup>2</sup> en su título: *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) —de la autora namibia Neshani Andreas— y *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), de la escritora nigeriana Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. En ambos libros este color comparte un significado simbólico similar que será explicado en el artículo.

Las dos novelas que nos ocupan contienen numerosos ejemplos de este tipo de solidaridad representada mediante amistad entre mujeres, ayuda mutua entre cuñadas o bien a través de un apoyo femenino social y comunitario. Confío en que, al final de su lectura, este artículo haya podido mostrar a sus lectores que la solidaridad femenina es un elemento esencial así como un modelo conductual repetido en la literatura escrita por autoras africanas.

**Palabras clave:** color violeta simbólico, literatura africana, hermandad entre mujeres, mujeres africanas, apoyo entre mujeres, mujerismo, solidaridad femenina.

In order to clarify key concepts, I have considered relevant to begin with an explanation of the meaning, connotations and different interpretations of the word *sisterhood*. Oyewùmi holds the view that

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<sup>2</sup> Probablemente la novela más famosa cuyo título incluye este color sea *The Color Purple* (Alice Walker 1982), la cual en 1983 recibió el Pulitzer Prize for Fiction y el National Book Award. Sin embargo, ya que esta autora no es africana sino afroamericana, la he dejado concientemente fuera de mi análisis.

*sisterhood* is a term that western feminists appropriated (1-8). Besides, this term does not have an alternative concept —as *womanism* versus *feminism*<sup>3</sup>— and, on the other hand, it also leads to shortcomings since it assumes solidarity among women rather than considering it a goal to be reached, as I will explain in the next paragraphs.

The second wave of western feminism had a negative attitude towards motherhood, as it conceived mothers as non-authoritative figures whose major roles were those of wives and victims. Due to this perception, the feminist ideology could not identify itself with a word referring to motherhood because this was a doomed concept, something that its followers wanted to avoid. On the other hand, feminist women found it possible to identify themselves with sisters who feared the father and wanted to become separated from their mothers:

The mother-daughter relationship was hierarchical, but sisters were equal. Sisterhood, which developed to signal the gender exclusivity necessary for white women to escape male control, also symbolized common victimhood and shared oppression, which made for equal relations and solidarity. Here in lies the historical and cultural roots of sisterhood. (Oyewùmi 8)

However, Afro-American feminists use the words *brother* and *sister* with a political connotation that implies solidarity and connection within the Black community. The term *sisterhood*, used by western feminists, denotes a women's community while the words *brother/sister* used by Black Americans go beyond genre solidarity since they become suitable refer to race communion. These kinship terms worked as one of the Afro-Americans' resistance strategies to counteract the weakening effect of slavery.

Oyewùmi also considers that western feminism has contributed to perpetuate the myth that contemplates the African *other* as a savage, subhuman, primitive and hyper-sexual being because, as I previously mentioned, Africans were initially represented as inferiors in order to justify their treatment (26-30). This author holds the view that western feminist discourses follow the same path, since they consider the white woman as the general rule and the model to look at. The objective of

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<sup>3</sup> To have a general view of the main feminist African thinking currencies as well as of their key concepts, I recommend to read Perez Ruiz's article entitled "Claves del feminismo africano" (2007), included in the bibliography.

that kind of feminism would be to free the rest of societies, but not even once would it consider that better societies than the western ones could exist and that, therefore, these would not need to be liberated.

On the other hand, western feminists were the ones to study, to create knowledge and do research, thus making clear that they were intellectually superior to all the other women. The inherent problem to this ideology lies in not taking into consideration the influence that colonization and slavery had in African women's subordination. Besides, from the west, many African traditions are viewed as barbaric because their own perspectives or contexts have not been considered. Finally, Oyewùmi criticizes that African men are viewed as power holders, not realizing that they are victims too.

In short, Oyewùmi's main criticism against western feminism is that this does not take into account aspects as important as race, social class and other distinguishing factors, since it considers African women as a homogeneous being without any power and as permanent victims. In this author's view, western feminism contemplates a universal white woman versus an opposite *other*.

Once explained the connotations of the term *sisterhood*, I will start the analysis of the two novels considered in this article. Both book titles possess a symbolic content. The first one, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, refers to the protagonist of the novel, Kauna, who was once called that way because of her beauty when she first arrived to that place, as an old woman from Oshaantu recalls aloud when talking to other village women:

"We all remember how beautiful she was when she first arrived here as a new bride. Don't you remember?" Mukwankala asked. "We called her the purple violet of Oshaantu. She was so delicate and she came when these flowers were in Bloom." (Andreas 148)

An extremely hard life overloaded with work and humiliations, as well as with her husband's lack of respect and physical abuse, will transform Kauna into a different kind of person: defeated, worn-out and deeply disappointed with her fate. However, within these adverse circumstances, she will find in her neighbour Mee Ali —the story's narrator— enough moral support and sympathy to keep on with such a frustrated and miserable existence. Their friendship bond is strong,



deep and rewarding and, at least for Kauna, is practically the only good thing in her life, as she tells her friend Ali: “You, the one and only good thing that has ever happened to me in this village” (171).

Nevertheless, despite Kauna’s apparent weakness, this character embodies a strong personality that will not permit adverse circumstances to overcome her. At the end of the novel Kauna and her children will be on the brink of starting a new life from scratch and, despite her logical reluctance about the uncertainty of her foreseeable future, Kauna’s personal experience has made her discover a strength she was unaware of. By that turning point of her existence, she has learnt that the person who has been battered by life is the most resilient against adversities. Her husband, who had never shown any love or respect towards her, has died; her in-laws have thrown her and her children away from their former home and, in spite of all these adversities, Kauna even dares to dream with a better future and with worthwhile men, as her farewell conversation with her friend Ali shows:

“I guess you are saying, ‘shoo’, never ever will I have anything to do with men of that generation again.”

“Me?” she asked, pointing at herself. “No. No, I don’t think so. You have not seen anything yet. You know what happens to the *mahangu* millet? After it has been knocked down, stepped on and mercilessly destroyed by cattle, it finds the strength to repair itself and grow better. It is often bigger and more vibrant than the millet that has not been threatened by any danger and cut to the ground,” she said. “No, I am not finished with them, I am only just starting.” (...) Kauna looked at the dusty gravel road ahead of us and said, “I don’t know what is out there for me and my children, but I will go, I am willing.” (174)

It is interesting to point out how important Kauna’s children are for her. She never complains about them, even though it is going to be much harder to start a new life with the children under her charge, but in African societies motherhood<sup>4</sup> is extremely valued and very rarely will a woman reject her maternal responsibilities. In Kauna’s case she does not even consider the possibility of leaving them behind

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<sup>4</sup> To understand better the different literary manifestations and evolution of motherhood that female Africa literature offers, I suggest reading Perez’s (2009) article on the issue included in the bibliography.

with her in-laws, as she clearly points out to her friend Ali when this one asks Kauna about them: “This (the children) is my baggage and your own baggage is never too heavy to carry. I am taking them with me” (167). However, Kauna does not accept passively tradition—which keeps women almost permanently pregnant— but, on the contrary, she secretly takes contraceptives that Sustera, the local nurse, has provided her. Nevertheless she does it in secret as Kauna knows that, if her husband knew it, he would kill her and the nurse.

But Ali and Kauna’s deep friendship is not the only example of sisterhood present in this novel. Another case occurs when Shange, Kauna’s husband, dies unexpectedly and, as a consequence, his widow feels temporarily unable to look after herself or her own children, which will make other women take over the situation and do it for her: “Women soon found something to do; they busied themselves with cooking and feeding people and taking care of Shange’s children” (13).

A new interesting example of the solidarity portrayed in this novel can be found in the market vendors’ relationship of mutual support and understanding despite the fierce competition among them: “It was astonishing how they competed for customers and still maintained a good relationship with each other” (89). This is a fact that does not only appear in this novel but in many others written by African women. In fact, much of the trading business in many African countries is based on women activities, such as in Amma Darko’s novel *The Housemaid* (1998), set up in Ghana<sup>5</sup>, where market vendors acquire a prominent role as they are the major trading presence in all western Africa:

While a few items will traditionally be sold by men, most of the trading activity is conducted by women. For example, the United Nations Development Fund estimates that 80 percent of all food production, processing, and marketing in West Africa is carried out by women. (Chamlee 79)

In this respect, I would like to clarify that one of the basic differences between African and Western women refers, precisely, to work. While in western societies women were for centuries economically dependent

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<sup>5</sup> Gracia Clark (293-331) points out in her article that, precisely due to the importance of women in the markets of this country, their government hand in hand with the mass media inflicted on them many political and even physical aggressions in the 70s with the ultimate intention of making this group lose their power.

on their husbands and were expected to remain at home making it a comfortable place to live in while looking after the children, in Africa women have always been considered responsible for their descendants, even economically.

Another relevant literary example in can be found in Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), where Adaku's character, co-wife of Nnu Ego's husband, provides readers with a new female attitude towards life adversities. In this case Adaku, unhappy with her limited existence, decides to build up a more satisfactory one. In order to reach her goals which, in the long run, will be based on trading, she starts by abandoning her husband and by entering prostitution as a means to improve her own life and that of her daughters. The anecdotal quality of it all lies in the fact that the writer does not punish this character but, quite the opposite, Adaku will finally see her dreams come true: she will become a successful businesswoman and will be able to offer a good education to her daughters, which will make them independent. In Emecheta's novel Adaku becomes a real winner<sup>6</sup>.

In this respect, Arndt interprets Adaku's prostitution as a metaphor symbolizing the courage a woman must possess in order to get rid of the threats in her life, in this case, of traditional dogmas (132). On the other hand, Katherine Frank considers the conscious use of the female beauty or body what she calls the "bottom power" which, according to this author, is present in the works of many female African writers that she considers feminists (14-34).

I hold the view that none of the previous examples will have surprised readers familiar with female African literature, as sisterhood and solidarity is a recurrent theme which, as I mentioned before, serves to compensate for the considerable difficulties these women suffer from. In this sense I subscribe to Obioma Nnaemeka's opinion when she declares the following:

Works by Black women writers also show that there are other channels, such as writing and solidarity/sisterhood, through which women survive and gain freedom (...) women appropriate

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<sup>6</sup> In this sense I disagree with Maria Hierro's opinión when she supports that "Adaku es totalmente rechazada por su comunidad, siendo marginada" (124). Actually, those around Adaku admire this woman, who has the courage to become successful even though her methods have not always been orthodox.

and refashion oppressive spaces through friendship, sisterhood, and solidarity and in the process reinvent themselves. (19)

The truth is that many of the women who appear in female African novels act as generators and active participants of a network of mutual social help. In Africa joys and tragedies tend to be lived in community in order to make adversity more bearable, and literature simply reflects this way of life. But this associative tradition is not at all new: "Rural women, historically, have been found to form strong mutual bonds through sharing the rhythms of life as they relate to both life and death" (Kivett 169). Informal loans, communal saving societies or collective businesses are some examples of this extended tendency in African societies where women get together "to pool resources for mutual assistance mainly at the community level" (Soetan 27).

In rural environments the most important female bonds usually take place among members of the same family but in the city, where a new way of life takes place, the closest relationships of sisterhood have to be established with the neighbours, who are the people available<sup>7</sup>. In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* this is what really happens, as the main character finds a confidant in her neighbour Ali rather than in any relative. And in the second novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, the female bond takes place between in-laws because Beatrice has no other options, as she does not have any relationship with other women apart from with her sister-in-law Ifeoma.

However, the main supportive aspect from *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* I want to concentrate on involves a wider solidarity than the expected from a close friend. I cannot but fully agree with A. C. Rhode when she states the following reflection on the issue:

Andrea's novel is in many respects a celebration of female solidarity and support. She uses this solidarity among her female characters to counter the oppressive gender ideologies and hierarchies in their society (...) The women in the community thus provide a supportive network for Kauna,

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<sup>7</sup> African novels written by women provide numerous examples of these situations in which the closest bonds among women take place with neighbours. Just to mention a few, I can refer to the Nigerian author Buchi Emecheta and her most famous novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), or to one of the novels written by the South African writer Sindiwe Magona entitled *To My Children's Children* (1990).

helping her to endure her hardships and to overcome them, eventually. (53, 55)

The village in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* portrays a Namibian habit related to the soil that brings women together in mutual support when one is behind with her ploughing: the *okakungungu*. When a woman cannot complete the cultivation of her land on her own before the rains come, she invites other women in the community to help her with the required physical work on a particular day. Women are traditionally the ones in charge of farming as their husbands are far away working in cities or mines:

Most of our husbands, in fact most able young men, worked hundreds of kilometres away from home. Except for the headman and a few older men, this village was headed, literally, by us, the women. (Andreas 118)

Women's responsibility is total in this respect as, if the work is not finished before the rains come, they will be considered the only responsible ones for it: "If you don't finish in time for the rain, people will talk about you, not your in-laws. ... People will say what a lazy, useless wife you are. They will accuse you of making your husband poor" (113).

In Kauna's case, it is Ali who suggests her friend the *okakungungu* and, much to her surprise, Kauna will discover that most of the women who had been invited turned out on the fixed date and worked really hard to help her. Strong physical effort under an unbearable heat joined these village women together in a way that no other circumstances would have favoured. The work is accompanied by collective singing and, once it is fulfilled, followed by communal eating, drinking and cracking of jokes: a community in its deepest sense is being created there as all women feel part of something, as a unique body, and that intense shared experience will bring closer some of their participants from then onwards. Probably one of the most moving and poetic parts of this novel is, precisely, the description of the shared time in the *okakungungu* and the beautiful consequences it brings about, as we can see in the following quotations:

We worked and worked.  
We worked with one spirit.  
We worked as if we competed for a prize.

We sang in harmony. (115)

The women understood Kauna's situation. There was a wonderful spirit, a spirit of sisterhood. For once, all ill-feeling and hate were forgotten. We were one again, sisters sharing a common cause. (116)

I wanted to run towards all those women, and hug and kiss them all. I wished the spirit would last forever among us. Although this *okakungungu* lasted just one day, a feeling of sisterhood and communal responsibility enveloped us in a strange and cheerful sense of oneness. I felt connected to these women, these sisters, these mothers, these aunts, and grand-mothers. As we parted I looked at them and thought, Yes girls, you have done it again. (119)

In the second novel analyzed in this article, *Purple Hibiscus*, the deepest bond of female solidarity takes place among two in-laws: Beatrice, Eugene's wife, and her sister-in-law Ifeoma, who feels emotionally closer to Beatrice than to her own brother. Ifeoma will play what I consider a maternal<sup>8</sup> role with Beatrice: advising, comforting and respecting her in all her decisions even if she does not fully agree with them. Ifeoma will thus become a stepping stone in Beatrice's limited horizon as well as a resting place for her sister-in-law's battered soul. Ifeoma will turn into a kind of feminine model for Beatrice until, finally, a radical act would permit Beatrice escape her fate and free herself and her children from the abusive father and husband they were confined to.

From this point of view, I would like to point out an interesting old traditional custom portrayed in the novel by which two women who feel very close can name each other as "my wife", to indicate the strong and special bond between them, as it is the case with Ifeoma and Beatrice:

"*Nwunye m,*" Aunty Ifeoma called, and Mama turned back.

The first time I heard Aunty Ifeoma call Mama "*nwunye m*" years ago, I was aghast that a woman called another woman

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<sup>8</sup> Another clear example of this type of maternal relationship among women is the one we find between Mainini, Tambudzai's mother in Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and her sister Lucia, Tambu's aunt. When Mainini is suffering from a non-diagnosed depression that makes her unable to look after her baby, to take care of herself and sometimes even to get up in the morning or eat, Lucia leaves her life and runs next to her sister. Her warm and protective presence will patiently lead her sister Mainini to reestablish contact with the other female community members in the village, to recover her spirit and be able to take on her responsibilities again.

“my wife.” When I asked, Papa said it was the remnants of ungodly traditions, the idea that it was the family and not the man alone that married a wife, and later Mama whispered, although we were alone in my room, “I am her wife, too, because I am your father’s wife. It shows that she accepts me.” (Adichie 73)

Ifeoma was born a real fighter<sup>9</sup>: she managed alone with three children after becoming a very young widow who could not count on her brother’s support; although she loves her home land, she decides to move to the USA once she realizes there are no other realistic options that would enable her to remain in Africa; she is neither afraid of decision-making nor of action and changes and does not believe that a woman’s destiny must be necessarily united to a man. However, she is extremely respectful and delicate with Beatrice, her sister-in-law, who lives and thinks very differently. Ifeoma always tries to calm Beatrice down, to respect, heal and listen patiently to her without forcing her sister-in-law’s opinions or considering that she holds the right view. That is why I describe such a relationship as maternal: Ifeoma unconditionally accepts Beatrice without any judgement but patiently listening and providing her sister-in-law with tenderness and with an affective closeness.

On the other hand, Beatrice accepts her husband Eugene in silence, passively and resigned. She loves and respects him so much that she even justifies Eugene’s physical violence against herself or her own children, explaining such behaviour as the result of external causes. One of these examples comes out when Beatrice has been so heavily battered by her husband that she must be taken to hospital and, nevertheless, she justifies the unjustifiable as a reaction caused by the stress and pressure Eugene is going through since his editor and friend, Ade Coker, was murdered: “Eugene has not been well. He has been having migraines and fever,” she said. “He is carrying more than any man should carry. Do you know what Ade’s death did to him? It is too much for one person” (250).

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<sup>9</sup> In this sense I totally disagree with Anthony Oha’s opinion when he says that Ifeoma does not share Nnu Ego’s (the main characters in Buchi Emecheta’s novel *The Joys of Motherhood*) pride (207). In my opinion, Ifeoma has proved to be independent, self-sufficient and very resourceful whereas Nnu Ego’s ultimate *leif-motif* has always been to become a mother and her lonely death, despite having had so many children, proves her that she was mistaken.



We find other examples of Beatrice's passiveness in her lack of reaction towards Eugene's severe physical beating of her daughter Kambili, which takes the girl to hospital, or when her husband burns his son and daughter's feet with boiling water for disobedience. In these situations Beatrice tries to comfort her children, to reduce the seriousness of these actions but she never reacts, an attitude that makes Kambili experience a mixture of contradictory emotions of love and rejection towards her mother that she does not fully understand:

Mama reached out to hold my hand. Her face was puffy from crying, and her lips were cracked, with bits of discolored skin peeling off. I wished I could get up and hug her, and yet I wanted to push her away, to shove her so hard that she would topple over the chair." (213)

One of the strong points of *Purple Hibiscus* lies in the fact that this novel's characters run away from oversimplification, of which Eugene becomes an excellent example. Not only is he portrayed as an abusive and extremely strict father, but also as a remarkably worthy man, both intellectually and humanly, with a strong personal and political commitment despite the serious physical risk this behaviour involves in a military controlled country like his. Eugene overtly rejects corruption and political tyranny; he is extremely rich but proportionally generous and not only through public donations, but also with other private generous actions that do not look for any public consideration.

Eugene is very rigid in terms of religious convictions, which makes him break up with his own father because of the old man's rejection of Catholicism in favor of traditional religions. Nevertheless, when Eugene's father dies, his son pays for a funeral following the old man's traditional rites even though father and son had split up precisely because of their different religious viewpoints. However, together with his virtues, Eugene can simultaneously present violent attitudes when what he considers correct is not done the way he wants and his disappointment can even lead him to take violent actions against the members of his own family: his wife Beatrice, his son Jaja and his daughter Kambili, the narrator and main character of the novel. To sum up, Eugene embodies an idealistic but fanatic character suffering from the deep confrontation between his convictions and opinions on the one hand and his family behaviour on the other:



It becomes surprising that a man who fights for the political freedom of his people through his journalistic ventures could apply what he attacks in his home. ... he engages in children and wife battery but criticizes those who batter the society. It looks like denying a phenomenon and embracing it at the same time. A paradox! ... He expects freedom but blocks it from his vicinity. (Oha 201-02)

As we have already seen in previous paragraphs, Ifeoma and Beatrice, Amaka and Kambili's mothers respectively, become behavioural models for their own daughters: in the first case a model of action and, in the second, one of silence and passive acceptance of reality. Jane Bryce holds the view that this novel offers two possible alternatives to Eugene's patriarchal violence: his wife's initial passiveness and final aggressive response or, as a second option, the one-parent harmonious family of his sister Ifeoma (58). Simultaneously, this novel refers to the two main resistance focuses against military authority, which are journalism and university.<sup>10</sup>

Beatrice is probably the most stereotyped character in this novel, as she embodies a battered wife who initially submissively accepts her fate because she does not even consider that others might even exist for her. This is why she always tries to keep her home calm, to handle her husband's difficult character and violent fits or to control her son when he tries to rebel against his authoritative father. In her search for family harmony, Beatrice even asks her children to be especially affectionate with a father who, at times, causes them so much physical and psychological pain: "Mama told Jaja and me often to remember to hug Papa tighter, to let him know we were there, because he was under such pressure" (208).

Beatrice's universe is limited to the domestic world, which makes her live through her children rather than have a life of her own. And it is precisely due to this attitude and to her lack of private experiences that she celebrates Jaja and Amaka's academic success so much. All of

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<sup>10</sup> The first resistance focus, journalism, appears repeatedly throughout the novel as Eugene has his own newspaper which, by the way, is very critical with the governing political system in his country. The second resistance focus, the university, is related to Ifeoma, whose job as lecturer presents readers not only with all the problems this institution has to face but also with the active response against government abuses of which students and some teachers are responsible for.

Beatrice's acts are under Eugene's control and she would never dare to do anything behind her husband's back. In connection to physical violence, I must say that Beatrice acknowledges more the violence her children suffer from than the one inflicted upon herself. However, she is usually unable to react because her submission to her husband is so deeply internalized that she does not even imagine that she has the possibility to resist. And it is precisely this closed and suffocating universe that Beatrice inhabits, which forces her to act desperately and finally leads her to poison her husband as the only viable escape for herself and her children she can think of.<sup>11</sup>

Beatrice's relationship with her children Jaja and Kambili is based on many different experiences: shared moments, affectionate gestures, tenderness, knowing glances, shared suffering, tension with Eugene and smoothness when he is not around and also failed attempts of mutual protection. But an essential element in this family's relationship is their silences. There are thorny and painful matters which neither Beatrice nor Jaja or Kambili ever mention because of an unspoken agreement, as there are certain things that should not even be named. This happens between mother and daughter: "There is still so much that we do not say with our voices, that we do not turn into words" (297), and also between Jaja and Kambili.<sup>12</sup>

We did that often, asking each other questions whose answers we already knew. Perhaps it was so that we would not ask the other questions, the ones whose answers we did not want to know.

Had Jaja forgotten that we never told, that there was so much that we never told?

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<sup>11</sup> Due to this Beatrice's unique but irreversible violent act of rebellion, *Purple Hibiscus* could be included in what Susan Arndt calls radical feminist writing. These kinds of novels' most outstanding characteristics are the lack of faith in change, the intrinsic violence that embebes all the novel and which, very often, ends up with death or with a crime, and the presence of female solidarity as the only aliviation for such a harsh and cruel world.

<sup>12</sup> Silence before pain becomes so important in this novel that it almost acquires a physical entity within family relationships. This remarkable prominence of silences is even stronger in the novel *Under the Tongue* (1996), by the Zimbabwean writer Yvonne Vera, where a nine-year-old girl has lost her speech as the consequence of a traumatic act inflicted on her and her final recovery of the ability to speak will be the clearest sign of her emotional recovery as well.

There is so much that is still silent between Jaja and me. Perhaps we will talk more with time, or perhaps we never will be able to say it all, to clothe things in words, things that have long been naked. (23, 154, 306)

The title *Purple Hibiscus* is a metaphor, as it already happened with the first novel analyzed in this article. In this case, a metaphor of the fact that the possibility of change and hope exists in any life despite difficulties or drawbacks. The colour purple in a hibiscus goes against nature and, nevertheless, one of Ifeoma's friends manages to make it real and grow such an exotic plant. Jaja discovers his passion for gardening during his stay at her aunt's home and he decides to take cuttings of this original plant to his own house with the intention of planting them. This apparently innocent act becomes a symbol of his faith in the future, of his eagerness for change and of his deep hope. The same happens with Beatrice and her children's suffocating existence under Eugene's authority, as they will finally manage to escape and be able to breathe fresh air, to move away from all suffering and pain and even dream about a promising future, as we will see at the end of the novel.

Kambili and Jaja's stay at aunt Ifeoma's house will expose themselves to a new way of feeling and living in a relaxed atmosphere where it is possible to speak one's mind freely, to laugh and debate openly as everyone has his/her own voice; a place where everybody feels surrounded by affection and encouraged to grow in all respects. This is one of the reasons why not only Jaja and Beatrice, but Kambili as well, will experience a profound personal transformation. After her stay at her aunt's house, this teenager will turn into someone more mature, capable of understanding and communicating better, of laughing openly and of assuming responsibilities when necessary.

Throughout the novel's plot Kambili will move from an initial shyness and social seclusion to certain openness towards others. She will now be able to establish relationships with people apart from her father, mother and brother: with her cousin Amaka, her aunt Ifeoma, her grandfather, the priest...etc. This personal maturity and evolution will make Kambili transform an initial mixed attitude of hatred/love towards her mother into a protective role with Beatrice. When this one, devastated, communicates Ifeoma and Kambili that she has had a

miscarriage because of Eugene's beating, Kambili leaves dignity behind and sits down on the floor next to her mother to accompany and comfort her until her mother finally falls asleep:

Mama slid down to the floor. She sat with her legs stretched out in front of her. It was so undignified, but I lowered myself and sat next to her, our shoulders touching.

She cried for a long time. She cried until my hand, clasped in hers, felt stiff. (249)

In spite of all the difficulties and pain Beatrice, Kambili and Jaja have suffered from, *Purple Hibiscus* is a hopeful novel since the final message of it seems to be that there is room for a better future, for laughter, dreams and projects full of hope: Jaja will soon be released from jail —where he had gone after he pleaded guilty of poisoning his father— and Kambili feels strong, full of future projects and capable of making plans involving her mother and cheering Beatrice up. All the past broken dreams, the whole family's paralysed existence because of the father's murder and its consequences, or Beatrice's evasion to her own invented universe when she no longer feels strong enough to cope with real life have come to an end and this family can now glimpse hope and a promising foreseeable future. In a sense, we could think that the new Kambili is like the purple hibiscus that names the book because, against all logical predictions, she will flourish personally despite the violent, tense and suffocating environment she lives in. As we can read in the final words of the novel Kambili, the daughter, is now the one who reassures a defenceless mother by means of a protective embrace and a confident smile in the future:

"We will take Jaja to Nsukka first, and then we'll go to America to visit aunt Ifeoma," I say. "We'll plant new orange trees in Abba when we come back, and Jaja will plant purple hibiscus, too, and I'll plant ixora so we can suck the juices of the flowers." I am laughing. I reach out and place my arm around Mama's shoulder and she leans toward me and smiles. (306-07)

Success and failure, broken dreams hand in hand with liberating discoveries; that is what these novels are all about, about life.

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# LA HEROÍNA PRINCIPAL DE NABOKOV-SIRIN: LA LITERATURA RUSA EN *THE GIFT*

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## **Abstract**

Before Nabokov became a famous American writer, he had paid homage to the literature of his native country in his last novel in Russian, *The Gift*. Here, the literary legacy becomes the main character. The reader should recognise this legacy in order to understand the novel. The purpose of this article is to analyze the intertext of the Russian literature and its components, and to distinguish their functions in the novel. We identify direct mentions, quotations and allusions of some Russian writers. We also analyse references based on proper names, parodies and characters borrowed from the Russian literature. The most representative writers and poets are studied throughout the article in order to understand better the novel.

**Keywords:** intertext, Russian literature, uninitiated reader, themes, style.

## THE MAIN HEROINE OF NABOKOV-SIRIN: RUSSIAN LITERATURE IN *THE GIFT*

## **Resumen**

Nabokov rindió homenaje a la literatura de su país natal en su última novela rusa *The Gift*, antes de escribir en inglés y de convertirse en un reconocido escritor norteamericano. Aquí, el legado literario se convierte en un personaje clave. Para entender la novela el lector debería comprender ese legado. El objetivo de este trabajo consiste en analizar el intertexto de la literatura rusa en *The Gift*, definiendo sus componentes y las funciones de estos elementos intertextuales.

Distinguimos las menciones directas, las citas, las alusiones y las reminiscencias. Además, comentamos las referencias onomásticas, parodias y héroes-préstamos de otras obras literarias. Estudiamos, pues, los escritores más representativos de la literatura rusa y los que más relevancia tienen a la hora de comprender la novela.

**Palabras clave:** intertexto, literatura rusa, lector inexperto, temas, estilo.

## Introducción

“Todos aquellos que no han perdido el interés hacia la literata rusa, la han leído o la leerán”, comenta Krug (127). En *The gift* Nabokov narra la historia de su inspiración y pinta el cuadro de su genio, para demostrar que está en su mejor momento; y así podrá esculpir un único monumento que ocupará un lugar junto con Pushkin y Gogol en el panteón de la literatura rusa. Aunque Nabokov insistió en que él “had never been influenced by anyone in particular, dead or quick”, encontramos una gran profusión de literatura rusa en su obra (*Strong Opinions* 116). En uno de los primeros estudios sobre la novela, Karlinsky señala que “not since *Eugene Onegin* has a major Russian novel contained such a profusion of literary discussions, allusions and writer’s characterizations”, por esta razón la define como “a work of literary criticism” (“Vladimir Nabokov’s Novel” 286). Sin embargo, el término “criticism” no nos parece del todo apropiado, ya que todas las muestras de la perspicacia literaria están insertadas en la trama principal del desarrollo artístico del protagonista, Fyodor, y por eso no pueden ser separadas de la subjetividad de su innato impulso creativo.

El desarrollo artístico del protagonista transcurre paralelo al camino que la literatura rusa tomó después del Siglo de Oro de la poesía de los años 1820s y su vuelta a la prosa de los 1830s a través de Gogol y Belinsky, hasta el utilitario siglo de Hierro de los 1860s, a través del periodo de Dostoievski y Tolstoi, hasta el Siglo de Plata y la literatura contemporánea.

Para analizar la literatura rusa en *The Gift*, hay que someterse a los términos de “metaliteratura” y “intertextualidad.” En nuestro estudio adoptamos la perspectiva de Ayuso de Vicente que entiende por intertextualidad “una relación que un texto literario establece con



otro texto literario, con un texto escrito o que pertenece al universo de la palabra” (201). Definimos todos los elementos del texto que se refieren de modo más o menos evidente a los poetas y escritores rusos y a sus obras como menciones a la literatura rusa. Así, distinguimos las menciones directas, las citas, las alusiones y las reminiscencias. Además, encontramos otro grupo de referencias que son distintas de las ya mencionadas. Se trata de elementos como, referencias onomásticas, parodias y héroes-préstamos de otras obras literarias.

No olvidemos que la presencia de tantas figuras literarias hace que la novela sea difícil para un lector inexperto en la literatura rusa. Según Barreras Gómez, “una capacidad que se le supone al lector implícito de Nabokov es un conocimiento de la literatura, especialmente la rusa, para comprender todas las referencias intertextuales que hace el autor” (“Releyendo” 20).

## Referencias a la literatura rusa

El texto alude a unos treinta escritores. En su gran mayoría, estas referencias sólo se pueden entender si se conocen las obras y los escritores aludidos. Además, algunos de los escritores no son muy conocidos, pero hay que entender las referencias ya que todas ellas cumplen ciertas funciones dentro de la novela. A continuación, se estudian los escritores más representativos de la literatura rusa y los que más relevancia tienen a la hora de comprender la novela. De este modo, se comentan los intertextos de Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov, Blok, Fet, Balmont, Bely, Gogol, Tolstoi, Dostoievski, Turgenev, Kjudasevich y Gumilev.

En primer lugar, analizaremos las referencias de la novela al poeta Pushkin. Según Davydov, “no one at home or in exile made claim to Pushkin’s legacy more faithfully than Nabokov” (482). Pushkin representa el tema principal de la novela, en la que se ha unido el amor hacia Pushkin, el conocimiento absoluto de sus obras y la imitación de su musa. Su publicación en 1937 coincidió con el centenario de la muerte de Pushkin. La novela representa el reconocimiento de la grandeza del poeta. El protagonista, Fyodor, “fed on Pushkin, inhaled Pushkin (Nabokov, *The Gift* 94).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Todas las citas pertenecen a la versión inglesa de la novela *The Gift* (1973). De aquí en adelante sólo indicaremos las páginas donde se encuentra la cita.

El texto abunda en menciones directas de Pushkin y sus obras. Éstas son las más transparentes de las referencias ya que no requieren, por parte del lector, ningún conocimiento profundo de la obra del poeta clásico ruso. La palabra 'Pushkin' en el texto de Nabokov debe entenderse con un amplio sentido de signos, ya que posee una serie de asociaciones. Citemos parte del poema de Nabokov, "Tolstoi": "Pushkin es otra cosa: capote, roca, espuma del mar / La palabra 'Pushkin' se cubre de poemas, como de hiedra" (1928).

El nombre del poeta se menciona 48 veces en la novela. Esta frecuencia nos demuestra las dimensiones de la influencia de Pushkin en Nabokov. Las referencias directas cumplen varias funciones. Por un lado, Pushkin es uno de los objetos principales del pensamiento de algunos personajes de *The Gift*. Nabokov inserta elementos propios de un análisis crítico y literario en la novela. Por ejemplo, se comparan matices del ritmo de Pushkin y Nekrasov: "Nekrasov's iambic pentameter enchants us particularly by its horatory and prophetic force and by a very individual caesura after a second foot, a caesura which in Pushkin is a rudimentary organ insofar as it controls the melody of the line" (230).

Se mencionan algunas imperfecciones en "Sirena": "weak spots in "Blizzard" (73). También, encontramos críticas más concretas a las obras de Pushkin. Para poder analizar a Pushkin, la crítica literaria debe descartar "its sociological, religious, philosophical and other textbooks which only help mediocrity to admire itself" (233). Solo a través de lo estético, Nabokov puede

...criticize Pushkin for any betrayals of his exigent muse and at the same time preserve both your talent and your honour. Upbraid him for letting one hexameter creep into the pentameters of *Boris Godunov*, for the metrical error in the twenty-first line of "The Feast During the Plague", for repeating the phrase 'every minute' five times within sixteen lines in "The Blizzard." (233)

Aquí, siguiendo las reglas de la poética del juego, que convierte al lector en un participante activo de la narración, el texto nos señala defectos de tipo estilístico, pero encontrarlos es la labor del lector.

En la novela también se intenta entender el sitio y el significado de Pushkin en la literatura rusa. La frase clave sería: "he is the gold

reserve of our literature” (72). Para Nabokov, Pushkin representa el comienzo de toda la literatura rusa. La herencia de la tradición de Pushkin se enfatiza durante la novela y cualquier oposición no resiste la prueba del tiempo: “when today I tote up what has remained to me of this new poetry, I see that very little has survived, and what has is precisely a natural continuation of Pushkin” (139).

Otra función de las menciones directas de Pushkin consiste en caracterizar a los personajes. La relación con Pushkin sirve de criterio universal para la evaluación de un personaje. Para Fyodor significa un icono del poeta ideal y para Chernyshevski es “his most vulnerable spot” (233). Según Nabokov, “it has long become customary to measure the degree of flair, intelligence and talent of a Russian critic by his attitude to Pushkin” (233). En relación con las menciones directas de las obras de Pushkin (como “Sirena”, “Andshelo”, “Viaje a Arzum”, *Historia de la revuelta de Pugachev*, *La hija del Capitán*, “El profeta”, “Anchar”, *Noches Egipcias*, *Boris Godunov*, *Eugene Onegin*, entre otras), éstas cumplen las mismas funciones.

Esta frecuencia de menciones a Pushkin está condicionada por el intento de “resucitar” al clásico, según Davydov. El protagonista cita a menudo las obras de su predecesor. Las citas se presentan en dos formas: citas exactas, con indicación a su origen, y citas inexactas. La función de las primeras consiste en indicar la fuente de inspiración de Fyodor, como vemos en este pasaje: “he had skipped some of the pages — “Angelo”, *Journey to Arzrum* — but lately it was precisely in these that he found particular pleasure. He had only just got to the words: “The frontier held something mysterious for me; to travel had been my favourite dream since childhood” (91).

Las citas inexactas se emplean para caracterizar a los personajes. Por ejemplo, la cita del redactor Vasiliev: “height of glory and good deeds” (39) — en comparación con Pushkin: “in hope of glory and good deeds” — enfatiza la inexactitud como un rasgo ‘profesional’, propio de los periodistas, según Nabokov. Chernyshevski también cita a Pushkin, aunque sus citas reflejan una miopía artística:

In his Saratov diary Chernyshevski applied two lines from Pushkin’s *The Egyptian Nights* to his courtship, completely misquoting the second one, with a characteristic (for him who had no ear) distortion: “I met the challenge of delight/

As warfare's challenge met I'd have" (instead of "As he would meet in days of war/ The challenge of a savage battle.") (235)

En otros casos, Fyodor emplea citas para argumentar sus ideas. En "Vida de Chernyshevski" encontramos varias citas de *Noches egipcias*, que sirven de argumento contra el concepto del utilitarismo y del valor social del arte, creados por Chernyshevski, como por ejemplo: "The poet himself chooses the subjects for his poems; the multitude has no right to direct his inspiration" (236).

Las citas se convierten también en el objeto del juego intelectual. La frase "Here is Apollo-ideal, there is Niobe-grief", del poema de Pushkin "Al pintor", recibe un significado nuevo (94). 'Apollo' y 'Niobe' son los nombres de las mariposas. Aquí, Nabokov emplea "un procedimiento de separación" y nos enseña palabras e imágenes ya conocidas desde una perspectiva inesperada. Encontramos además citas 'ocultas' o alusiones, cuya heterogeneidad está disfrazada por el contexto. Por ejemplo: "he was in that state of feeling and mind when reality given way to fancies, blends with them in the nebulous visions of first sleep" (94).

Las alusiones a Pushkin realizan una función de 'comunicación de expertos', pues es un sistema de insinuaciones dirigidas a un lector experimentado. La gran mayoría de las alusiones carecen de indicaciones de su origen. Hay que destacar la complejidad de algunas alusiones por tener varios niveles de interpretación. La poesía de Yasha Chernyshevski ensalza "the Neva's granite parapet on which one can scarcely discern today the imprint of Pushkin's elbow" (42). En primer lugar, el pasaje alude a *Eugene Onegin*:

With soul full of regrets,  
And leaning on the granite,  
Eugene stood pensive —  
As his own self the Poet has described.

En segundo lugar, hace alusión al poema de Pushkin "Una vez cruzado el puente Kolushkin." En tercer lugar, se refiere a un poema de Nabokov "San Petersburgo" (1924), en donde encontramos líneas como: "La huella de su codo / Dejó en el granito Pushkin." Esta complejidad enfatiza la imagen artística. Así, según Bux, "la lectura de la novela provoca una selección de evaluaciones, que en realidad representa el reconocimiento cultural del lector, su identificación intelectual" (*Eshafot* 153).

La comprensión de las alusiones como característica, no es solamente una cualidad del lector, sino también de los personajes, pues los conocedores de la obra de Pushkin, Fyodor y Koncheyev son capaces de inferir las alusiones de uno y de otro. Koncheyev no tiene por qué explicar a Fyodor que alude a *Eugene Onegin*: “An uhlan knew how to captivate her, / An uhlan by her soul is loved.”

Según Davydov, Nabokov utiliza “one of Pushkin’s devices most skilfully employed in *Eugene Onegin*” (494). Fyodor, al igual que Eugene, presiente que su futura novela está ya escrita: “At times I feel that somewhere [my book] has already been written by me, that it is here, hiding in this inky jungle” (286). El poeta de Pushkin “peering into a magic crystal, dimly recognizes the shape of his future novel” (Capítulo 8, estrofa 50).

También encontramos varias reminiscencias en la novela. El primer capítulo incluye numerosos poemas de Fyodor, todos ellos escritos en pentámetro yámbico, la métrica que inmortalizó Pushkin en la poesía rusa. Aquí, la identificación de cualquier pasaje como una reminiscencia depende del punto de vista de cada lector. Por ejemplo, según Rusanov (19), el siguiente pasaje presenta una reminiscencia de *Eugene Onegin*: “his home museum ... where the laboratory assistants worked at tables along the one-piece windows” (101). Pero las imágenes del baile aristocrático de *Eugene Onegin* y del museo de la casa de *The Gift* son muy distintas desde la perspectiva de sus asociaciones; y la expresión “one-piece window” no es suficiente para crear una reminiscencia. Para distinguir las alusiones de las reminiscencias hay que tener en cuenta que las primeras representan características de los personajes y las segundas desempeñan una función de carácter estético o estilístico. Dada la dificultad de identificar todas las reminiscencias no nos detendremos en ellas.

La novela además tiene otro grupo de menciones a Pushkin que podemos subdividir en diferentes categorías. Una de ellas son las referencias onomásticas. Vemos que el apellido de Fyodor, ‘Godunov-Cherdyntsev’ combina la referencia al héroe de Pushkin (*Boris Godunov*) y una indirecta al apellido de Chernyshevski. Cuando analizamos los nombres propios en la novela, observamos que algunos héroes de Pushkin aparecen como tales en *The Gift*. Por ejemplo, Bux distingue al ingeniero Kern y al abogado Charsky (*Eshafot* 56). El apellido del

ingeniero lo relaciona con la “musa” de Pushkin, Kern. El apellido ‘Charsky’ lo conecta con el poeta de *Noches egipcias*. Senderovich, a su vez, señala la presencia de los nombres de dos grandes expertos de Pushkin, ‘Gershenzon’ y ‘Shchyogolev’ (352). El primero pertenece al médico que salvó al tío de Fyodor, su herida era parecida a aquella que acabó con Pushkin. El segundo pertenece al padrastro de Zina. Además, el nombre de la hermana de Fyodor, *Tatiana* alude a la heroína de *Eugene Onegin*. El uso de estos nombres sirve para darle al texto más juego intelectual.

Asimismo encontramos algunos personajes de Pushkin que cobran vida en *The Gift*. La pareja formada por el poeta y el improvisador de *Noches egipcias* aparece en la novela con diferentes variaciones. Una de ellas es el poeta Fyodor y el escritor Busch. El retrato de Busch muestra un “envejecido reflejo paródico del improvisador” (Bux, *Eshafot* 160): “a tall, portly gentleman with a large-features face, wearing a black felt hat (a strand of chestnut hair falling from under it)” (192).

En el capítulo cuatro, el improvisador y el poeta están representados por Pushkin y Chernyshevski. Aquí el paralelismo está construido a base de sus vidas. Lo vemos en los triángulos amorosos ‘Chernyshevski — Olga Socratovna — Dobrolubov’ versus ‘Pushkin — Natalí — Dantés’. Chernyshevski sufría un “deadly heartache — made of pity, jealousy and wounded pride — which a husband of quite a different stamp had experienced and had dealt with in quite a different way: Pushkin” (215). Por analogía al modelo de Pushkin, esta pareja en la novela está compuesta por ‘Godunov-Cherdyntsev — Busch’; por ‘Godunov-Cherdyntsev — sus críticos’; y en el rol de improvisador emparejado con el mismo Nabokov aparecen todos aquellos que intentan interpretar la novela. No olvidemos que *The Gift* es una novela de reflejos y parodias. Encontramos el triángulo amoroso de *Eugene Onegin*: ‘Onegin — Olga — Lensky’, reflejado paródicamente en la novela como: ‘Yasha — Olga — Rudolfo’. Yasha se parece a Lensky además, no está enamorado de Olga sino de Rudolfo, que se parece físicamente a la Olga de Pushkin.

Pushkin es la clave en la novela. Resucitando a Pushkin y colocándolo en la cima de toda la literatura rusa, Nabokov construye al mismo tiempo su ataque contra los escritores de la revista *Chisla* [Números] y el grupo de escritores y críticos contemporáneos suyos.

La novela además incluye el intertexto de Lermontov. Hay cinco menciones directas al poeta. Las citas de Lermontov sirven para evaluar su poesía y para distinguirlo de los demás poetas rusos:

Farewell, our dear comrade Alas, upon earth/ Not long did you dwell, blue-eyed singer! / A plain cross of wood you have earned and with us/ your memory always shall linger..." Lermontov's real magic, the melting vistas in his poetry, its paradisiacal picturesqueness and the transparent tang of the celestial in his moist verse — these were completely inaccessible to the understanding of men of Chernyshevski's stamp. (233)

Una de las heroínas de Lermontov aparece en la novela. En casa de los Chernyshevski encontramos a una mujer, descrita así: "a fragile, charmingly debilitated girl with pink eyelids, in general appearance rather like a white mouse; her first name was Tamara" (37). Es la descripción paródica de Tamara de Lermontov. Más adelante esta imagen aparece otra vez en el personaje Kostomarov: "endowed with curious abilities, he could write in a feminine hand — explaining this himself by the fact that he was 'visited at the full moon by the spirit of Queen Tamara'" (248). Aquí, Nabokov establece un paralelismo paródico: Tamara, seducida por el demonio (Lermontov) y Kostomarov seducido por el tercer departamento, delata a Chernyshevski.

El poeta Nekrasov aparece como uno de los personajes secundarios en la novela. Su poesía se compara con la de Pushkin. Nabokov aprovecha las citas para criticar algunos defectos de su poesía y su desconocimiento de la naturaleza:

He read Nekrasov and seeing a certain urban-journalist defect in his poetry, he found an apparent explanation for the vulgarisms in his pedestrian Russian Women ('How jolly, furthermore, To share your every thought in common With someone you adore') in the discovery that despite his walks in the country he confused swarm with bumbles and wasps ('a restless swarm of bumblebees' and ten lines lower down the horses under the smoke of a bonfire' seek shelter from the wasps.') (185)

Aparte de citas, la novela contiene varias alusiones a Nekrasov. Una de ellas la encontramos en este pasaje:



At the entrance to the public park we have the balloon vendor;  
look children how they billow and rub against each other, all  
full of God's sunshine, in red, blue and green shades ... now  
the happy children have bought their rouble balloon and the  
kindly hawker has pulled it out of the jostling bunch. (25)

Según Bux (*Eshafot* 189), el pasaje alude al poema de Nekrasov "El poema, dedicado a los niños rusos." Asimismo, la figura de Nekrasov sirve para establecer un paralelismo: Pushkin es el maestro de Fyodor y Nekrasov el de Chernyshevski, ya que él "placed Nekrasov the poet above all others (above Pushkin, above Lermontov and Koltsov)" (230).

Otro poeta ruso que menciona la novela es Fet. Fyodor aprecia sus poemas y le perdona algunos 'defectos' de su poesía: "I can forgive him everything for 'rang out in the darkening meadow', for 'dew-tears of rapture shed the night', for the wing-fanning, 'breathing' butterfly" (73). Aquí, Fyodor alude a los poemas "La tarde", "El ruiseñor y la rosa", y "La mariposa." Para él, la poesía de Fet presenta un ejemplo de la lírica pura. Al igual que con Pushkin, Nabokov construye una oposición artística: Pushkin y Fet son los mejores poetas para él, Chernyshevski, al contrario, los rechaza: "Is it possible to write Russian without verbs? Whispers, timid respiration, trill of nightingale. Written by a certain Fet, a well-known poet in his time. An idiot with few peers. Fet he detested" (220). Para Fyodor, sin embargo, esta ausencia de verbos en la poesía crea lo ilusorio, lo indefinido y lo versátil.

Otro poeta que también compone la poesía sin verbos y que se menciona en *The Gift* es Balmont. Fyodor cita: "how the rims of the clouds palpate... Poor Balmont" (73). La cita pertenece al poema "Ella se entregó sin reproches" (1903). El protagonista ironiza sobre las innovaciones de Balmont que desfiguran el yambo tradicional: "I would give this prancing hunchback a sunset to carry or a boat and was amazed that the former faded and the latter sank" (142). En la descripción de unas de las alumnas de Fyodor encontramos una alusión directa a Balmont: "this slightly trembling little hand with the sharp fingernails, lying so invitingly close" (153). Esta imagen alude al poema "Pantera."

Junto a Balmont, la novela alude a Blok. Críticos como Shadursky (2004), Dolinin (1995) y Bethea (1995), estudiaron las influencias de Blok en la prosa de Nabokov. El mismo Nabokov reconoce que Blok es



“one of those poets that gets into one’s system — and everything else seems unblokish and flat. I, as most Russians went through that stage some twenty-five years ago” (Karlinsky, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* 94). Para Bethea, Blok “was perceived by Nabokov as a false and demonic lunar father of the exact opposite of his own lucid biographical father and of Pushkin, the ‘sun’ of Russian poetry” (380). Dolinin comenta que en la poesía y prosa de Nabokov “the rejection of Blok is not limited to declarations but involves the transformation of the entire poetic system: the lexicon is prosaicized and purged of Symbolism clichés, direct intonation and thematic echoes of Blok disappear, and the lyrical hero gradually yields his place to the ironic narrator” (41). Encontramos esta ironía en un poema de Fyodor que alude paródicamente al poema de Blok “No construyas casas al lado de los meandros fluviales” (1905), dedicado a Chulkov (poeta y escritor simbólico):

She always unexpectedly appeared out of the darkness, like a shadow leaving its kindred element. At first her ankles would catch the light: she moved them close together as if she walked along a slender rope. Her summer dress was short, of night’s own colour, the colour of the streetlights and the shadows, of tree trunks and of shining pavement — paler than her bare arms and darker than her face. *This kind of blank verse Blok dedicated to Georgi Chulkov.* (164)<sup>2</sup>

Los temas principales de Blok eran el humano condenado y la llegada inevitable de la muerte, que aparece como una amante lúcida. Aquí, en lugar de la muerte en apariencia lúcida, vienen el amor y la inspiración.

También se observan algunas semejanzas relacionadas con la utilización de los colores por los dos escritores. Nabokov a menudo emplea la paleta de Blok: azul, violeta y lila claro. A través de los símbolos de la paleta, la novela refleja irónicamente la afición juvenil de Nabokov por la poesía de Blok: “His [Yasha’s] poems exalted his grievous love of Russia — the smoky blue of Blok-ish bogs” (42).

Volviendo al tema de la métrica y del ritmo, tan importante para Fyodor, el personaje se muestra bastante condescendiente con el ritmo de Blok: “Things went easier with the dreamy stutter of Blok’s rhythms,

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<sup>2</sup> La frase en cursiva no está en la versión rusa.

but as soon as I began to use them my verse was imperceptibly infiltrated by stylized medievalizing — blue page-boys, monks, and princesses” (142).

Aparte de las referencias a los poetas rusos, la novela alude a los escritores prosaicos. Los críticos de Nabokov conectan la unicidad de su prosa con su origen poético. Hablando de su poesía, Fyodor reconoce en ella “a ghost of the transparent prose” (34). Y más adelante, confiesa que podría ser un poeta perfecto si él fuera “a typical poet who never fell for the blandishments of harmonious prose” (143). Así, la prosa ideal para Fyodor representa una prosa ‘transparente’ con un ritmo inolvidable. Para crear este tipo de prosa Fyodor consulta la experiencia de sus predecesores, entre ellos, de Bely.

Alexandrov nos ofrece un estudio comparado de las obras de estos dos escritores, y señala una serie de influencias de Bely en forma de alusiones y reminiscencias (“Nabokov and Bely” 358). Encontramos uno de los ejemplos en la escena cuando Fyodor piensa en su futuro libro, al principio de la novela: “the fleeting thought was touched with a careless irony; an irony, however, that was quite unnecessary, because somebody within him, on his behalf, independently from him, had absorbed all this, recorded it, and filed away” (11). Según Alexandrov, “a related sort of thinking occurs to the character and the narrator in Petersburg as well” (“Nabokov and Bely” 364).

Volviendo al estilo de Bely, que sirvió para Fyodor como punto de partida para convertirse en un escritor prosaico, no olvidemos que Nabokov va más allá, ampliando el sistema de métodos para introducir los metros silábicos en la estructura de su prosa. Hay pasajes métricos en forma de poemas, cadenas métricas y también líneas de poemas incluidas en el contenido prosaico. Teniendo en cuenta ‘las clases’ de Bely, Nabokov organiza el metro de su prosa haciéndolo más flexible y menos pesado.

Gogol aparece como maestro de la prosa rusa en *The Gift*. Muchos críticos han comentado las afinidades entre las obras de Nabokov y Gogol. Según Fanger,

Both show a tendency to non-endings in terms of plot, favouring circular forms that enclose what amounts to an autonomous and self-justifying world. Both feature freakish and morally repugnant characters, often bearing odd names, oftener still

inclined to solipsism. Both writers conflate prose and poetry...  
and both exalt art over everyday life as a rival reality. (421)

En relación a menciones directas a Gogol, encontramos diez referencias. También aparecen obras, como *Almas muertas* y “El retrato.” Por ejemplo, la novela comienza con las palabras: “One cloudy but luminous day, toward four in the afternoon on April the first” (11). El primero de abril nació Gogol. Desde este momento, el intertexto de Gogol se manifiesta en *The Gift* hasta el final. Encontramos una cita de *Almas muertas* que expresa los pensamientos más íntimos de Fyodor: “Longer, longer, and for as long as possible, shall I be in a strange country. And although my thoughts, my name, my works, my words will belong to Russia, myself, my mortal organism, will be removed from it” (167).

En cuanto a alusiones, los críticos identifican el comienzo de la novela como una alusión a *Almas muertas*. Nabokov ofrece una descripción detallada de dos personas descargando una furgoneta, que no tienen ninguna importancia para la trama de la novela. Esto confunde al lector. El mismo método empleó Gogol en su obra, obligando a sus lectores a leer entre líneas, a inferir lo escondido y a no creer en lo que ven en la superficie.

Así, Fyodor en su viaje de la poesía a la prosa, va desde Pushkin a Gogol. El capítulo tres representa el periodo de Gogol en la literatura rusa. Según Dolinin, la mención de *Almas muertas* “proved to be invaluable practice in detecting *poshlost*’, while Gogol’s of the grotesque set the example of how *poshlost*’ should be mocked” (145). Al acabar de leer *Almas muertas*, Fyodor decide escribir “La vida de Chernyshevski”, ya que éste representa la encarnación de “poshlost” para él. Nabokov a menudo describe a Chernyshevski como un diablo. Por ejemplo, encontramos a Chernyshevski que escribe “in an even hand with little struggles”, o “worked so feverishly, that the impression he produced was alms frightening”, y “Chernyshevski’s evil lure, his physical resemblance to the Devil” (211, 228-29). Estas continuas alusiones a Gogol permiten crear la imagen de Chernyshevski como una proyección paródica de Chichikov.

En el capítulo cinco, encontramos otra alusión a Gogol que sirve para “demostrar una relación mutua entre la literatura y la pintura:

aquí la pintura sirve para describir e identificar al personaje” (Bux 200). Citemos el pasaje:

Koncheev began by drawing a picture of flight during an invasion or an earthquake, when the escapers carry away with them everything that they can lay hands on, someone being sure to burden himself with a large, framed portrait of some long-forgotten relative ... and this is how Koncheev explained the stupefaction occasioned by the appearance of Fyodor Konstantinovich's book: “Somebody suddenly confiscated the portrait.” (281)

El pasaje alude al relato “El retrato” de Gogol, al final del cual el retrato de un usurero con los ojos demoniacos desaparece. La alusión refuerza la imagen diabólica de Chernyshevski ya comentada.

En cuanto a parodias, “Fyodor casts Chernyshevski, the nineteenth-century radical critic, writer, and revolutionary, as the hero of a would-be Gogolian tale. The cruel but hilarious vivisection of the darling of the liberal intelligentsia is performed with Gogolian scalpel” (Davydov 492). La novela muestra la opinión de Nabokov sobre Gogol: “he at his best —like any writer of genius— is incomparable and inimitable” (*Strong Opinions* 103).

Distinguimos también el intertexto de Dostoievski. Nivat apunta que “in spite of his overt distaste for Dostoievski, [...] Nabokov in his work demonstrates not only a very detailed knowledge of Dostoievski's themes and patterns, but a hidden influence” (398). Como sabemos, a Nabokov le gustaba “jugar” con la literatura rusa —en sus obras y, especialmente, en *The Gift*, de este modo “Dostoievski was the main target in that game” (Nivat 401). Nabokov se burla de su “Bedlam turned back into Bethlem”, que presenta una conversión inversa de los asilos locos y burdeles en los símbolos religiosos (72). Pocas cosas aprecia de Dostoievski: “with one reservation,...in the *Karamazovs* there is somewhere a circular mark left by a wet wine Glass on an outdoor table” (72).

A pesar de esta “burla” sobre Dostoievski, encontramos referencias al escritor sin que éste sea directamente criticado. Por ejemplo, el pasaje de la pastelería alude a *El idiota*: “Enter the theme of pastry shops. But pastry shops seduced him not at all with their victuals... newspapers, gentlemen, newspapers, that is what they seduced him with! ‘May I

have the *Independence belge*? Thank you” (207-08). La alusión sirve para desenmascarar la seriedad de las pretensiones filosófico-políticas de Chernyshevski, ya que el periódico tiene una mala calidad y fama. Más adelante encontramos otra alusión: Olga Sokratovna se parece a Natacha Fillipovna (heroína de *El idiota*) en su carácter histérico: “this hysteric, unbalanced wench with her insufferable temper”, “her hysterical fits culminate sometimes into convulsions” (216, 268).

También encontramos un fragmento entero de Dostoievski introducido en *The Gift*. Aquí, reconocemos al protagonista de *El idiota*: “It is said that Ippolit Myshkin, disguised as a gendarme officer, went to Vilyisk where he demanded of the district police chief that the prisoner be handed over to him, but spoiled the whole business by putting his shoulder knot on the left side instead of the right” (262).

Junto a Dostoievski, Nabokov introduce como un personaje más a Turgenev. Su prosa y su estilo son objeto de crítica: “remember those inept tête-à-têtes in acacia arbours? The growing and quivering of Bazarov? His highly unconvincing fussing with those frogs?” (73). En “La vida de Chernyshevski” Nabokov ilustra la relación entre Turgenev, Tolstoi y Chernyshevski: “there was quite definitely a smack of class arrogance about the attitudes of contemporary well-born writers towards plebeian Chernyshevski. Turgenev, Grigorovich and Tolstoy called him ‘the bed-bug-stinking gentleman’ and among themselves jeered at him in all kinds of ways” (228).

La novela menciona directamente las obras de Turgenev, como *Rudin*, y de Tolstoi, como *Anna Karenin* y *En vísperas*. Foster reconoce que, “there are vast possibilities for stylistic echoes, passing allusions, or meaningful revisions” en *The Gift* (519). El crítico compara *The Gift* y *La guerra y la paz*, y encuentra muchas similitudes entre ambas novelas, como vemos en el hecho de que “Fyodor’s delighted discovery of the pattern that brought him and Zina together may echo similar retrospective discoveries in *War and Peace*, first when Natasha is betrothed to Prince Andrew, then when Pierre is attracted to her” (Foster 525). Según Foster, Nabokov acepta a Tolstoi como “a personal literary landmark during the far-reaching cultural metamorphosis that led him through Europe to America, and beyond the literary canon into middlebrow and mass culture”(526).

La influencia de Tolstoi se ve también en las imágenes artísticas de Nabokov: la aparición de un libro justamente antes o después de la muerte de un personaje. Recordemos que en la novela *Anna Karenin*, antes de suicidarse, Anna lee un libro. A diferencia del libro de Tolstoi, que permite mirar la vida pasada, el libro de Nabokov le permite mirar hacia delante. Como ejemplo encontramos tomos de Annensky y de Jodasevich que son mencionados en el momento de la muerte de Yasha. El padre de Yasha delibera “funny that I have thought of death all my life, and if I have lived, have lived only in the margin of a book I have never been able to read. Oh, years ago in Kiev... would take out a library book in a language he didn’t know, make notes in it and leave it lying about so visitors would think: He knows Portuguese, Aramaic” (284). Las últimas palabras de Chernyshevski fueron: “A strange business: in this book there is not a single mention of God’. It’s a pity that we do not know precisely which book he was reading to himself” (273).

En otros casos encontramos referencias a Gumilev en la novela. Según Alexandrov, “of all the Acmeists, Gumilev plays the most obvious and possible the most interesting role in Nabokov’s *oeuvre*” (“Nabokov and Gumilev” 428). El crítico observa las huellas del espíritu heroico de Gumilev en la escena de la posible muerte del padre de Fyodor: “the telling details in the passage are the father’s ‘smile of disdain’ at the firing squad and his following with a glance of encouragement a whitish moth just before the Bolsheviks open fire” (Alexandrov, “Nabokov and Gumilev” 430).

Por último, la novela alude a Kjudasevich. Bethea comenta que “the subtle, sustaining kinship between Khodasevich and Nabokov is one of the great stories of Russian émigré literature of the interwar period” (452). Esta amistad se basaba en el legado del simbolismo y en la admiración a Pushkin, entre otras cosas. Algunos críticos reconocen como prototipo de Koncheyev a Kjudasevich, aunque Nabokov en su prólogo de *The Gift* dejó claro que “it is rather in Koncheyev, as well as in another incidental character, the novelist Vladimirov, that I distinguished odds and ends of myself” (8). No olvidemos que, aparte de un Koncheyev real —que no tiene nada que ver con el poeta Sirin— hay otro Koncheyev, creado por la mente de Fyodor. Éste último presenta unas ideas artísticas de Kjudasevich. El texto además alude en diferentes ocasiones a la poesía de Kjudasevich. Por ejemplo, la incapacidad de Chernyshevski de ver la belleza se manifiesta en su

incapacidad de ver las estrellas: “he...could see only four out of seven stars of the Great Bear” (197). Esta imagen alude al poema “Estrellas” (1925) de Kiodasevich. Otra alusión más evidente la encontramos en la escena con los bañistas en el lago: “he saw with revulsion the crumpled, twisted, deformed by life’s nor’easter, more or less naked or more or less clothed —the latter were the more terrible— bodies of bathers stirring on the dirty-grey sand” (306). La escena alude al poema “De veraneo” (1923). Vemos, pues, que Nabokov reconstruye la literatura rusa y las relaciones literarias de su país, dejando claras sus preferencias y sus críticas.

## Conclusiones

Tras el estudio intertextual se ha visto que las obras clásicas de la literatura rusa representan una fuente de temas, métodos y referencias para Nabokov, que reproduce una familia literaria y en esta jerarquía familiar todos ocupan sus puestos. Estas posiciones no son generalmente reconocidas, sino que son asignadas por el autor de la novela. Pushkin aparece como señal de que su legado jamás podrá ser borrado de la literatura rusa. Encontramos a casi todos los escritores y poetas de los años sesenta. Nabokov separa a Chernyshevski gradualmente de los demás escritores para aislar la literatura rusa del movimiento de liberación en su manifestación más extrema. Es decir, Nabokov intenta quitar la culpa a la literatura en la preparación de la revolución bolchevique.

Nuestro estudio pone de relieve que el juego literario le permite a Nabokov interpretar críticamente la obra de sus predecesores, de sus contemporáneos y la suya propia. Esta interpretación se realiza a través de la intertextualidad. Aquí el juego literario cumple unas funciones determinadas. La más importante es la organización de las relaciones creativas entre el lector y el autor en el proceso de la adivinación y, al mismo tiempo, la creación de la nueva concepción estética del mundo. La comprensión de la cultura rusa en toda su complejidad y variedad nos da acceso a la novela. Una vez comprendida, tal y como lo desea Nabokov, la novela nos abre la puerta hacia su concepción del arte y de la literatura y nos permite formar parte de las relaciones privilegiadas entre el lector y el autor.



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# **CULTURAL STUDIES**



# **“LORCA GRAVES:” PRESENCIAS DE LA LITERATURA HISPANA EN LA OBRA DE BOB DYLAN**

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## **Resumen**

Este artículo analiza la presencia en la obra del cantautor estadounidense Bob Dylan (1941--) de una serie de motivos y referencias provenientes de la cultura hispanohablante. La obra dylaniana ha gozado desde hace tiempo de una recepción positiva en el universo hispano; a la vez, se demuestra aquí que tanto sus canciones como sus escritos en prosa evidencian, entre sus múltiples influencias, una considerable impronta española e hispanoamericana. En particular, se examinan varias intertextualidades literarias, sobre todo relativamente a Federico García Lorca (1898-1936), cuya conjugación de lo popular y lo surrealista anticipa aspectos de la poética de Dylan.

**Palabras clave:** Bob Dylan, Federico García Lorca, poética, popular, surrealista.

## **“LORCA GRAVES:” PRESENCES OF HISPANOPHONE LITERATURE IN THE WORK OF BOB DYLAN**

## **Abstract**

This article explores the presence in the work of the American singer-songwriter Bob Dylan (1941--) of a series of motifs and references drawn from Hispanophone culture. While Dylan's work has long been positively received in the Spanish-speaking world, his songs and prose writings are shown to bear, among their multiple influences, a considerable Spanish and Latin American imprint. In particular, a number of literary intertextualities are examined, specially with particular reference to Federico García Lorca (1898-1936), whose

combination of the popular and the surrealist is shown to anticipate aspects of Dylan's poetics.

**Keywords:** Bob Dylan, Federico García Lorca, poetics, popular, surrealist.

“... in Spain, back where it all started”  
Bob Dylan, 2004

## I

Puede no ser de conocimiento general que dentro de la obra del célebre cantautor norteamericano Bob Dylan (1941--) existe una alusión directa a Federico García Lorca. Efectivamente, en *Tarantula*, su novela de 1966, nos encontramos con una secuencia pesadillesca en la que Dylan nos habla de “babies in Lorca graves” (56). Este detalle debe alertarnos no sólo a la fuerte *literariedad* del trabajo del músico, sino a su interés, real y repetidas veces demostrada, por el mundo hispano. Se sabe que la obra dylaniana ha sido estudiada desde el punto de vista literario con mayor intensidad que la de cualquier otro cantautor,<sup>1</sup> al menos de habla inglesa. Ha sido propuesto cada año desde 1996 como candidato al Premio Nobel de Literatura<sup>2</sup> y, en España, fue galardonado en 2007 con el Premio Príncipe de Asturias, en la sección de las Artes. Su obra creativa - compuesta por más de 500 canciones, dos obras en prosa (*Tarantula* y la memoria *Chronicles Volume I* de 2004)<sup>3</sup> - y una serie de textos ocasionales (notas de contraportada o folleto, etc.), — está jalonada de referencias literarias, entre las cuales, como veremos en este estudio, no faltan alusiones a la cultura y literatura del mundo hispano, y, muy particularmente, al universo poético lorquiano.

Dylan ha sido desde siempre una figura muy apreciada y valorada en los países de habla castellana.<sup>4</sup> Son múltiples los elementos que ratifican este fenómeno: sus repetidas giras de concierto en España e Hispanoamérica (ha actuado en México, Argentina, Uruguay y Chile);

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<sup>1</sup> Véanse, por ejemplo: Day (1988); Gray (2000); Scobie (2004); Dettmar (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Véase Ball (1997).

<sup>3</sup> Están prometidos dos volúmenes más de *Chronicles*.

<sup>4</sup> Para el análisis de varios aspectos de este fenómeno, véase García (2000) y Rollason (2007).

las numerosas interpretaciones y adaptaciones de sus canciones en lengua castellana (como también en catalán, gallego o hasta asturiano); profusos y amplios reportajes desde hace decenios en la prensa hispanohablante; traducciones al castellano de sus letras y sus obras en prosa; libros dedicados a su vida y obra, tanto originales como traducciones; revistas especializadas tipo *fanzine*; e incluso seminarios universitarios consagrados a su obra, sea en España (Sevilla),<sup>5</sup> Bolivia (Cochabamba) o Perú (Lima). Tamaña multiplicidad de enlaces entre Dylan y el mundo hispano nunca podría ser resumida en el espacio de un sólo artículo, y en el presente trabajo, por ende, aparte de comentar algunas de las referencias dylanianas al mundo hispano en general, nos centraremos en el aspecto específicamente literario.

## II

Abundan las alusiones al universo hispanoparlante en la obra dylaniana, tanto en su cancionero como en sus obras en prosa. Para comenzar con *Tarantula*, en ese libro se destacan toda una serie de referencias, aparte de la lorquiana ya mencionada. En las páginas de la novela aparecen, por lo peninsular, Sancho Panza (101), el flamenco (58), las malagueñas (61), Goya (73), Pablo Casals (135) e incluso, y siniestramente, el General Franco (51). En lo que respecta a lo hispanoamericano, el comienzo del libro presenta una mención de “el dorado” (1)<sup>6</sup> y más tarde se evoca la urbe de “Mexico City” (105). La misma narrativa contiene unas secuencias con frases intercaladas en español, centrados en un personaje femenino del nombre de María, sin duda de procedencia mexicana. *Chronicles*, por su parte, proporciona referencias a, nuevamente, el flamenco (101) y (dos veces) Goya (90, 269), además de Velázquez (269), El Greco (269) y (tres veces) Picasso (55, 269, 275; una de estas alusiones se refiere a *Guernica*), y en temas del otro lado de la frontera, menciones de Cortés y Moctezuma (109) y del trabajo del antropólogo de lo mexicano Carlos Castaneda (114). Destaquemos también una llamativa autocomparación con Colón:

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<sup>5</sup> El Ciclo de Conferencias de Bob Dylan de la Universidad de Sevilla (organizado por el Colegio Mayor Hernández Colón) fue inaugurado en 2009. El presente texto reúne elementos del que fue presentado por su autor en abril de 2011, en el marco de la tercera edición del referido ciclo.

<sup>6</sup> Minúsculas de Dylan.

“When I left home, I was like Columbus going off into the desolate Atlantic. I’d done that and I’d been to the ends of the earth—to the water’s edge—and now I was back in Spain, back where it all started, in the court of the Queen with a half-glazed expression on my face, and even the wisp of a beard” (108).

Añadamos, siempre en el campo de la prosa dylaniana, que en las notas de contraportada del álbum *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965), Dylan se imagina en una peña musical en Puerto Vallarta, ciudad balnearia del estado de Jalisco, en la costa pacífica mexicana (“at this hootenanny down in puerto vallarta, mexico”).<sup>7</sup>

En el cancionero dylaniano,<sup>8</sup> son más destacables las alusiones latinoamericanas, siendo las que parecen apuntar a España más generalizadas o indefinidas. Así, la célebre canción de 1964 “Boots of Spanish Leather”, si bien evoca a Madrid y Barcelona, trata en realidad de un viaje marítimo entre Estados Unidos y Europa que cuando finaliza la canción ni siquiera ha terminado, y cuyas célebres botas de cuero menos tienen que ver con España que con la canción tradicional “Black Jack Davey”, la cual Dylan había de grabar lustros después en el álbum *Good As I Been To You* (1992). Señálese, no obstante, la referencia histórica, en “With God On Our Side”, otra canción de 1964, a “the Spanish-American war” de los años 1890, episodio conflictivo del historial de las relaciones hispano-estadounidenses y presentado por Dylan como constitutivo de la mentalidad nacional.

En relación a lo latinoamericano, hagamos hincapié en primer lugar en una muy significativa crítica al imperialismo económico norteamericano, en el marco de la industria minera en “North Country Blues” (1964): “They complained in the East / That you’re payin’ too high / They say that your ore it ain’t worth diggin’ / That it’s much cheaper down in the South American towns / Where the miners work almost for nothin’”. Este registro de reclamación geopolítica regresa en “Union Sundown” (1983), canción en que Dylan denuncia la política

<sup>7</sup> Minúsculas de Dylan.

<sup>8</sup> En general, citamos las letras de Dylan a partir del libro *Lyrics* 1962-2001. Para canciones no incluidas en *Lyrics*, las citas se transcriben desde las grabaciones oficiales. Para la mayor parte de las canciones, citamos el año en que salió el álbum que las incluía, puesto que esa fecha corresponde con la de su grabación. Allí donde existe un intervalo entre grabación y divulgación oficial en disco, proporcionamos más detalles.



estadounidense de desplazar la producción a economías emergentes o aún terciaristas, entre otras latinoamericanas: “Well, that job that you used to have / They gave it to somebody in El Salvador”; “The car I drive is a Chevrolet / It was put together down in Argentina / By a guy making thirty cents a day”. El cancionero exhibe otras referencias argentinas: el tango aparece de forma implícita en “The Groom’s Still Waiting at the Altar” (1981): “She could be respectably married / Or running a whorehouse in Buenos Aires”, ya que se considera que el famoso género musical tuvo sus orígenes en los lupanares de la ciudad porteña. “Angelina”, otra canción de la misma época,<sup>9</sup> reincide en lo argentino, con fuertes connotaciones políticas: “Tell me, tall men, where would you like to be overthrown / Maybe down in Jerusalem or Argentina?”. Si esa línea parece referirse a la emigración judía hacia Argentina en la época nazi, en la misma estrofa, en el verso “There’s a black Mercedes rollin’ through the combat zone”, podríamos tener una alusión a las dictaduras sudamericanas de los años 70.

Sin embargo, la tónica dominante en el universo hispanoamericano dylaniano la proporciona México. La primera canción que habla del país vecino es “Farewell”, grabada en 1963.<sup>10</sup> Aquí, el narrador se propone un viaje que lo llevará a parar en “a town ... / Down in the old Mexican plains”, del cual afirma: “They say the people are all friendly there / And all they ask of you is your name”. Otras alusiones, más ambiguas, corresponden a una noción de México connotando frontera, mestizaje e incerteza. Así, en “Brownsville Girl” (1986), canción cuyo título evoca la frontera tejano-mexicana de Brownsville/Matamoros, la protagonista femenina se esfuma en tierras mexicanas para nunca más volver: “Way down in Mexico you went to find a doctor and you never came back”; mientras “Something is Burning, Baby” (1985) ofrece el verso “I’ve had the Mexico City blues since the last hairpin curve”, creándose una directa intertextualidad con *Mexico City Blues*, poemario de Jack Kerouac.<sup>11</sup> Otras alusiones asocian al país azteca con lo gótico y lo terrorífico, como en una de las variantes de la canción “Dignity”: “Stranger stares down into the light / From a platinum window in the Mexican night / Searching

<sup>9</sup> Grabada en 1981, publicada en 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Canción sólo publicada oficialmente en 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Según su biógrafo Robert Shelton, Dylan afirmó a Allen Ginsberg en 1975 que leyó el poemario de Kerouac de joven, en Minneapolis (455).

every blood-sucking thing in sight / For Dignity”.<sup>12</sup> En cambio, México aparece como lugar de tópicos espirituales: “Don’t keep me knockin’ about / from Mexico to Tibet” (“True Love Tends to Forget”, 1978), o, alternativamente, de liberación apocalíptica, en “Caribbean Wind”: “And them Caribbean winds that blow / From Nassau down to Mexico / Fanning the flames in the furnace of desire”.<sup>13</sup> La más reciente alusión mexicana, en “If You Ever Go to Houston” (2008), es más bien histórica y política, recordando la guerra entre Estados Unidos y México de los años 1840: “Well, I know these streets / I’ve been here before / I nearly got killed here / During the Mexican War”. En último lugar, hay que destacar dos canciones directamente ubicadas en México: “Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues” (1966), narrativa tristemente profética de violencia y corrupción en la fronteriza Ciudad Juárez, y “Romance in Durango” (1975), historia de amor y muerte localizada en el estado mexicano de ese nombre; y, finalmente, el espeluznante “Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)” (1978), enigmática evocación de una incierta frontera. A veces, la crítica (como en el caso de Adam Lifshey y sus comentarios de 2009)<sup>14</sup> ha acusado la representación mexicana de Dylan de dejarse llevar por los estereotipos y los tópicos, alegaciones que, sin duda, merecerían un largo debate. Sea como fuere, no cabe duda de que las referencias a México y otros elementos del gran universo hispano, además de muy diversas y variopintas, destacan como una constante en la obra del cantautor.

### III

Las evocaciones dylanianas de lo hispano no se limitan al campo de la generalización: elementos de la literatura castellanohablante pueden haber incidido directamente en el proceso creador del estadounidense. Quien busca tales huellas literarias puede señalar, en primer lugar, una visible presencia cervantina, a la cual se puede agregar la posible

<sup>12</sup> Esta canción, compuesta en 1989, existe en tres versiones, cada una con variantes significativas en la letra: una que apareció por primera vez en *Greatest Hits III* (1995) y dos incluidas más tarde en *Tell-Tale Signs: The Bootleg Series Vol. 8* (2008).

<sup>13</sup> Grabada en 1981, publicada en 1985.

<sup>14</sup> Este crítico contrasta negativamente la representación dylaniana con lo que considera ser una visión más equitativa y más libre de tópicos en las canciones en tema mexicano de Bruce Springsteen.

impronta de Tirso de Molina y, desde tierras argentinas, de Jorge Luis Borges y de la epopeya gauchesca de José Hernández, *Martín Fierro*.

En las páginas de *Tarantula*, como hemos visto, Dylan no duda en evocar a una figura tan cervantina como Sancho Panza. El *dylanita* español José Manuel Ruiz Rivero, en un artículo en el que plantea una serie de paralelismos con el *Quijote*, sugiere que la secuencia del mismo *Tarantula* que comienza con “here lies bob dylan” (118-20)<sup>15</sup> pudo haber sido inspirada por el epitafio prematuro consagrado al protagonista cervantino (“Aquí yace el caballero ..”) como apéndice a la primera parte de la novela (Cervantes, I, LII, 595; Ruiz Rivero, 2005, 30). Añadamos que tanto Dylan como Cervantes, buenos intertextualistas los dos, se han aprovechado de la misma cita de Virgilio, sacada del sexto libro de la *Eneida* —Dylan en “Lonesome Day Blues” (2001): “I’m going to spare the defeated, boys, I’m going to speak to the crowd / I’m going to teach peace to the conquered / I’m gonna tame the proud”,<sup>16</sup> y Cervantes en la segunda parte del *Quijote*: “para enseñarle cómo se han de perdonar los sujetos y supeditar y acocer a los soberbios” (Cervantes, II, XIX, 781). A la vez, en una de las variantes de la canción “Dignity” damos con estas muy llamativas líneas: “Don Juan was talking to Don Miguel / Standing outside the gates of hell”.<sup>17</sup> Aquí, la figura de Don Juan podría ser o el Don Giovanni de la ópera de Mozart o el personaje primordial de la obra dramática *El Burlador de Sevilla* de Tirso de Molina, texto fundador del gran mito (pues en ambas versiones el seductor se ve consignado al final al infierno). A la vez, no es de descartar que su interlocutor Don Miguel pudiera ser nadie menos que el hidalgo Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra —por cierto, como creador de Alonso Quijano, referencia muy idónea en una canción dedicada al tema de la *dignidad*.

Si desde la Edad de Oro de Cervantes y Tirso emprendemos viaje a la lejana Argentina, descubriremos otras posibles analogías literarias con la obra de Dylan. En primer lugar, el largo poema

<sup>15</sup> Minúsculas de Dylan.

<sup>16</sup> Virgilio, *Eneida* (*Aeneid*), Libro VI, 851-853; traducción de Jackson, 108: “Roman, be this thy care - these thine arts - to bear dominion over the nations and to impose the law of peace, to spare the humbled and to war down the proud!” (“Hombre de Roma, que sea éste su cuidado, que sean éstas sus artes — ejercer dominio sobre las naciones e imponer la ley de la paz, ser misericordioso con los humildes y declarar la guerra a los orgullosos”). Cf. Thomas (2007), 30-32.

<sup>17</sup> Esta versión de “Dignity” es una de las dos variantes incluidas en *Tell-Tale Signs: The Bootleg Series Volume 8* (2008).

narrativo que generalmente se considera como la epopeya nacional argentina, *El gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872), de José Hernández, narra, en un simulacro de lenguaje popular (el autor no era gaucho) que exhibe algún paralelismo con el registro lingüístico dylaniano, una historia igualmente no sin analogías con ciertos temas cultivados por el norteamericano. El héroe es un gaucho que, después de ser reclutado en el ejército argentino, regresa a su tierra para descubrir que ha perdido su rancho, y desde entonces vive como forajido —figura, como se sabe, emblemática para la imaginación dylaniana, como así lo demuestran canciones tales como “Outlaw Blues” (1965) o “John Wesley Harding” (1968). Aquí es llamativa la descubierta, de parte del *dylanita* estadounidense Scott Warmuth (divulgada por la Red en 2008), de que la frase “a pile of sins to pay for”, de la canción “Nettie Moore” (2006), vendría de la traducción de *Martín Fierro* realizada en 1960 por Walter Owen.<sup>18</sup>

El poema de Hernández fue analizado en detalle por nadie menos que Jorge Luis Borges,<sup>19</sup> y tampoco faltan posibles enlaces entre la obra de Dylan y la del insigne fabulista argentino. Tanto Borges como Dylan se han fijado en la carrera de otro forajido, esta vez histórico, el estadounidense Billy the Kid —Dylan en *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973),<sup>20</sup> banda sonora compuesta por él para la homónima película de Sam Peckinpah, y Borges en un capítulo de su libro de 1935, *Historia universal de la infamia*. En otro registro, ambos escritores han especulado, de una forma más o menos hereje, en una posible inversión de papeles entre Jesús y Judas Iscariote —Dylan en la ya referida canción de 1964 “With God on our Side” (“But I can’t think for you / You’ll have to decide / Whether Judas Iscariot / Had God on his side”), y Borges en su relato de 1944, “Tres versiones de Judas”, en el cual especula sobre si, a fin de cuentas, “Dios ... eligió un ínfimo destino: fue Judas” (181).

<sup>18</sup> Véase Warmuth: <http://expectingrain.com/discussions/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=32746>, 27 noviembre 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Este libro fue co-escrito por Borges con Margarita Guerrero.

<sup>20</sup> Dylan también participó como actor, en un papel menor, en esta película, realizada en Durango (México).

#### IV

No obstante, se puede afirmar con certeza casi absoluta que si hay un escritor de lengua castellana que obligatoriamente debería ser vinculado a Dylan, éste es Federico García Lorca (1898-1936). Podemos suponer que desde sus primeros años de cantor Dylan ha sido consciente de la obra del genial poeta y dramaturgo andaluz y de su trágico fallecimiento en Granada a manos del verdugo fascista, en 1936. Sabemos que en 1966, Allen Ginsberg le obsequió al cantautor una cajita de libros de poesía de varios autores, entre los cuales estaba García Lorca,<sup>21</sup> siendo del mismo año el ya citado pasaje de *Tarantula* en el que Dylan habla de “Lorca graves”. Incluso existe la posibilidad de que el título de la enigmática novela de Dylan pudiera ser lorquiana, pues en su poema “Las seis cuerdas” (de *Poema del Cante Jondo*, 1931), Federico urde un paralelismo entre guitarra y ... tarántula: “La guitarra, ... como la tarántula / teje una gran estrella / para cazar suspiros”.

En la poesía y prosa lorquiana destacan una serie de binomios o aparejamientos que apuntan hacia unos sugerentes paralelismos con el imaginario dylaniano: luna y viento, gitanos y negros, tradicionalismo popular y modernidad surrealista, cultura alta y cultura del pueblo. Como acertadamente nota su crítico Miguel García-Posada, la obra del granadino se caracteriza por la coexistencia de “lo muy popular y lo muy culto” (27), fusión también determinante en el universo de Dylan. Puede plantearse un paralelismo, en el plano de las influencias, entre la tradición *blues* que tanto ha marcado a Dylan y el patrimonio andaluz del flamenco que tiene una presencia semejante en la obra de un Lorca que, como se sabe, tuvo algo de flamencólogo y conferenció sobre temas como el cante jondo, las canciones de cuna españolas y el duende. En su conferencia sobre la importancia histórica el cante jondo, el poeta calificó el género andaluz como “una de las creaciones populares más fuertes del mundo”, así comprometiéndose, como el Dylan intérprete de viejas baladas, con la tradición popular (226). Por otro lado, en la charla que dedicó al duende, opinó Lorca que “España está en todos tiempos movida por el duende. Como país de música y danzas milenarias donde el duende exprime limones de madrugada, y como país de muerte” (333-34). Esta identificación afectiva entre tierra y música genera sugestivos parentescos entre el sur de España y el sur de Estados Unidos,

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<sup>21</sup> Véase Scobie, 194.

recordándonos la gran canción dylaniana “Blind Willie McTell”,<sup>22</sup> en la cual el cantante consagra al espíritu del blues como divinidad tutelar de una tierra perdida: “Seen the arrow on the doorpost, / Saying ‘This land is condemned’”. Si la relación entre Lorca y Dylan parece no haber sido explorada en los medios académicos españoles, entre los *dylanitas* podemos felicitar a José Manuel Ruiz Rivero, a quien ya nos referimos en el marco cervantino, por dos breves trabajos que publicó en 2002, en los que esboza una serie de paralelismos temáticos y pistas para una futura investigación. Parece cierto que se puede constatar una serie de índices de sensibilidades parecidas, a las que se suman ciertas muy posibles influencias concretas en determinadas obras de Dylan, sobre todo las de su primera madurez.

En 1928 fue publicado *Romancero Gitano*, poemario en el cual figuraron títulos como “Romance de la Luna, Luna” o “Romance sonámbulo”, apuntando directamente hacia el género medieval y popular del *romance*. Otras colecciones del andaluz que incluyen poemas o temas de posible interés dylaniano son: *Libro de Poemas* (1921); *Canciones (1921-1924)* (1927), libro que su título coloca en la frontera entre poesía y música; el también llamativamente titulado *Poema del Cante Jondo* (1931); y, sobre todo, *Poeta en Nueva York* (escrito en 1929 y 1930 y publicado de forma póstuma en 1940), poemario cuyo título yergue un puente entre lo español y lo norteamericano. El volumen de Federico, compuesto en Nueva York, Vermont y (en el viaje de regreso) Cuba,<sup>23</sup> fue publicado por primera vez en la misma Nueva York, en una edición bilingüe. Está patente la influencia de las letras norteamericanas en la “Oda a Walt Whitman”, mientras las cartas que escribió Lorca durante su estancia también evidencian un vivo interés por la obra de Edgar Allan Poe.<sup>24</sup> Se trata aquí de dos grandes escritores estadounidenses que han dejado sus huellas igualmente en la escritura de Dylan. Federico evoca al “vidente Edgar Poe” en la conferencia que dictó sobre *Poeta en New York* en Madrid en 1932 (345), y sabemos que se entusiasmó en particular por dos poemas de ese autor que también figuran entre los preferidos de Dylan — “Annabel Lee” (que fue leído en voz alta por el cantautor en la edición del 3 de enero de 1997 de su programa

<sup>22</sup> Grabada en 1983, publicada en 1991.

<sup>23</sup> Para la estancia de Lorca en Cuba, véase Gibson (1989), 282-302.

<sup>24</sup> Véase la edición de *Poeta en Nueva York* de Christopher Maurer (1990), la cual, en una nota, menciona “[Lorca’s] fascination with ‘Annabel Lee’ and ‘The Bells’” (186n).

radiofónico *Theme Time Radio Hour*)<sup>25</sup> y “The Bells”, poema que Dylan recuerda, en *Chronicles*, haber intentando musicar durante su propia estancia en Nueva York (37).<sup>26</sup>

Otro enlace curioso entre Dylan y Lorca viene proporcionado por el poeta y cantautor canadiense Leonard Cohen, rival profesional pero a la vez admirador y buen conocido de Bob Dylan. En 1988, Cohen incluyó “Take This Waltz”, su propia traducción de “Pequeño vals vienés”, de *Poeta en Nueva York*, en su álbum *I’m Your Man*. Cohen es un devoto incondicional del vate andaluz. Una hija suya incluso lleva el nombre de Lorca, y Cohen participó en 1986 en las conmemoraciones oficiales en Granada del medio centenario del martirio de Federico (Dorman y Rawlins 36, 353). El eje Lorca-Cohen-Dylan es, seguramente, un relato de tres poetas. Es de señalar, igualmente, el hecho de que otra artista asociada con Dylan, Joan Baez, también ha interpretado obras de Lorca, concretamente, en su álbum *Baptism* (1968), dos textos extraídos, traducidos al inglés, de su último poemario, *Divan del Tamarit*,<sup>27</sup> “Casida del llanto” y “Gacela de la muerte oscura”.<sup>28</sup>

Las aficiones creadoras de Lorca rebasaban el área de la literatura para abarcar la música: de niño, daba la impresión de que acabaría no como escritor sino músico. Tenía conocimientos profundos de la música tanto culta como popular (era gran amigo de Manuel de Falla), tocaba con maestría la guitarra flamenca y componía piezas para guitarra: una composición lorquiana, “Zorongo gitano”, fue grabada en 1972 por nadie menos que Paco de Lucía.<sup>29</sup> El poeta también era pianista: en 1931 grabó, acompañando a la cantante Encarnación López Júlvez (“La Argentinita”), un conjunto de diez canciones populares españolas, no sólo andaluzas sino representativas de la diversidad peninsular, que había recopilado y arreglado él mismo. Este material, comercializado en 5 discos 78, incluso tuvo éxito comercial en su momento, y fue reeditado en CD en 1994 por el sello Sonifolk, bajo el título *Colección de canciones populares españolas*.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Véase el archivo del sitio Expecting Rain, <http://home.online.no/~rainy/archives2007a.shtml>, entrada de esa fecha.

<sup>26</sup> Para un análisis comparado de Dylan y Poe, véase Rollason (2009).

<sup>27</sup> Escrito en 1934, publicado póstumamente en 1940.

<sup>28</sup> Traducidas por el poeta británico Stephen Spender, en colaboración con, respectivamente, J.L. Gili y Peter Levi.

<sup>29</sup> Este tema figura en el CD de compilación *Entre Dos Aguas* (Philips, 1981).

<sup>30</sup> Para un estudio detallado de estas grabaciones, véase Vaquero (1994). La reedición en CD contiene doce músicas, añadiendo dos temas a los diez originalmente comercializados.



Por otro lado, la obra lorquiana ha fascinado y sigue fascinando a los músicos andaluces: buen número de sus poemas se han convertido en elementos de referencia del cancionero flamenco (Josephs y Caballero 60-61). Notemos, en este marco, los dos CDs consagrados total o parcialmente a Lorca de parte del grande del flamenco Enrique Morente, fallecido en 2010: *Omega* (1996) y *Lorca* (1998). En particular, *Omega*, CD cuyo folleto lo anuncia como “la visión de Enrique Morente sobre *Poeta en Nueva York* de Federico García Lorca”, se compone de arreglos de textos lorquianos, en su mayoría poemas o extractos de poemas de aquel libro, más tres canciones de Leonard Cohen traducidas al español, y, curiosamente, una *reespañolización* de la versión coheniana de “Pequeño vals vienés”, manteniendo el arreglo de Cohen pero restituyendo el texto original.

El periplo estadounidense de Lorca en 1929 y 1930 no sólo desembocó en *Poeta en Nueva York*, sino también le hizo conocer una serie de géneros musicales norteamericanos, sobre todo negros, del jazz al góspel. El poemario evidencia los sentimientos de solidaridad que despertó en el poeta la marginada comunidad negra, como en sus evocaciones de Harlem, barrio que también inspiró la canción dylaniana “Spanish Harlem Incident” (1964): en su posterior conferencia-recital dedicada a *Poeta en Nueva York*, Lorca califica a la comunidad afroamericana como “lo más espiritual y lo más delicado de aquel mundo” (346) — así sin duda viéndola como equivalente de la comunidad gitana en Andalucía. Aquí, obviamente, recordaremos en paralelo la enorme influencia en la obra de Dylan del blues — sin olvidar el góspel<sup>31</sup> — y sus canciones de solidaridad interracial como “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” (1964), “George Jackson” (1971), o “Hurricane” (1975). En una carta a su familia, Lorca cuenta cómo, en una fiesta organizada por la escritora negra Nella Larsen (fue la única persona de raza blanca presente), el cantar y bailar de los afroamericanos le recordaban el cante jondo, cómo escuchaba canciones *góspel* interpretadas por un joven, y cómo él mismo se instaló delante del piano para dar un recital improvisado de música andaluza, para gran goce de sus amigos negros.<sup>32</sup> Tampoco le resultó ajeno al poeta el ambiente musical blanco estadounidense, ya que también interpretó material peninsular para audiencias blancas,

<sup>31</sup> Véanse sus álbumes *Slow Train Coming* (1979) y *Saved* (1980).

<sup>32</sup> Lorca, carta a su familia 14 de julio 1929.



y se sabe que hubo un evento neoyorquino en el que Federico “shared attention with a singer of American folk songs named Jack Niles”.<sup>33</sup> Se trata de John Jacob Niles (1892-1980), cantor que ha sido identificado como fuente dylaniana, con sus versiones de canciones como “Love Henry”, vieja balada que, decenios después, Dylan interpretaría en su álbum *World Gone Wrong* (1993).<sup>34</sup> El mismo Dylan recuerda en *Chronicles* como en algún momento de su estancia en Nueva York escuchaba las grabaciones de Niles, en términos que sin duda hubieran entusiasmado a Federico: “I listened a lot to a John Jacob Niles record, too. Niles was nontraditional, but he sang traditional songs ... he hammered away at some harplike instrument and sang in a bone chilling soprano voice” (239).

Más allá de todo esto, hay buenas razones para plantear una presencia directa, substancial y fecunda de Federico García Lorca en la poética de Bob Dylan. Si bien la mención de Lorca en *Tarantula* es de 1966, la evidencia interna sugiere que los conocimientos lorquianos del cantautor son algo anteriores a esa fecha. La combinación en la obra del andaluz de elementos tradicionalistas y vanguardistas, la tensión entre el universo de *Poema del Cante Jondo* y el de *Poeta en Nueva York*, encuentran su contrapartida en un Dylan cuya producción también acusa ambas tendencias. En términos formales, si Lorca nos ofrece ejemplos modernos del antiquísimo género del romance, el joven Dylan fue capaz de componer algo tan próximo a las viejas baladas angloescocesas como “Seven Curses”;<sup>35</sup> y por otro lado, el ya maduro Dylan propuso, en el álbum *Under the Red Sky* (1990), una reescritura de otro género popular, el de las *nursery rhymes* o poemillas para niños, en moldes que se asemejan a las canciones de cuna *para adultos* del poemario lorquiano *Canciones*.<sup>36</sup> Más concretamente, algunas de las más fuertes imágenes dylanianas de mediados de los 60 se parecen a otras de Lorca, si bien en ningún momento se podría hablar de transposición o imitación de índole directa, tratándose más bien de un método poético en común. Destaquemos, de todos modos, algunas semejanzas más que

<sup>33</sup> Maurer, nota a carta de Lorca a su familia, ca. 24 julio 1929, en Lorca, ed. Maurer, *Poet in New York* (1990), 219n (citando a Mildred Adams, García Lorca: *Playwright and Poet*, New York: Braziller, 1977, 125-126).

<sup>34</sup> Véase Gray (2000), 348, 773.

<sup>35</sup> Grabada en 1963, publicada en 1991.

<sup>36</sup> Para *Under the Red Sky* y la influencia de las *nursery rhymes*, véase Gray (2000), 634-702.

curiosas. La imagen que aparece en la canción dylaniana de 1966, “Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window?”, “trying to peel the moon and expose it”, tiene un llamativo antecedente en el poema “Si mis manos pudieran deshojar”, fechado en 1919, de la primera colección de Lorca, *Libro de Poemas* (1921) que concluye con los versos: “Si mis dedos pudieran / deshojar la luna”. Incluso esta misma imagen aparece en la prosa de ambos autores, pues en *Tarantula* redescubrimos las palabras “trying to peel the moon” (67), mientras en la conferencia lorquiana sobre el duende nos topamos con, precisamente, la frase “la luna pelada” (334). Efectivamente, la luna, así como el viento, aparecen como símbolos clave en la obra de Federico, y es el mismo poeta quien los vincula directamente, como “dos mitos inventados”, en su conferencia dedicada a *Romancero Gitano*, evocando en primera línea los dos textos que abren el poemario, “Romance de la Luna, Luna” y “Preciosa y el Aire” (361). Son, igualmente, símbolos primordiales en la obra dylaniana. Para la luna, citemos un verso como “the midnight moon is on the rise” (“Dark Eyes”, 1985), o, en lo que podría ser una directa evocación de Lorca, “the Spanish moon is rising on the hill” (“Abandoned Love”<sup>37</sup>); para el viento, incluso a los que nada más saben de Dylan les suena, y con fuerza, su celeberrimo “Blowin’ in the Wind” (1962), mientras los más instruidos se acordarán de versos como “Turn, turn to the rain and the wind” (“Percy’s Song”<sup>38</sup>) o “What makes the wind want to blow tonight?” (“Shot of Love”, 1981).

Aparece igualmente en las dos obras el tema emblemático del gitano. Para Lorca, esta figura es un ser de una dignidad elemental — como opina en la conferencia de *Romancero Gitano*, “lo más elevado, lo más profundo, más aristocrático de mi país” (358) — compromiso traído a colación con suma elocuencia en un fulgurante poema como “Romance de la Guardia Civil española”, con su inolvidable “ciudad de los gitanos”. En la obra de Dylan, tenemos canciones como “Went to See the Gypsy” (1970), “Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)” (1978), donde aparece “a gypsy with a broken flag and a flashing ring”, o la ya mencionada “Spanish Harlem Incident” (1964), que retrata a una “gypsy gal” del epónimo barrio neoyorquino. Esta canción, efectivamente, podría revelarse como mas *española* de lo que se suele pensar, pues acusa una muy posible

<sup>37</sup> Grabada en 1975, publicada en 1985.

<sup>38</sup> Grabada en 1964, publicada en 1985.

influencia lorquiana: la gitana de Dylan, que anima una noche “pitch-black” con sus “rattling drums”, “pearly eyes” y “flashing diamond teeth”, podría ser la hermana de las seis gitanas bailadoras de la lorquiana “Danza (en el huerto de la petenera)” (de *Poema del cante jondo*): “En la noche del huerto, / sus dientes de nácar, / escriben la sombra / quemada”.

También parece haber huellas en Dylan de la fase abiertamente surrealista de Lorca. *Poeta en Nueva York* está escrito, por lo general, en un registro experimental de verso libre sin rimar que difiere radicalmente de las formas tradicionalistas que Federico había cultivado antes, con la prevalencia de líneas largas e irregulares en cierto modo parecidas a las que favorecía Dylan (aunque conservando la rima) en sus composiciones de mediados de los 60. Lo que más destaca, no obstante, es la fuerte semejanza en el empleo de imágenes surrealistas de parte de los dos. *Poeta en Nueva York* proporciona imágenes y versos que no desentonarían en el ambiente poético de los conocidos álbumes dylanianos *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965), *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) y *Blonde on Blonde* (1966). En “Norma y paraíso de los negros” salen a colación los versos: “azul donde el desnudo del viento va quebrando / los camellos sonámbulos de las nubes vacías”, que tienen su eco en el Dylan de “Gates of Eden” (1965): “Upon four-legged forest clouds / The cowboy angel rides”, o de “Ballad of a Thin Man” (del mismo año): “You walk into the room / Like a camel and then you frown”. Los siniestros “lumberjacks” que, en la misma canción, “get you facts when someone attacks your imagination” — y que reaparecen en la última secuencia de *Tarantula*, libro que termina con las palabras: “the lumberjacks are coming” (137) — también se prefiguran en el poema lorquiano “El Rey de Harlem”: “El leñador no sabe cuando expiran / los clamorosos árboles que cortan”. En “La aurora”, encontramos la perturbadora imagen: “A veces las monedas en enjambres furiosas / taladran y devoran abandonados niños”, la cual sugiere paralelismos con, otra vez, “Gates of Eden”: “curbs ‘neath holes where babies wail” e “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)” (1965): “money doesn’t talk, it swears”. Y como si todo esto no fuera suficiente, “Luna y panorama de los insectos” nos desvela los versos: “No se salva la gente de las zapaterías / ni los paisajes que se hacen música al encontrar las llaves oxidadas”, que resuenan en la oscuridad como si anticiparan a Dylan y sus “Visions of Johanna”

(1966), visiones en que “we see this empty cage now corrode” mientras “the harmonicas play the skeleton keys and the rain”.

Tampoco se limitan los paralelismos al período clásicamente surrealista de la obra dylaniana, pues *Poeta in New York* también nos brinda imágenes que sugieren otras de canciones anteriores o posteriores del norteamericano. Así, en el poema “Grito hacia Roma (desde la torre de la Chrysler Building)” encontramos: “No hay más que un millón de carpinteros / que hacen ataúdes sin cruz. / No hay más que un gentío de lamentos / que se abren las ropas en espera de la bala” — versos que anticipan el vendaval de imágenes de “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” (1963), canción donde el joven Dylan sueña con “a room full of men with their hammers a-blazin” y “ten thousand talkers whose tongues were all broken”. Regresando al poema “El Rey de Harlem”, localizamos más imágenes evocadoras en los versos: “El sol que destruye números y no ha cruzado nunca un sueño, / el tatuado sol que baja por el río / y muge seguido de caimanes” — los cuales, si una vez más apuntan hacia “Gates of Eden”, canción cuyo ángel cabalga “with his candle lit into the sun, though its glow is waxed and black” y cuyos bajeles lucen “tattooed sails”, prefiguran igualmente una canción dylaniana bien posterior, “Series of Dreams”, compuesta en 1987. En la versión de ese texto que aparece en *Lyrics 1962-2001* (si bien en ninguna de las dos grabaciones oficiales de la canción),<sup>39</sup> se nos refiere un sueño en el que, lorquianamente, “numbers were burning”. En resumen, parece casi indiscutible la afirmación de que el surrealismo poético de Lorca ha dejado huellas profundas en el proceso creativo del cantautor Dylan.

## V

En otro orden de cosas, se conoce perfectamente la orientación sexual del poeta granadino, y si bien la España de nuestros días se encuentra entre la decena de países de vanguardia que han legalizado el matrimonio gay y lesbiano, en ese mismo país en la época de Lorca, amar a gente del mismo sexo no era exactamente una opción cómoda, y aun menos en zona franquista a partir del malhadado 18 de julio de 1936. En este marco, de sexualidad *difícil* y clima de acoso y guerra,

<sup>39</sup> “Series of Dreams” aparece, en variantes distintas, en dos compilaciones: *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3* (1991) y *Tell-Tale Signs: The Bootleg Series Volume 8* (2008).

plantearemos ahora la hipótesis de que la excelente canción dylaniana “Standing in the Doorway” (del álbum *Time Out Of Mind*, de 1997) pueda esconder en su interior un recóndito homenaje al vate andaluz: no que su narrador sea literalmente un Lorca disfrazado, ni tampoco el *you* o destinatario de la narración, sino que se trata de la creación de un ambiente español, andaluz y lorquiano que se difunde a lo largo de la canción.

Fijémonos, desde esta óptica, en los versos: “I’m strummin’ on my gay guitar / Smokin’ a cheap cigar”. De entrada, el adjetivo *gay*, en este texto dylaniano de características lingüísticas más bien tradicionalistas si no arcaizantes, podría parecer tener su *viejo* significado de *alegre*. No obstante, la frase “gay guitar” podría, de forma alternativa, tener connotaciones metonímicas de la sexualidad de quien toca esa guitarra, pudiendo, así, apuntar al *guitarrista gay* (en la aceptación contemporánea) que fue Federico García Lorca. La canción contiene, igualmente, una serie de pormenores que sugieren a España, y máxime de Andalucía: “walking through the summer nights”, “under the midnight moon”, “the dark land of the sun”, e incluso “live my life on the square”, eventual evocación de la holgazana vida de plaza. La luna, ya lo sabemos, es la imagen lorquiana por excelencia, y el refrán “you left me standing in the doorway crying” podría recordar un lamento andaluz. Las palabras “Maybe they’ll get me and maybe they won’t” apuntan a un acosado, alguien que se sabe cazado y que teme que muy pronto lo alcanzarán sus verdugos — todos detalles que esbozan un eventual paralelismo con el trágico hado de Lorca. Para hablar de temas más genéricamente españoles, se puede aducir también que la línea “even if the flesh falls off my face” indica cierta temática gótica de cariz ibérico, de obsesión por las calaveras y la muerte. Pensemos aquí en Goya, artista, como hemos visto, valorado por Dylan;<sup>40</sup> o en un verso que aparece en una de las variantes de “Dignity”, “Death is standing in the doorway of life”,<sup>41</sup> que no sólo contiene en sí el título de la canción que nos ocupa, sino que evoca las inquietudes cadavéricas del mismo Francisco Goya y Lucientes o, también, de Federico García Lorca, ya que en la obra de ambas figuras españolas la Muerte nunca dista mucho.

<sup>40</sup> Véanse las alusiones a Goya, señaladas arriba, en *Tarantula* y *Chronicles*.

<sup>41</sup> Esta versión de “Dignity” es una de las dos variantes incluidas en *Tell-Tale Signs: The Bootleg Series Volume 8* (2008); es también en esta variante que figuran los personajes Don Juan y Don Miguel, arriba mencionados.

La canción “Standing in the Doorway” también luce unas connotaciones gitanas que encajan con lo lorquiano. El verso dylaniano “Eat when I’m hungry, drink when I’m dry” deriva, en primera instancia, de una canción tradicional, “Moonshiner” (tema que interpretó el mozo Dylan),<sup>42</sup> pero su origen más lejano estriba en la sabiduría de los gitanos. Encontramos, así, prácticamente las mismas palabras en la boca de un personaje gitano de la novela de 1823, *Quentin Durward*, de Walter Scott: “I eat when I am hungry, drink when I am thirsty, and have no other means of subsistence than chance throws in my way” (210). Si bien la canción de Dylan echa raíces en la tradición estadounidense del blues, siendo incluso su título uno recurrente en ese género,<sup>43</sup> por otra parte, y sobre todo si tenemos en cuenta las semejanzas que hemos identificado entre blues y duende, esta misma canción, culminando en la sentida línea “blues wrapped around my head” —cabeza de poeta obsesionado por el blues, como también podría serlo por el duende andaluz — bien podría enmarcar el debido homenaje de Dylan al universo de Federico García Lorca.

## VI

Nos cuenta Francisco García, en su libro *Mapas de carretera para el alma*, que el día 18 de abril de 1999 Dylan dio un concierto en Granada, ciudad conocida por el martirio de Federico, pero que a la vez es hoy día la base de la cada vez más conocida Fundación García Lorca, la cual se ubica desde 1995 en la casa-museo granadina y antiguo solar de la familia del poeta, La Huerta de San Vicente. En ese momento, fue Laura García Lorca, sobrina nieta del poeta y presidenta de la Fundación, quien entró en los bastidores antes de la actuación de Dylan, llevando en sus manos *la guitarra que antes tocaba el mismísimo Federico*, para que el cantautor la viera e incluso tocara en ella, antes de subir al escenario (García 153-54). Tan emocionante detalle nos sirve, desde luego, para recalcar la presencia de la sombra de Federico García Lorca en el universo dylaniano.

En aras de conclusión, esperamos haber demostrado en este trabajo que lo hispano actúa como una presencia significativa en la obra de

<sup>42</sup> Grabada en 1963, publicada en 1991.

<sup>43</sup> Existe una canción titulada “Standing in My Doorway Crying”, escrita y grabada por Jessie Mae Hemphill, cantante blues de Mississippi, en su álbum *She-Wolf* (1980).

Bob Dylan, tanto en su cancionero como en sus trabajos en prosa, y que, especialmente, García Lorca se encuentra como fértil presencia implícita en esa obra y como una más de las múltiples influencias que jalonan el canon dylaniano. Si, en términos relativos, Lorca se sitúa más en el ámbito de cultura de elite y Dylan más en el de la cultura popular, no es menos verdad que muchos elementos en la obra lorquiana se nutren de lo popular, mientras Dylan es notorio por haber acercado lo popular a lo culto. La presencia hispana y lorquiana en la obra dylaniana también tiende a desmentir cualquier noción de su obra como únicamente portadora de valores anglosajones o norteamericanos. En un momento en que la hispanidad está asumiendo su justo valor cultural en Estados Unidos y en el mundo, vale la pena recordar la simbiosis cultural que ha permitido que un icono estadounidense como Bob Dylan haya descubierto fuentes significativas para su proceso creativo, bajo la siempre fulgurante “Spanish moon”.

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# **VISUALIDADES *QUEER* EN LOS ESTUDIOS CULTURALES: CINE SUBALTERNO Y NEW YORK, LA CIUDAD PERMEABLE**

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## **Resumen**

Este artículo busca poner en diálogo la narrativa fílmica más reciente de John Cameron Mitchell con las teorías críticas que articulan la producción de identidad con la generación de espacialidades durante la primera década del siglo XXI en Estados Unidos en general y en New York en particular. Las propuestas epistemológicas de Deleuze para reformular la concepción espacial del conocimiento humano a través de multiplicidades se negocian con el trabajo teórico de Judith Butler sobre *gender performance* y *queer theory*, para dar lugar a una problematización de la *identidad subalterna* como forma de producción cultural y apostar por una espacialidad rizomática que cuestione las relaciones aceptadas de centro-periferia.

**Palabras clave:** estudios culturales, cine, queer, performance.

## ***QUEER* VISUALITIES IN CULTURAL STUDIES: SUBALTERN FILM AND NEW YORK AS PERMEABLE CITY**

## **Abstract**

This article seeks to put into dialogue John Cameron Mitchell's recent film narratives with the critical theory that articulates identity production and spatiality reformulation in New York City at the turn of the century. Gilles Deleuze's epistemological proposals to rewrite—through mechanisms of multiplicity—the spatial conceptualization of human knowledge are articulated in this article with Judith Butler's

studies on gender performance and queer theory. As a result, this article intends to demonstrate that queer visualities problematize the concept of *subaltern identity* as a tool for cultural production in order to favour rhizomic spatialities that question the center-periphery normalized structures.

**Keywords:** cultural studies, film, queer, performance.

Desde que Enrique Dussel (2005, 2007), Lévinas (2002) y Vattimo (2007) se enzarzaron en el diálogo en torno a la configuración paradigmática de la *transmodernidad*, se retomaron con nuevos alcances/recorridos las truncadas aproximaciones a las aporéticas formas de análisis propuestas por Foucault (1986, cf. Munt, 2008) (heterotopía) y Deleuze (1980) (rizoma) para tratar la espacialidad y la discursividad desde un debate de transgresión del binomio centro-periferia.<sup>1</sup> La disolución de la estructura básica del sistema moderno de pensamiento ha permitido el brote de espacialidades dispersas que tradicionalmente habían estado dictaminadas a sobrevivir en una suerte de periferia marginal, y éstas han caminado hacia una representación artística que ha adquirido la condición de madurez para otorgarles una postura de autocrítica paródica, de pastiche y de estética *camp* antisublime.

El cénit de esta consecución *espacial* se articula en la plasmación *performativa* de lo subalterno en la obra filmica de John Cameron Mitchell, y en particular en *Shortbus* (2006), ya que su deconstrucción del concepto urbano de la impermeabilidad, sustentado por una figura etérea de la sociología canónica y problematizado por una actitud *queer* del devenir ontológico post-urbano se postula como punto de partida de una espacialidad otra que cuestione la fundamentación teórica del sujeto. Con sus propuestas filmicas, el director de *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) propone una estructura espacial rizomática y no-jerárquica que desestabiliza las relaciones axiológicas establecidas por un sistema tradicional de exclusión y marginalización, y cuestiona, a partir del componente paródico de sus obras, la validez de las discursividades oficiales. Este estudio pretende discutir la articulación plástica de

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<sup>1</sup> Tal y como se entiende el “centre-periphery model” en Gordon Marshall. A Dictionary of Sociology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

esta teoría espacial con la estética permeable del discurso fílmico de Mitchell.

¿Qué es centro? ¿Qué es periferia? Si atendemos a la conceptualización cosmológica propuesta por Deleuze (1980) sobre el conocimiento humano y las *actuaciones* de éste en su entorno político, resulta difícil establecer una definición contrastiva diáfana para ambos conceptos. Aun podríamos ir más allá y afirmar a partir de la fenomenología que resultaría no sólo complicado, sino también contradictorio, poder defender la existencia de lo uno como opuesto absoluto de lo otro, ya que el cuestionamiento del primero implica una problematización mecánica del segundo y viceversa (Vesely 2004; cf. Brewer 2002). Al proponer el modelo del rizoma como forma constitutiva de la condición humana actual y de su arqueología epistemológica, Deleuze expande al ámbito de las espacialidades la suspicacia sobre los binarismos propios del racionalismo, y defiende un patrón paradigmático, un *episteme* paródico con el que se diluyen las otrora claras fronteras entre centro y periferia. Esta reformulada espacialidad, desde luego, atiende a planos de actuación en los que las líneas de fuga se imponen sobre los modelos lineales y jerárquicos, y hacen que prevalezca un molde de multiplicidad sobre un modelo de univocidad basado en la diferencia como mecanismo de poder y de hegemonía.

La era posmoderna se postula como la maquinaria geopolítica perfecta para destejer las propuestas de espacialidad estructurada. En un momento epistemológico en el que la cultura popular toma conciencia de clase y se equipara conceptual y metodológicamente con el canon cultural, se produce un conflicto identitario de proyección aporética. El hecho de que la cultura popular sea adoptada por las élites culturales como propia produce inherentemente un matiz esquizoide en su política de identidad, que transforma el rasgo determinante de su condición en anticuerpo ideológico de su naturaleza. Lo popular deja de ser tal y se deja seducir por la élite académica, que le propone problematizaciones y disecciones. La cultura popular deja de ser periferia y se transforma en un centro cuya identidad no es aceptada por una élite intelectual más interesada en explorar la periferia que en caer en la trampa de un nuevo canon que cuestione sus teorizaciones. El resultado es un espacio híbrido de identidad heterogénea, múltiple y contradictoria en el que lo popular es culto y lo culto es popular, y donde el objeto de

estudio se desplaza a la incesante aporía de un retorno insostenible de lo idéntico.

Según Deleuze, será en estas espacialidades indeterminadas donde se podrá desarrollar una configuración rizomática que se distancie de los parámetros arbóreos propios de las jerarquías racionalistas, y donde otorgar así un espacio equitativo entre las voces del subalterno y las voces del ostentador de la hegemonía (Deleuze, loc. cit.). En otras palabras, la estructura arbórea de la ontología racionalista que prima o hace prevalecer un sistema binario de escisiones controladas deja paso con las propuestas posmodernas de fragmentación perpetua y deconstrucción permanente a un sistema fundamentado en la multiplicidad que aboga por una (des)estructura basada en el cuestionamiento de las escisiones duales típicas de la lógica moderna y a favor de una maquinaria en forma de rizoma. Tal y como se explica en *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie 2. Mille Plateaux*, una estructura de tales características permitiría una dinamicidad que fuese múltiple más que binaria, de forma que el modo en que el sujeto entiende su entorno se asiente sobre un sistema de planos heterogéneos y de dimensiones tanto convergentes como divergentes cuya comunicación dé lugar a una forma de conocimiento que trascienda la diferencia como elemento de base para configurar una esquematización jerárquica de la sociedad.

En cualquier caso, no habría que entender esta resignificación del concepto de estructura como una apuesta por el caos, la desorganización o la *absolutización del relativismo*. El funcionamiento de la multiplicidad ha de estar asentado sobre un sistema flexible de cuestionamiento y problematización de las identidades de la *otredad* y de la *mismedad* como forma base del conocimiento. Un conocimiento no orgánico, fundamentado en una reconceptualización de los órdenes establecidos y en la deconstrucción de éstos. Tal y como expone Artaud, “...el cuerpo es el cuerpo. Está solo y no necesita organismos. El cuerpo nunca es un organismo; los organismos son los enemigos del cuerpo. No se trata de quemar las cosas, sino las representaciones que tenemos de las cosas” (Artaud en Deleuze y Guattari, *Anti-Œdipus* 18).

Esta definición bien puede ser utilizada como descriptor del sustrato de realidad que, en diálogo con la contemporánea problematización del sistema binario, sirve como inestable y deslizante punto de apoyo a la *queer theory* que sirve como herramienta de análisis en este estudio.

Utilizamos aquí una lectura del concepto *queer theory* que sigue a la que había propuesto Judith Butler en “Contagious Word”, ensayo publicado en el 2005 en el que afirma:

...the statement that one is homosexual is construed as acting homosexually on the person to whom or before whom it is uttered. The statement is in some sense not only an act, but a form of conduct, a ritualistic form of speech that wields the power to *be* what it *says*, not a re-presentation of a homosexuality, but a homosexual act... (147)

Aunque es evidente que la articulación teórica actual de *queer* no se corresponde exclusivamente con discusiones de identidad de género —o de actuaciones de género— sino que hace referencia a una maquinaria política mucho más extensa, para los propósitos de este estudio es conveniente enfocar la susceptibilidad retórica de la postura *queer* desde el ámbito del *gender performance*. Así, Butler cuestiona los elementos de juicio que llevan al discurso dominante a tomar una posición de determinación ante las discursividades *queer*, y que las clasifica de acuerdo con su actitud performativa, produciendo por inercia un estado hegemónico ante estos discursos *subalternos* que conlleva, insoslayablemente, la marginalización de éstos. Si entendemos por *actitud queer* un énfasis afirmativo en toda aquella actividad sexual y/o identitaria categorizada como *desviación* por la normatividad del discurso dominante estaremos, al mismo tiempo, legitimando el binarismo de una diferencia categórica fundamentada en taxonomías de representación. Sin embargo, ¿cómo adoptar una postura contestataria frente al discurso dominante sin ejercer la función de resistencia que según Foucault es necesaria para producir esa relación opresiva? O dicho de otra forma, ¿es posible socavar los cimientos del discurso hegemónico desde un alzamiento de las voces llamadas minoritarias, o esta actitud posmoderna conduce a una perpetuación de las relaciones establecidas? La espacialidad de las propuestas rizomáticas aplicadas a los discursos identitarios posmodernos puede ofrecernos una respuesta a estas preguntas.

En *Shortbus*, John Cameron Mitchell propone una apropiación del discurso dominante desde la subalternidad de su espacialidad *queer*, conduciendo su apuesta ontológica a una aporía suscitada que apuesta por dinamitar, mediante un mecanismo de falsificada *normativización*, las relaciones establecidas de poder. En ella, una serie de personajes

*actúan* en una Nueva York tal y como responde a la notoriedad de la *Big Apple*: sofisticada, frenética y con un orden confuso pero tremendamente atractivo para sus habitantes. El matiz que aporta la obra de Cameron es que esos rasgos característicos de *La Ciudad* se encarnan a partir de una propuesta estética que interroga —desde su incorporación a ellos— los discursos oficiales de la ciudad de los rascacielos. En *Shortbus*, la ciudad que escriben sus personajes aparece desprovista de artificios ornamentales accesorios, ya que la plasticidad urbana que atesora se revela flexible, asimétrica y fundamentada en una autenticidad *camp*, revestida de *mal gusto* y de planteamientos irónicos y excesivos (según la definición que Susan Sontag hace del término en 1968).<sup>2</sup> Al mismo tiempo, el término *camp* no abandona la actitud política que se le supone a una estética de sus condiciones. Tal y como lo describe Glyn Davies,

The gay “campness” of mainstream cinema is fairly democratic and “open”; the forms of queer camp are more expansive and subtle than those of Hollywood movies, incorporating historical allusions, political commentary, genre parody, and camp characterization. (59)

El argumento de la obra de Cameron encaja en la problematización de las identidades políticas a través del espacio: una terapeuta sexual (ella se autodenomina *consejera de pareja*) se confiesa ante unos pacientes como *pre-orgásmica*. Éstos le aconsejan que acuda a Shortbus, un club nocturno de New York en el que los clientes acuden a expresar libremente y a actuar sin represión sus realidades sexuales y en el que se naturaliza lo *queer* por medio de una regularización de lo *obsceno*: en este local la condición de sus inquilinos pasa a ser una multiplicidad de realidades en flujo coherente y alejado de binarismos jerarquizantes, lo que debería suponer un remedio *infalible* para la condición sexual de la terapeuta, que debe aprender a desplazarse de su espacio identitario fijo, inflexible e impermeable para adentrarse en espacialidades de actuaciones alternativas de su cuerpo.

Evidentemente, la propuesta lúdica de este planteamiento se manifiesta en múltiples planos a través de la ironía: en el plano de la normatividad, el espectador se enfrenta a una profesional de la psicología que padece el mal para cuyo remedio consulta a numerosas

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<sup>2</sup> En su conocido artículo “Notes on ‘Camp’”, incluido en la colección de ensayos publicada en 1994.



parejas. Pero esta relación vacía de significado pragmático se traslada a *Shortbus*, es decir, al plano *queer*, como una consulta colectiva invertida en la que la terapeuta es *tratada* de forma inclusiva, participativa y receptiva por los representantes de la *desviación* axiológica, con el fin de facilitarle un alejamiento del *episteme* cientificista que le permita experimentar su subjetividad deconstruida en multiplicidades.

Para poder realizar este giro en el tratamiento del sexo como generador de identidad a partir de una espacialidad aporética, la película ofrece un tema recurrente que opera como leitmotiv subversivo: la celebración del cuerpo como expresión permeable de la identidad, que le confiere a ésta una dimensión paródica con la que se plantean cuestiones de subjetividad, de género o de conocimiento colectivo. Después de que Judith Butler (“Contagious Word” 73) expusiese su idea sobre los binarismos de género como subproductos de la práctica opresiva heterosexual, se abrió un ámbito de especulaciones sobre la escritura del propio cuerpo como palimpsesto de la identidad subjetiva, y en este caso, *Shortbus* se hace eco de las manifestaciones de Butler y las lleva a su máxima expresión a través de una celebración orgiástica permanente de las subjetividades de sus personajes. Con esto, la discursividad filmica de Cameron sugiere una política de identidad basada en la transmutación, en el continuo flujo de realidades por las líneas de fuga del rizoma establecido y en la multiplicidad como forma ontológica deseada. El local de reunión *subalterno* se convierte así en un agente *queer* simbólico de cuestionamiento de lo opresivo, de las categorías de la sexualidad y de los constructos de género, del mismo modo en que ya lo había hecho Hedwig, el protagonista del anterior film de Cameron Mitchell (Hsu, 2007).

En *Shortbus*, el cuerpo se establece como punto de partida para producir una política de identidades que se base en la continua deconstrucción de las connotaciones corporales y en la reescritura de la subjetividad a partir de un cuerpo que, como se ha explicado con anterioridad, problematiza su condición orgánica. Si Deleuze (1969, 1972, 1980) explicaba su “plano de inmanencia” abogando por un “cuerpo sin órganos” en el que se conjugaba la presencia física de éste, incluyendo su historial de rasgos, hábitos o afectos, con la potencialidad de su dimensión virtual para reescribir incesantemente su condición, Slavoj Žižek responde con una inversión de este modelo. En su texto de 2003, *Órganos sin cuerpos*, el filósofo esloveno argumenta que tal

postura ontológica reduce al sujeto a sustancia, desdeñando así uno de los rasgos que definen la subjetividad: su *nothingness* (su nada). Los personajes de la obra de Mitchell hacen propia esa nada al alejarse de todo organicismo lógico y presentar sus cuerpos como lienzos sobre los que reinventarse en perpetuidad en una suerte de palimpsesto de significantes deslizantes. Los cuerpos que se proponen en *Shortbus* rompen con toda atadura arbórea para apostar por un sistema de interconectividad rizomática que permita un devenir lúdico de multiplicidades, tal y como las conceptualiza Bergson (Deleuze, 1988).

Siguiendo algunos ejemplos concretos pertenecientes a la obra fílmica, cuando el personaje de la terapeuta entra en el salón principal de *Shortbus* se encuentra con una escena orgiástica de sexualidades múltiples en la que participan de forma indiscriminada personas de tendencia homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual y transexual (19.16). Desde una perspectiva heterocéntrica, para el espectador *normalizado* lo más llamativo de esa escena probablemente se corresponda con la imagen de una mezcla de sexos y géneros. Sin embargo, estéticamente lo que resalta de esa imagen es la acumulación de cuerpos que configuran una unidad multiforme para naturalizar la condición marginal de quienes realizan prácticas sexuales fuera de los límites de la *normalidad*. No obstante, lejos de buscar un camino hacia la canonización de su condición, algo que les haría entrar irremisiblemente en la mecánica de las estructuras jerárquicas, los participantes de *Shortbus* buscan alcanzar una conciencia de margen, un movimiento centrífugo que multiplique exponencialmente las centralizaciones y, consecuentemente, elimine esa idea de centro. Su estrategia es la de la naturaleza permeable de su condición, entendida como recreación de una espacialidad dispersa que trasciende el binarismo de centro y periferia y permite que formas alejadas de su producción cultural sean partes integrantes de ella.

Como parte de esta estrategia de producción identitaria el equipo directivo de esta producción decidió que las escenas deberían ser grabadas utilizando lo que llamaron *sextras*, es decir, que los actores y actrices que grababan las escenas orgiásticas deberían estar realmente teniendo relaciones sexuales. De esta forma, se rompió una barrera más en la actuación de las identidades propuestas, ya que se eliminaron etapas en la comunicación entre mensaje y recepción, habilitando

así una espacialidad fronteriza coherente con la política subversiva inherente al discurso fílmico propuesto.

Siguiendo esta misma postura ontológica, otro ejemplo de espacio corpóreo de permeabilidad manifiesta es el de la propia aglomeración urbana. La ciudad de Nueva York ve enfatizada en la película su caracterización como espacio multicultural y heterogéneo del que el salón donde se desarrolla la acción es un microcosmos: hay espacio para la cultura, para el trabajo, para la celebración y para el fracaso. Multirracial, Nueva York mantiene un espacio compartido en el que conviven diferentes clases sociales y en el que se encuentran las varias espacialidades de sus márgenes. El director de la película explica que

Quería que nuestro “salón” defendiera al Nueva York de antes, los valores de Walt Whitman, de García Lorca y del punk rock. Espero que la ciudad sea siempre un lugar de conexión y transformación donde todos, desde la tímida empollona universitaria hasta la cantante de cabaret de vuelta de todo, e incluso el ex alcalde sin futuro, puedan expiar sus pecados —reales o imaginarios— y redimirse creando cosas maravillosas con sus amigos y amantes. (“Expiation and Redemption” 2008)

Es este el motivo por el que, como preámbulo a las secuencias que se realizan en cada escenario, hay una visión panorámica, subjetiva y plástica de la ciudad que pasa de un plano general a viajar hasta el interior de los espacios atravesando puertas y ventanas, mostrando desde la propia narrativa fílmica la capacidad de absorción y penetrabilidad del perfil urbano de Nueva York. Sin embargo, esa permeabilidad de la ciudad está condicionada a una fundamentación política e histórica que ha de ser renovada con continuidad. Hay a lo largo de la película una simbiosis establecida entre ciudad y cuerpo, en la que el condicionante de la permeabilidad sirve como espacio común. James, uno de los personajes que, junto con la terapeuta, no es capaz de celebrar la porosidad de su espacialidad, afirma: “Puedo verlo... está a mi alrededor... pero se para al llegar a mi piel. No puedo permitirle pasar de ahí. Siempre ha sido así, y siempre lo será” (1.15.45). La penetración del cuerpo conlleva la multiplicidad identitaria, y ésta la reconfiguración espacial de una ciudad que celebra en la película cada celebración ontológica con un *brown-out* indicativo del cuestionamiento de los valores tradicionales establecidos.

*Shortbus* parece proponer desde su actitud *queer* una espacialidad rizomática y no-jerárquica que afecta a todos los planos de conocimiento que toca: desde la problematización de los valores dominantes al cuestionamiento de las estructuras arbóreas que éstos favorecen. El sistema binario de exclusión y marginalización cuya reconciliación con el espacio corporal y urbano actual no tiene lugar se hace a un lado en la propuesta fílmica que nos ocupa, para dar paso a una política identitaria basada en la permeabilidad que cuestiona —a partir del componente paródico y lúdico— la hegemonía de las discursividades dominantes. La propuesta política y estética de la obra de Mitchell responde a la necesidad ontológica de la subalternidad norteamericana, que a través del espacio paradigmático del urbanismo neoyorquino, se presenta como metonimia de la identidad múltiple, actuada desde parámetros que amalgaman el binomio centro-periferia para (re)producir una agencialidad propia desde los discursos marginales, y subvertir así la condición espacial de las relaciones identitarias entre las actuaciones normativas y las actuaciones *queer*. El grito de toma de conciencia *queer* que es *Shortbus* se resume en la definición que Justin Bond (Justin Bond), el *Mistress* de *Shortbus*, ofrece del origen del nombre del local: “Everybody has heard of the long yellow school bus. Well, this is the shortbus”. En oposición al autobús escolar amarillo típico de Estados Unidos, el *short bus* es el vehículo especial que transporta a los escolares con discapacidades / minusvalías / o *habilidades diferentes* en ese país de Norteamérica; es la nueva propuesta ontológica del constructo espacial del Nueva York del siglo XXI.

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# **TRANSLATION STUDIES**





# **IVANHOE TRADUCIDO AL ESPAÑOL: ANÁLISIS CONTRASTIVO DE TRES VERSIONES**

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## **Resumen**

Trabajo que versa sobre algunas de las traducciones castellanas del relato más popular de Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*, que empiezan ya en 1823 debido a uno de los principales protagonistas del exilio liberal literario español en Londres: el sevillano José María Blanco White, que tradujo fragmentos de la obra. Versión íntegra es ya la del exiliado gaditano José Joaquín de Mora, editada en Perpiñán en 1825 por la editorial londinense Ackermann, primera de todas y que antecede a la segunda de ellas: la edición de 1826, atribuida en mi opinión erróneamente a Don Pablo de Xérica por una mala interpretación de las siglas que forman el criptónimo D. J. M. X. De 1833 es la traducción, sin nombre de traductor, del editor barcelonés Antonio Bergnes de las Casas. Además de estas primeras del XIX, analizaremos una de las más editadas y populares de las ediciones modernas: la publicada por Bruguera en 1975, debida a la pluma de Guillem d'Efak. De tres de estas versiones se realiza un análisis contrastivo basado en tres de las premisas fundamentales para completar una buena versión: no añadir, no omitir, no adulterar; se proporcionan múltiples ejemplos que ponen al descubierto lo apropiado o inapropiado de las traducciones estudiadas.

**Palabras clave:** Walter Scott, relato, traducción de prosa.

## **IVANHOE TRANSLATED INTO SPANISH: CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE DIFFERENT VERSIONS**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to discuss some Spanish translations of one of the major novels written by Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*. An early version dates from 1823, which was only partially done by the Jesuit Jose María Blanco White from Seville, one of the prominent Spanish liberal literary figures exiled in London at the time. The first full version of this work, published in Perpignan in 1825 by the London based Publisher Ackermann, was done by the likewise exiled José Joaquín de Mora from Cádiz; this was followed the next year by another translation erroneously attributed to Don Pablo de Xérica, suggested by the misreading of the cryptonym D. J. M. X. The next version is that of the anonymous 1833 edition, which was in fact done by Antonio Bergnes de las Casas. Alongside with these early 19<sup>th</sup> century versions we shall look closely at one of the most popular current Spanish editions, that published by Bruguera in 1975, the work of Guillem d'Efak. We shall conduct a contrastive analysis of three versions of the work founded upon the main three fundamental premises of a good translation: add nothing, omit nothing, adulterate nothing. We provide numerous examples that reveal the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the translations under survey.

**Keywords:** Walter Scott, novel, prose translation.

### **Introducción**

En la obra narrativa de Scott hay que diferenciar dos grupos de novelas: aquellas más próximas a su tiempo como *Waverley* (1814), cuya acción localiza el autor en Escocia, y aquellas otras cuya acción se desarrolla en escenarios medievales como *Ivanhoe* (1819). Esta segunda supone un importante cambio en relación a la primera ya que se centra en el pasado de Inglaterra y constituye el texto clave para la conformación del género al convertirse en el punto de referencia de los imitadores europeos de Scott. El cambio que significa *Ivanhoe* lo justifica el escritor en el prefacio autorial ficticio: "Dedicatory Epistle to the Rev. Dr. Dryasdust, F. A. S"., aparecido en la edición de 1819 y firmado por "Laurence Templeton".

Las novelas de Scott, considerado el creador del género de la novela histórica,<sup>1</sup> lograron una gran acogida en las naciones europeas (Francia, España, Italia, Alemania...), en las que los relatos del escocés animaron a otros escritores a llevar a cabo en relación a la historia de su nación lo que Scott había hecho en relación a Escocia o a Inglaterra; este hecho explica en gran parte el que fueran traducidas inmediatamente.<sup>2</sup>

Centrándonos en las traducciones, digamos que el catálogo de la Biblioteca Nacional de España registra más de 700 entradas con el nombre de Scott, siendo unas 600 ediciones españolas. Entre todas las obras del novelista escocés, *Ivanhoe* ha sido la más traducida: se pueden contar más de un centenar de ediciones y reediciones en distintas versiones,<sup>3</sup> de las cuales las más modernas son las de Ismael Antich Sariols (Barcelona: Fama, 1950), J. Sirvent (Barcelona: G.P. Col.

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<sup>1</sup> Sobre este punto véase la obra de Celia Fernández Prieto: *Historia y novela: Poética de la novela histórica*, Ediciones de la Universidad de Navarra, Eunsu, 1998 (85).

<sup>2</sup> La novela histórica *Ivanhoe* de Sir Walter Scott (1819) es la primera en donde Scott usó un escenario y un tema exclusivamente inglés. Se trata de una novela de caballería ambientada a finales del siglo doce y que tiene como telón de fondo las Cruzadas y las aventuras del Rey de Inglaterra Ricardo corazón de León. Sir Wilfred de Ivanhoe, uno de los últimos miembros de la nobleza anglosajona e hijo de Cedric el Sajón, está enamorado de Rowena, otra descendiente de la aristocracia sajona y pupila de su padre. Sin embargo, el padre de Ivanhoe, Cedric pretendía juntar la sangre del linaje real sajón por medio del casamiento de su pupila con Athelstane de Coningsburgh. Desterrado por su padre debido a su amor por Rowena, Ivanhoe marcha a las cruzadas para servir al Rey Ricardo en Tierra Santa; allí se gana el favor del monarca inglés por su valor en la batalla. Como consecuencia, su lealtad se verá dividida entre el sueño de su padre de lograr un renacimiento sajón y su propia lealtad hacia un monarca que aún lo mejor de sajones y normandos y que promete acabar con un siglo de enemistad racial.

Juan, hermano del rey Ricardo (Juan “sin Tierra”), aprovechando su ausencia, intenta usurpar el trono con la ayuda de algunos barones normandos y ambiciosos. En el torneo en Ashby-de-la Zouche, Ricardo reaparece milagrosamente para ayudar a Ivanhoe a derrotar a los caballeros de Juan, al mando de los cuales se encuentra el brutal templario Sir Brian Bois-Guilbert y Sir Reginald Front-de-Boeuf. Durante el gran torneo Sir Brian se enamora de Rebeca, una hermosa judía, cuyo padre es prestamista del rey y de la nobleza normanda. Es apresada junto con su padre Isaac, Rowena, el herido Ivanhoe, y Cedric, por los barones normandos y encarcelada en el Castillo Front-de-Boeuf's de Torquilstone. El Rey, ayudado por la banda de proscritos de Robin de Locksley (Robin Hood), asalta el castillo y rescata a los prisioneros. Sin embargo, Bois-Guilbert conduce a la judía Rebeca a la preceptoría de Teplestowe, donde el gran maestro de los templarios la acusa de brujería. Ivanhoe aparece como su campeón, enfrentándose a Bois-Guilbert. Este último muere entre las filas sin ser alcanzado por la lanza de su adversario sino víctima aparente de su propia pasión por competir. Cuando Rebeca es consciente del amor que siente Ivanhoe por Rowena, abandona Inglaterra junto con su padre. Además de estos personajes, intervienen en algún momento del relato otros como el bufón Wamba, Gurth el porquero y el Fraile Tuck, que prestan un matiz cómico a la novela.

<sup>3</sup> Véase para este aspecto la entrada “Scott, Walter”, del recientemente aparecido *Diccionario histórico de la traducción en España*, de Francisco Lafarga y Luis Pegenaute (eds.), Madrid, Gredos, 2009, cuya entrada es de Julio César Santoyo (1030-2).

Enciclopedia Pulga, 1954), José María Claramunda Bes (Barcelona: Zeus, 1969), Guillem d'Efack (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1975), María del Mar Hernández (Madrid, Anaya: 1990), Hipólito García (Barcelona: RBA, 1994), Enrique Campbell (Barcelona: Edicomunicación, 2001) y Elena O'Callaghan (Barcelona: Castellnou, 2007).

La moda del *scottismo* en España, con las traducciones consiguientes, está muy bien narrada por Montesinos en su conocido ensayo sobre la novela en España en el XIX; citemos lo más relevante:

La primera tentativa de aclimatar entre nosotros la novela de Walter Scott ocurrió, como era lógico, entre los emigrados de Londres, y Mora tradujo, y publicó Ackerman, *Ivanhoe* y *El talismán* en 1825. Las traducciones de Mora son de lo mejor que se hizo entonces, y, si no exentas de yerros, ellos son imputables al deficiente conocimiento de la edad media, que caracterizaba a un tiempo al autor y a sus traductores -a éstos más que a aquél-, por lo que incurrían a veces en pintorescas confusiones.<sup>4</sup>

Nuestro trabajo versará sobre tres de las traducciones existentes de *Ivanhoe*: la segunda y la tercera cronológicamente, de 1826 y 1833 (de manera muy concisa), y una de las últimas y más reeditadas (la de Guillem d'Efak), a la que dedicaremos gran parte de nuestro análisis.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Montesinos, José F., *Introducción a una historia de la novela en España*, en el siglo XIX, seguida del *Esbozo de una bibliografía española de traducciones de novelas* (1800-1850), Madrid: Castalia, 1982 (1ª ed. 1955) (59).

<sup>5</sup> Ya que la primera traducción (antes habían aparecido fragmentos sueltos en la revista de los exiliados españoles en Inglaterra, *Las Variedades*) de la novela de Scott en cuestión, la de José Joaquín de Mora (1783-1864), editada en Perpiñán en 1825 por la editorial londinense Ackermann, ha sido ampliamente estudiada por Marcos Rodríguez Espinosa: "Exilio, vocación trasatlántica y mediación paratextual: José Joaquín de Mora y sus traducciones de *Ivanhoe* (1825) y *El Talismán* (1826) de Walter Scott", en *Diez estudios sobre la traducción en la España del siglo XIX*, Granada: Editorial Atrio, 2008. (73-93). Igualmente, a su: *Edición Traductológica Digital de [Walter Scott] Ivanhoe*. [Traducción de José Joaquín de Mora]. (Rudolph Ackermann, Londres, 1825). Marcos Rodríguez Espinosa Universidad de Málaga (UMA) Proyecto de Investigación I+D, HUM-2004-00721FILO (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia). Transcribo literalmente la opinión expresada en *El Repertorio Americano*, 1826, de la obra de José Joaquín de Mora: "El Talisman, cuento del tiempo de las cruzadas, por el autor del Waverley: traducido al castellano, con un discurso preliminar. 2 tomos 8vo. Londres 1825. El *Ivanhoe*, novela por el autor del Waverley i del Talisman: traducida al castellano. 2 tomos 8vo. Londres 1825. No hemos leído la traducion del Talisman, pero nos basta que sea de la misma pluma que la del *Ivanhoe*. Ciñéndonos a esta última, no dudaremos decir que representa casi todas las gracias de su admirable orijinal, i nos trasporta con casi no menos poderosa majia a los siglos heroicos i ferozes de la caballería. La pintura animada de aquellas costumbres tan diversas de las nuestras, de aquellas justas i banquetes, castillos i palenques, damas

## 1. La traducción de D. J. M. X., de 1826

La traducción en cuestión lleva por título: *Ivanhoe o el Regreso de la Palestina del Caballero Cruzado* (Perpiñán: Imprenta de J. Alzine, 1826)<sup>6</sup> y va firmada por el criptónimo D. J. M. X., que Robert Marrast en un documentado artículo atribuye al poeta, abogado y traductor vasco Don Pablo de Xérica (1781-1841),<sup>7</sup> aunque en su atribución confunda la

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i caballeros, amores i desafíos, galas i armas, pendones i divisas, corceles i palafrenes; aquellos personajes i caracteres tan vivamente retratados, que nos parece tenerlos a la vista, conversar con ellos, i revestirnos de sus sentimientos i pasiones; aquel judío Isaac; aquella hermosa i anjélica Rebeca; aquel Ricardo; aquel Juan; aquel prior de Jorvaulx; aquel hermitaño de Copmanhurst; aquellos templarios; en suma, cuantas personas figuran en aquel grande i variado drama; lo interesante i graduado de la accion, que nos lleva de escena en escena i de lance en lance, empenándonos cada vez mas en ella; el calor de los afectos, sin la fastidiosa sentimentalidad de las novelas que se usaban aora cuarenta años; la amenidad de las descripciones campestres i solitarias que tan agradablemente contrastan con las de los combates, asaltos i funciones de armas; lo entretenido i sabroso de la narrativa, i la naturalidad del diálogo, son dotes en que el Ivanhoe apenas admite comparacion, en las novelas de este jénero, sino con otras del fecundo autor del Waverley. El traductor los ha reproducido con mucha felicidad en el castellano, i a fuerza de talento ha superado las dificultades no pequeñas que ofrece la diferente índole de las dos lenguas, acercándose mucho a la escelencia del orijinal aun en el estilo descriptivo, sin embargo de la superior copia, facilidad i concision del idioma ingles. No aseguramos que el Dr. Dryasdust quedase completamente satisfecho con los equivalentes castellanos de algunas voces i frases relativas a ciertos usos de las edades caballerescas. Pero ¡qué diferencia entre el feudalismo español, modificado por la influencia arábiga, i el estado social que la conquista normanda produjo en Inglaterra! Los glosarios de ámbos son por consiguiente diferentísimos, i no se puede verter el uno en el otro, sino aproximadamente, o empleando circunlocuciones embarazosas. El traductor del Ivanhoe ha tenido razon en preferir el primer medio” (318-20).

<sup>6</sup> No se ha esbozado la probable hipótesis de que las anónimas siglas encerraran el nombre de Don José J. de Mora, añadiéndole el editor de Perpiñán la X final para que no fuera fácil la identificación del traductor, exiliado por sus ideas políticas desde 1823 en Londres y desde 1827 en Argentina, Chile, Perú y Bolivia, antes de volver a París en 1840 y a España en 1843 (no hemos podido encontrar la genealogía de la familia del escritor, ni el apellido de la madre de José Joaquín de Mora, tan sólo que el padre era abogado). De cualquier modo, en caso de que esa hipótesis tuviera visos de ser real, el traductor *cambió* o modificó las dos versiones.

Otra probabilidad, tampoco esbozada, es que el criptónimo de la versión de Perpiñán de 1826 fuera del presbítero y diputado liberal en las Cortes de Cádiz, que cultivó la traducción entre 1825 y 1835 como medio de vida, Juan Nicasio Gallego Hernández (1777-853); Gallego utilizó diversos anagramas de su nombre en sus traducciones y también seudónimos. Bien pudo traducirla él solo, o bien con el periodista y escritor romántico catalán, Ramón López Soler (1806-1836). Los dos tenían una versión de *Ivanhoe* que no llegó a publicarse, pudiéndose tratarse de ésta.

<sup>7</sup> Pablo de Xérica y Corta nació en Vitoria en 1781. Estudió Filosofía con los religiosos dominicos de su ciudad natal y Derecho en la Universidad de Oñate. Por entonces publicó una traducción de las *Heroidas* de Ovidio. Al acabar sus estudios, pensó dedicarse al comercio y en 1804 publicó *Cuentos jocosos en diferentes versos castellanos*. Ese mismo año se trasladó a Cádiz para establecerse, pero tuvo la mala fortuna de coincidir con la epidemia que en la ciudad se declaró y con la batalla de Trafalgar. Publicó y estrenó en esta ciudad (1807) *Los títeres o lo que puede el interés*, comedia traducida del francés.

segunda letra del criptónimo, que es una J, por una P; por su importancia transcribimos gran parte de su argumentación:

En octubre del citado año de 1824, Alzine imprimió un prospecto en el cual anunciaba la publicación de las obras completas de Walter Scott en 82 volúmenes en 12°. Churchman y Allison Peers incluyeron en 1922 este prospecto, que no habían visto, en la bibliografía que acompaña su estudio sobre Walter Scott en España, describiéndolo según la *Bibliographie de la France*, donde efectivamente figura en el número 4 del 4 de diciembre de 1824 ... Sin embargo, esta empresa no empezó a realizarse antes de fines de 1825, ya que el depósito legal de los cuatro tomos de *Ivanhoe* (tirada declarada de 2000 ejemplares), se efectuó el 19 de enero de 1826 ... ¿Cómo se puede explicar este retraso, cuando en el prospecto se anunciaba que “a contar desde el primero de febrero de 1825, saldrá a luz una entrega de las obras de Sir Walter Scott ... la novela de IVANHOE, o EL REGRESO DE LA PALESTINA DEL CABALLERO CRUZADO, será la primera”? Y, sobre todo, teniendo en cuenta que la traducción, según dice el mismo prospecto, correría a cargo de “una sociedad de literatos españoles”, expresión que da a entender que Alzine tenía contratados, para realizar su empresa, a varios traductores que trabajarían asiduamente para que se respetase la periodicidad indicada (una entrega

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Fue redactor del *Diario Mercantil*. Xérica se trasladó a La Coruña, donde se convierte en secretario de la Junta de Censura y Protección de la Libertad de Imprenta. Terminada la guerra de la Independencia, vuelve a su ciudad natal, y colabora en el *Correo de Vitoria*. En 1814 Fernando VII declaró nula la Constitución, Xérica fue perseguido por sus ideas liberales, procesado y condenado a un destierro en Melilla por diez años y un día. Se le inició un segundo proceso a consecuencia de la publicación de unos artículos en el *Correo de Vitoria*, siendo sentenciado a seis años de presidio en Pamplona. Prevenido, sin embargo, escapó a Francia, se mantuvo próximo a la frontera y hubo de pasar tres meses en la prisión de Pau, acusado de conspirar (1817); pasó a París, y allí permaneció tres años, dedicado a estudios literarios. En 1814 publica en Valencia su primer volumen de *Ensayos poéticos*, donde incluye algunos cuentos que habían sido publicados anteriormente, siendo prohibido por la Inquisición, y reimpresso en 1822 en Vitoria bajo el título de *Poesías de don Pablo de Xérica*. Regresó a España, como otros muchos, en 1820, y, de acuerdo con su filiación liberal, fue comandante del Batallón de Voluntarios Constitucionales de Vitoria y miembro de la Junta de Censura de la Diputación Provincial de Álava, y, en 1823, alcalde constitucional de Vitoria. Derrocada la Constitución, permaneció en España, ocultándose de la persecución que se le hacía. Finalmente, vendió todos sus bienes y se marchó a Francia, donde contrajo matrimonio con la francesa Victoria de Cambotte y adquirió la nacionalidad francesa. Establecido en Dax, publicó *Colección de cuentos, fábulas, descripciones, anécdotas, diálogos selectos* (1831), *Miscelánea instructiva y entretenida* (1836) y unas *Letrillas y fábulas* (1837). Pablo de Xérica falleció en la ciudad francesa de Cagnotte (Landas), en marzo de 1841.

cada seis semanas). ¿Quiénes eran estos literatos, que también pueden haber sido los inspiradores del proyecto? En el decenio 1820-1830, Alzine publicó - al menos oficialmente - sobre todo reediciones: la *Moral universal* de d'Holbach, puesta en castellano por Manuel Díaz Moreno (1822); las *Aventuras de Telémaco de Florian*, versión de Fernando Nicolás de Rebolledo (1822); la *Galatea* de Cervantes imitada y concluida por Florian, versión de Casiano Pellicer (1824). En otros casos, tratándose de primeras traducciones, el autor de la versión castellana no se nombra, o sólo va designado por iniciales difíciles de decriptar. Tal es el caso, por ejemplo, de *El sitio de la Rochela*, de madame de Genlis, “traducido por D.A.L.D”. en 1823. No es posible averiguar quién se ocultó bajo el seudónimo “un amigo de la religión y del Rey” para firmar su traducción de las *Observaciones varias sobre la revolución de España ...* de Clausel de Cousserges (1823), ni el que adoptó el criptónimo de “un C. del H. D.M”. en la portada de la versión de la séptima edición del *Genio del Cristianismo* de Chateaubriand (1825).

En la portada de las tres novelas de Scott que llegó a editar Alzine en el año de 1826, podemos leer: *Ivanhoe*, “traducido del inglés al español por D.P.M.X.”; *Los puritanos de Escocia* y *El enano misterioso*, y *Quintín Durward* “traducidos del inglés al español por D.F.A.Y.G”.

Es decir que la llamada “sociedad de literatos” se reducía de momento a dos hombres: D.P.M.X. es Don Pablo [¿María?] de Xérica, y D.F.A.Y.G. es Don Francisco Altés y Gurena.<sup>8</sup>

Un estudio pormenorizado de la portada de Alzine nos permite deducir que la lectura del criptónimo es D.J.M.X. (y no D.P.M.X., como deduce el hispanista Marrast en su citado trabajo), con el fin indudable de *adaptarlo* a lo que él quiere demostrar.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Marrast, Robert, “Ediciones perpiñanesas de Walter Scott en castellano: 1824-1826”, *Romanticismo* 3-4 (Génova), 1988 (69-80).

<sup>9</sup> En un trabajo posterior desarrollaré minuciosamente el estudio del criptónimo D.J.M.X., aunque se puede afirmar que si examinamos la edición impresa por el editor J. Alzine en Perpiñán, 1826, podemos apreciar que el texto de la portada está construido, como era habitual en el primer tercio del siglo XIX, con una composición múltitipográfica, siendo el motivo de este diseño la necesidad de enriquecer visualmente al lector desde el mismo comienzo del libro. Ya se consideraba desde el origen de la imprenta que la situación de los espacios y la modificación de los tipos lograba el propósito específico de prestar al lector la máxima ayuda para la comprensión del texto. De ahí la sucesiva combinación de tipos que pueden parecernos un poco sorprendentes hoy día. En este caso el peso visual microtipográfico es vertical, generando un peso que va desde el título de la



La traducción firmada por D.J.M.X. se toma bastantes libertades respecto del original, sin importarle suprimir o añadir cuando lo cree conveniente. Formalmente, aún reconociendo su mérito de traducción culta, es un ejemplo de estilo absolutamente en desuso, debido no sólo a la utilización del lenguaje (adecuado a la época del trabajo), sino por un empleo excesivamente literario (por paradójico que parezca al juzgar una traducción de este tipo), difícil de entender incluso en su época por la utilización de un lenguaje bastante culto, muchos de cuyos términos ya han desaparecido en nuestra lengua. Veamos un ejemplo que atestigua esta última afirmación, en el siguiente párrafo del capítulo once: “Picad fuego pues, dijo el jefe, porque me interesa visitar este bolsillo”, en lugar de lo que sería actualmente más apropiado: “Aproximad una luz, en el acto -dijo el capitán-; examinaremos el contenido de esta bolsa”.

Hay un empleo abusivo del modo subjuntivo y el traductor se toma a veces bastantes libertades, bien incluyendo notas propias para contrarrestar las afirmaciones del novelista escocés respecto de los españoles, o como se puede ver en la traducción del exergo que encabeza el capítulo III:

Then (sad relief!) from the bleak coast that hears  
The German Ocean roar, deep-blooming, strong,  
And yellow hair'd, the blue ey'd Saxon came.  
Thomson's *Liberty*

que el traductor versiona así:

Es bien conocida esa estéril costa,  
Do su bravura el mar del norte estrella.  
De aquí salió aquel sajón impávido,  
Que ojos azules, rubia cabellera,  
Y siempre fresco rostro aun hoy distinguen

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obra hasta la imprenta. El diálogo entre los elementos se genera en la contraposición del autor de la obra y el título, con lo que el lector en un primer vistazo percibe claramente los datos fundamentales del libro. Macrotipográficamente, la selección de las dos fuentes, la Pradell del título, y la Gótica libraria canonizada del autor, parecen en un principio desequilibradas. Los grandes tipógrafos, como Manuzio en el Renacimiento o Bodoni en el Neoclasicismo eran especialmente cuidadosos en lograr portadas elegantes y equilibradas, con una clara predilección por la armonía. Frente a esta teoría tipográfica, el editor Alzine, para lograr que el lector recibiera una visión romántica y evocar el espíritu medieval que creía que poseía la obra de Scott, rompe con este sistema equilibrado desde el punto visual, desarrollando un diseño móvil, violento, teatral que inspira en el espíritu apacible del lector el espíritu aventurero y de gusto por el pasado que es posible encontrar en la obra.



cuando una traducción ajustada de lo que dice Scott sería, por ejemplo:

Entonces, ¡triste ayuda! de la inhóspita costa que oye  
bramar al mar del norte, sanguinario, hondo y fuerte,  
vino el sajón de azules ojos y gualdo pelo.  
(James Thomson: *Liberty*)

En bastantes ocasiones el traductor no tiene reparo alguno en suprimir parte del texto, sobre todo en las descripciones, posiblemente por pensar que no contribuyen al realce de la narración. El caso contrario, inventar párrafos o frases enteras, también lo hallamos en esta traducción; citemos sólo un ejemplo en el capítulo nueve: al intentar averiguar quién es el Caballero Desconocido comparan la robustez de otro con él, añadiendo el traductor de su cosecha: “Pero pudiera muy bien haber dejado sus carnes y medro en la Tierra Santa, dijo De Bracy”.

Son observables algunos galicismos y similares, de los que señalamos sólo dos:

- a) “Sí, repito, los votos deben cumplirse, a menos que nuestra santa madre Iglesia no crea oportuno el acordarnos su dispensación”; sobra el *no* (equivalente al “ne” expletivo en francés), ya que en esta oración, un calco de la francesa con *a menos que*, no es necesario el *no*.
- b) En alguna ocasión un error de interpretación lo lleva a traducir *ale* por ajo, en lugar de cerveza: “presénteles Vd. el ajo y el vino”, en vez de *deles vino y cerveza* (seguramente por influencia del francés en un claro deslizamiento de significado al confundir *ale* con *ail*).

## 2. La traducción del editor Bergness de 1833<sup>10</sup>

De 1833 es *Ivanhoe o el cruzado*, editada en Barcelona por la Imprenta de Antonio Bergnes de las Casas,<sup>11</sup> sin el nombre del traductor.

<sup>10</sup> Antes de esta edición hubo dos intentos de editar en Barcelona *Ivanhoe*: uno del periodista y escritor Ramón López Soler (1806-1836), en el año 1828, que chocó con la censura, y otro el del traductor de cuestiones de derecho y jurisprudencia Gregorio Morales Pantoja (no se sabe bien si Pantoja era un pseudónimo o un hombre de paja del editor y político catalán Buenaventura Carlos Aribau) que intentaría, sin éxito, a mediados de 1830, la licencia para los dos primeros tomos de *Ivanhoe*.

<sup>11</sup> Edición que, formada por cinco volúmenes, se puede consultar en Google, al igual que la de 1826.

Es ésta una versión correcta y muy comprensible, bastante más cercana a nuestra época, a pesar de estar realizada casi en los mismos años que la anterior, aunque en ocasiones omite frases y párrafos enteros o bien cambia el sentido de lo dicho; por ejemplo, en el capítulo tercero, al recibir a los normandos, Cedric ordena a su mayordomo: “... *and see their train lack nothing*”, es decir: “encárgate de que a su séquito no le falte de nada”, siendo la traducción propuesta: “y que no se extravíe nada en el equipaje”.

No incluye la epístola dedicatoria, a modo de prólogo; suele obviar los exergos a comienzos de capítulo, aunque sí añade bastantes notas a pie de la cosecha del desconocido traductor. Veamos una muestra de esta traducción, el comienzo del capítulo V en el original y en versión del editor Bergnes:

Original:

OSWALD, returning, whispered into the ear of his master, “It is a Jew, who calls himself Isaac of York; is it fit I should marshall him into the hall?”

“Let Gurth do thine office, Oswald”, said Wamba with his usual effrontery; “the swineherd will be a fit usher to the Jew”.

“St Mary”, said the Abbot, crossing himself, “an unbelieving Jew, and admitted into this presence!”

“A dog Jew”, echoed the Templar, “to approach a defender of the Holy Sepulchre!”

“By my faith”, said Wamba, “it would seem the Templars love the Jews’ inheritance better than they do their company”.

“Peace, my worthy guests”, said Cedric; “my hospitality must not be bounded by your dislikes. If Heaven bore with the whole nation of stiffnecked unbelievers for more years than a layman can number, we may endure the presence of one Jew for a few hours. But I constrain no man to converse or to feed with him.—Let him have a board and morsel apart,—unless”, he said smiling, “these turban’d strangers will admit his society”.

“Sir Franklin”, answered the Templar, “my Saracen slaves are true Moslems, and scorn as much as any Christian to hold intercourse with a Jew”.

“Now, in faith”, said Wamba, “I cannot see that the worshippers of Mahound and Termagaunt have so greatly the advantage over the people once chosen of Heaven”.

“He shall sit with thee, Wamba”, said Cedric; “the fool and the knave will be well met”.

“The fool”, answered Wamba, raising the relies of a gammon of bacon, “will take care to erect a bulwark against the knave”.

*Traducción del editor Bergnes:*

*Oswaldo volvió de su encargo, se acercó á Cedric, y le dijo en voz baja: “Es un judío, que se llama Isaac de York. ¿He de hacerle entrar en la sala?”*

*—Deja que Gurth haga tu oficio, dijo Wamba, con su natural desfachatez: el porquerizo debe ser el que cuide del hebreo.*

*—¡Un perro judío, dijo el Templario, en nuestra compañía!*

*—Sabed, nobles huéspedes, dijo Cedric, que mi hospitalidad no puede arreglarse á vuestro gusto. A nadie obligo á que le hable ó coma con él. Póngasele mesa aparte, y en ella cuanto necesite; á menos que quieran hacerle compañía esos señores de los turbantes.*

*—Señor hidalgo, respondió el Templario, mis esclavos sarracenos son verdaderos musulimes y huyen del trato y comunicacion con los Judios.*

*—Se sentará á tu lado, Wamba, dijo Cedric, que un bribon no está mal junto á un loco.*

*—El loco, dijo Wamba alzando los restos de un pernil, alzaré este baluarte entre él y el bribon.*

Obviando la grafía de la época, el texto es bastante exacto y muy comprensible para el lector; no obstante, se puede afirmar que no capta (o no se interesa por hacerlo) los pequeños matices y toda la riqueza del lenguaje, sobre todo en el parlamento de Cedric, que resume en exceso.

Sería mucho más exacta y ajustada al texto original la traducción que proponemos:

Oswald, de vuelta, susurró al oído de su amo: — Es un judío que se llama Isaac de York; ¿debo hacerle entrar al salón?

— Deja que lo haga Gurth -dijo Wamba, con su acostumbrada desfachatez-; el porquerizo acomodará al judío.

— ¡Santa María! -dijo el abad persignándose-, un judío descreído, y admitido en nuestra presencia.

— ¡Un perro judío -se hizo eco el templario-, relacionándose con un defensor del Santo Sepulcro!

— A fe mía -dijo Wamba-, diríase que los templarios prefieren la herencia de los judíos a su compañía.

— Haya paz, mis honorables huéspedes -dijo Cedric; mi hospitalidad no puede verse restringida por vuestras aversiones. Si el cielo soporta a toda la nación de obstinados incrédulos durante más años que un lego pueda enumerar, bien podemos soportar nosotros la presencia de un judío por unas pocas horas. Pero no obligo a nadie a que hable o coma con él. Que se le ponga una mesita y comida aparte; a menos que -dijo sonriendo-, estos extranjeros de los turbantes quieran admitirlo en su compañía.

— Señor *franklin* -respondió el templario-, mis esclavos sarracenos son verdaderos musulmanes y desprecian, tanto como puedan hacerlo los cristianos, tener trato con un judío.

— A fe mía -dijo Wamba-, no veo porque los devotos de Mahoma y de Termagaunt<sup>12</sup> deban tener más ventajas que el pueblo elegido por Dios.

— Se sentará contigo, Wamba -dijo Cedric-, que un loco y un truhán no se encontrarán mal juntos.

— El loco -respondió Wamba levantando los restos de una pata de cerdo- se cuidará de alzar un baluarte contra el truhán.

### 3. La traducción de Guillem d'Efak

La traducción de Guillem d'Efak<sup>13</sup> ha sido continuamente reimpresa, siendo la última la editada para “La Biblioteca de la aventura”, en Edhasa, con ilustraciones de Jordi Vila: de todas las traducciones consultadas sobre la obra, creo que es la que más se ajusta al original y menos se aparta de él.

Si partimos de la base de que al menos en apariencia la traducción perfecta es algo inexistente, al tiempo que un hecho de civilización particularmente subjetivo, no está de más avanzar algunas ideas, a la vez que optamos finalmente por defender aquellas con las que nos identificamos más, teniendo en cuenta lo que la experiencia

<sup>12</sup> Dios imaginario del que se creía en la Edad Media que era adorado por los musulmanes.

<sup>13</sup> Publicada en Barcelona (Bruguera, 1975), el nombre completo del traductor es: Guillem Sullana i Hada d'Efack, escritor, cantante y actor nacido en Río Muni en 1929 y muerto en Mallorca en 1995.

como traductor (de poesía generalmente) nos indica. Para una buena traducción se requieren, entre otras cosas: afinidad de espíritu con el autor traducido, buen conocimiento de ambas lenguas y cierta habilidad sutil y aun astucia para llegar a la verdadera fidelidad. Interpretar un código extranjero en el idioma propio, hacer revivir un texto en otra lengua con el máximo de recursos que ésta nos permita, para que la emoción que despierte en el lector de la traducción esté lo más cercana posible de lo que el autor pueda lograr en los hablantes de la suya. Sólo una observación más, y la más importante de todas: como bien defendiera García Yebra en múltiples foros universitarios, las reglas de oro de la traducción serían: *no omitir, no añadir, no adulterar*.<sup>14</sup> Así, una vez sentadas estas premisas, vayamos al análisis de los tres elementos que conforman esta atinada aseveración:

- Entre las omisiones señalamos las siguientes:<sup>15</sup>

Párrafo 6° del capítulo I:

“...and lay, some prostrate near their former site, and others on the side of hill” (*algunas estaban cerca de su lugar de origen, otras al otro lado de la colina*).

Capítulo VII, párrafo 15:

“...had but swelled him like a bottled spider” (*no habían hecho sino hincharlo como a una araña metida en una botella*).

Capítulo VII, párrafo 17:

“... from which his long curled hair escaped and overspread his shoulder, ...” (*del cual salía su larga y rizada cabellera desparramándose por sus hombros*).

Capítulo VII, párrafo 17:

“... and they were the greater number by a hundred to one...” (*y cuyo número es más grande que de cien a uno*).

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<sup>14</sup> Todo traductor, si es que valora realmente su tarea, debería optar -siempre que las editoriales se lo permitan, claro está- por presentar al lado de la traducción el texto original; ello permitiría al lector comparar y apreciar la calidad o no del texto resultante, así como poner al descubierto todas esas traducciones que no merecen llevar ese nombre, de tanto como desvirtúan el texto original.

<sup>15</sup> No incluimos aquí, por obvio, el uso incorrecto de las preposiciones, en el que, aunque es bastante acertado en general, pueden detectarse algunos errores: “...fácilmente has de encontrar alguien de tu misma tribu que te brinde refugio”, en la que se omite la preposición *a*.

- Entre las adiciones, es decir que añade de su cosecha o inventa:

Capítulo VII, párrafo 6º:

*“Esta especie de carnaval, se supone que posteriormente influyó la ciencia heráldica”.*

Al final del capítulo IX, al atacar El Desheredado a Bois-Guilbert, el traductor añade:

*“Directa y limpiamente dio en el visor del normando, donde la punta de las lanzas quedó prendida entre las barras de acero”.*

Capítulo X: en un diálogo de Gurth con Isaac, el porquerizo dice lo siguiente:

*“Barely”, said Gurth, “and it will leave my master nigh pennyless. Nevertheless, if such be your least offer, I must be content”.*

Una traducción adecuada sería:

—Muy poco -dijo Gurth-, y dejaré a mi amo casi sin un céntimo. No obstante, si ésa es tu última oferta, debo aceptarla.

Pero el traductor interpreta lo siguiente:

—Escasamente -dijo Gurth, aunque la suma pedida era más razonable de lo que había esperado-. Y mi amo quedará sin un céntimo. De todos modos, si ésa es tu última oferta, debo conformarme con ella.

En el capítulo XIII, al recibir el príncipe Juan la nota, el traductor pone en boca de éste algo que no aparece en el original:

—Esto quiere decir que mi hermano Ricardo está en libertad.

- Adulteraciones (señalemos las palabras que el traductor *cambia*, falsea o adultera de significado, analizando sólo los primeros capítulos):

*Manada*, en lugar de: *piara*; *avisado*, en lugar de: *advertido*; *joyas*, por: *monedas de oro*; *mirar con suficiencia*, por: *mirar desdeñosamente*; *reticente*, por: *recostado*; *en bandolera de su cabalgadura*, en vez de: *en la grupa*; *avanzar un buen trecho*, en lugar de: *avanzado a un buen ritmo*; *con rudeza*, por: *precipitadamente*; *muchas gracias por tu consejo*, en

lugar de: *...por tu advertencia*; *carácter disperso*, por: *carácter disoluto*; *flechas*, por: *aljabas*; *por razones parecidas*, en vez de: *por razones contrarias*; *hermana*, por: *hija*; *risa aduladora*, por: *carcajada*; *cejas pobladas*, por: *mirada abatida*; *alagó*, por: *indignó*; *acción juzgada más inhábil*, en lugar de: *acción vergonzosa*; *sorprendido*, por: *temible*; *presuntuoso*, por: *impertinente*; *gorros*, por: *cubre cuellos*; *armado de punta en blanco*, en lugar de: *cubierto por negra armadura*; *se desvió*, por: *se encabritó y cayó*; *no podría decirlo*, por: *no podría adivinarlo*; *bizqueando*, por: *encogiéndose*; *temeroso*, por: *perturbado*; *voluntarioso*, por: *bullicioso*; *necesitar el concurso de otro juez*, en lugar de: *necesitar otra opinión*; *examinar detenidamente*, por: *examinar numerosas...*; *el bovino Athelstane*, en vez de: *el impasible Athelstane*; *zequíes*, por: *cequíes*; *el filisteo iracundo*, por: *el filisteo incircunciso*; *persona*, por: *emperatriz*; *descansar*, por: *preparar*; *un sujeto apayasado*, por: *un sujeto zafio*; el Caballero Desheredado *se refugió en la parte posterior de la tienda*, por el Caballero Desheredado *se puso en la puerta con audacia* (es decir, lo contrario de lo expresado por el original); *francamente*, por: *osadamente*; *obrando así*, por: *hasta ahora*; *si me llega a reconocer*, por: *si soy descubierto*; *desacompasados*, por: *descompasados*; *¿Y qué cantidad has llevado contigo?*, por: *¿Y qué cantidad traes -o llevas- contigo?*; *buen sajón*, por: *buey sajón*; *una carta extraviada*, por: *una carta falsificada*, etc.

Un último ejemplo, a comienzos del capítulo XIII, del que transcribimos el original y la traducción de Efak, nos muestra las *opciones personales* de este traductor:

“Prince John had proceeded thus far, and was about to give the signal for retiring from the lists, when a small billet was put into his hand.

‘From whence?’ said Prince John, looking at the person by whom it was delivered.

‘From foreign parts, my lord, but from whence I know not,’ replied his attendant. ‘A Frenchman brought it hither, who said, he had ridden night and day to put it into the hands of your highness.’

*Iba a retirarse el príncipe Juan, cuando un emisario le deslizó una nota entre las manos.*

—¿De quién procede? —preguntó.

—*De gente extraña, milord, pero no la conozco. Un francés lo trajo y dijo que había galopado día y noche para ponerla en manos de Vuestra Alteza.*

El traductor, *condensa* los párrafos reduciéndolos, cortando, simplificando y cambiando el desarrollo de la acción de lugares a personas, o *ciñéndose* excesivamente a la literalidad del texto en otras, como podemos ver en la que sería una traducción más exacta:

Una vez convenido esto, y cuando el príncipe Juan estaba a punto de dar la señal para retirarse del palenque, le trajeron una pequeña nota.

—¿De dónde procede? -dijo el príncipe Juan, mirando a la persona que se la había entregado-.

—De tierras extranjeras, milord, pero no sé de cuales -replicó el miembro de su séquito-; un francés la trajo, diciendo que había cabalgado día y noche para entregársela a Vuestra Alteza.

Incluimos en este apartado los leísmos: *le* atrapó, *pínchale*, veamos quien se atreve a detener*le*, obligándoles, observar*le*, *le* rodeaban, ver*le*, *le* habían familiarizado...

A veces (al final del capítulo 10 por ejemplo), la puntuación no se ajusta al original: el traductor desplaza puntos y aparte, sitúa indebidamente los guiones correspondientes al parlamento de los personajes, añade párrafos de su cuenta para la mejor comprensión del texto, etc.

Por último, señalemos algunos matices incorrectos en el empleo de unas palabras determinadas en lugar de otras más apropiadas y exactas en su significación; veamos un párrafo completo al finalizar el torneo de Ashby-de-la-Zouche, en el momento de la entrega del premio al vencedor, al final del capítulo XII:

It being now the duty of Prince John to name the knight who had done best, he determined that the honour of the day remained with the knight whom the popular voice had termed *Le Noir Faineant*. It was pointed out to the Prince, in impeachment of this decree, that the victory had been in fact won by the Disinherited Knight, who, in the course of the day, had overcome six champions with his own hand, and who had finally unhorsed and struck down the leader of the opposite party. But Prince John adhered to his own opinion, on the



ground that the Disinherited Knight and his party had lost the day, but for the powerful assistance of the Knight of the Black Armour, to whom, therefore, he persisted in awarding the prize.

Guillem d'Efak traduce:

*Había llegado el momento de que el príncipe Juan nombrara al caballero que se había portado mejor, y determinó que el honor de la jornada recaía sobre aquel a quien la voz popular había bautizado con el mote de Negro Holgazán. Se le hizo notar al príncipe, impugnando su decreto, que de hecho la victoria la había conseguido el Caballero Desheredado, quien en el transcurso del día había derrotado a seis campeones con la fuerza del propio brazo y, finalmente, había descabalgado al paladín del bando contrario. Pero el príncipe Juan se mantuvo en sus trece, argumentando que el Desheredado y sus usted hubieran salido derrotados de no haber contado con la poderosa ayuda del caballero de la negra armadura, al cual, por tanto, insistía en otorgar el premio.*

Entre las objeciones que se pueden poner a esta traducción:

- a) no se trata de *portarse* mejor o bien, sino de *ser* el mejor en la lucha;
- b) no se *impugna* un decreto del príncipe, ya que los cortesanos no tienen poder para ello; se refuta, discute, contesta, etc.;
- c) tampoco se trata de un decreto, sino de una decisión o algo que se pueda emitir de viva voz y no por medio de un documento escrito;
- d) hay verbos que no traduce, como *strike down*, abatir;
- e) utiliza expresiones excesivamente coloquiales: “se mantuvo en sus trece”, en lugar de la más lógica *se mantuvo fiel a su opinión*, como correspondería al verbo inglés *adhere*;
- f) el príncipe Juan no *argumenta*, sino que *se basa*, *se fundamenta* (“on the ground”).

Proponemos la siguiente traducción, que se ajustaría más al original:

El momento había llegado para que el príncipe Juan cumpliera con la obligación de nombrar al caballero que mejor había luchado, decidiendo que el honor de la jornada recaía en

el caballero al que la voz popular había llamado El Negro Holgazán. Se le sugirió al príncipe, en refutación a su decisión, que de hecho quien había obtenido la victoria era el caballero Desheredado, que en el curso del día había vencido por su propia mano a seis campeones, y por último desmontado y abatido al líder del bando contrario. Pero el príncipe Juan se mantuvo fiel a su opinión, basándose en que el Caballero Desheredado y su bando habrían sido derrotados, a no ser por la poderosa ayuda del Caballero de la Negra Armadura, a quien, por tanto se empeñaba en conceder el premio.

## Conclusión

En resumen, aunque una buena traducción debe basarse en un magnífico dominio de la lengua a la que se traduce y, al menos, uno muy bueno de la que se traduce, no debemos olvidar la gran ayuda que nos proporcionan el buen uso de los diccionarios; así, *jealous* no debe traducirse por celoso, simplemente, sino en el sentido de que: *se esfuerza por mantener / proteger sus derechos / libertades*, de ahí que una buena traducción fuera: *defensor de sus derechos*. En este aspecto, las posibilidades de manejar buenos diccionarios, y por tanto de ser más exactos al traducir, se han ampliado enormemente en nuestra época; por ello, debemos ser mucho más condescendientes con las traducciones anteriores y considerarlas como un buen punto de partida.

Una breve reflexión sobre si se deben consultar otras traducciones o no en el momento de iniciar la nuestra. Las dos opiniones son defendibles y tienen sus ventajas e inconvenientes: las traducciones siempre son alternativas válidas para una obra, salvo que la traducción esté hecha con una absoluta inoperancia; personalmente no llego a captar cuáles pueden ser los inconvenientes de consultar varias versiones de una obra antes de emprender la propia, a no ser el de descubrir errores, tergiversaciones, omisiones, adiciones y otros fenómenos similares. A veces la lectura de varias versiones nos lleva a una gran confusión, ya que nada tienen que ver unas con otras, ni tampoco con el original, y ello sin que intervenga el hecho de que una sea más académica o universitaria (términos que, por otra parte, no siempre coinciden), o que este llevada a cabo por un traductor profesional. No obstante, esta confusión es sólo momentánea ya que el recurso al texto original

nos sacará siempre de dudas, y en todo caso las diferentes versiones (tomadas como lo que son: ‘versiones’ y no un modelo a seguir de manera obligada, ni a veces recomendable), nos puede aportar un uso de la palabra que posiblemente no se nos habría ocurrido de no consultar esas traducciones.

Por último, un ejemplo ilustrativo de la diferencia existente entre unas versiones y otras, en este caso el de las tres primeras traducciones al español de la obra de Scott: la de José Joaquín de Mora (1825) y las dos siguientes cronológicamente (la anónima de D. J. M. X, 1826 y la del editor Bergnes de las Casas, 1833); se trata del primer párrafo del primer capítulo, dando finalmente la nuestra propia. Juzgue el lector, que a él compete, de la benignidad de una u otra, así como de los posibles ‘préstamos’ entre una versión y otra<sup>16</sup>:

#### Original:

In that pleasant district of merry England which is watered by the river Don, there extended in ancient times a large forest, covering the greater part of the beautiful hills and vallies which lie between Sheffield and the pleasant town of Doncaster. The remains of this extensive wood are still to be seen at the noble seats of Wentworth, of Warncliffe Park, and around Rotherham. Here haunted of yore the fabulous Dragon of Wantley; here were fought many of the most desperate battles during the civil Wars of the Roses; and here also flourished in ancient times those bands of gallant outlaws, whose deeds have been rendered so popular in English song.

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<sup>16</sup> Tras un cotejo minucioso de las tres traducciones la impresión, clara y diáfana, que se saca es que la del editor Bergnes de las Casas, de 1833, es una copia prácticamente exacta de la de José Joaquín de Mora de ocho años antes, con algunos cambios de grafía o acentuación menores, como se puede comprobar ya desde el inicio de la novela; lo más probable es que el editor reimprimiera la traducción de Mora, igual que luego haría con la de El talismán de 1825, reimprimiéndola en 1838. Añadamos un solo ejemplo más del segundo párrafo del capítulo XIII:

1<sup>a</sup>: “Bien puede prepararse Front-de-Bœuf a restituir el feudo de Ivanhoe”, dijo Bracy, que despues de haber peleado valientemente en el torneo, y despojandose de sus armas, estaba ya con los otros personajes de la comitiva del Principe. (José Joaquín de Mora).

2<sup>a</sup>: “—Bien puede prepararse Frente de buey á restituir el feudo de Ivanhoe, dijo Bracy que despues de haber peleado valientemente en el torneo y despojándose de sus armas, estaba ya con los otros personajes de la comitiva del Principe”. (Traducción del editor Bergnes de las Casas).

## Traducción de José Joaquín de Mora:

*En aquel agradable distrito de Inglaterra por el cual pasea sus modestas aguas el río Don, había en tiempos antiguos una extendida selva, que sombreaba la mayor parte de las hermosas colinas y valles que median entre Sheffield, y la linda ciudad de Doncaster. Aun en el día se ven los restos de un espeso bosque en las haciendas que poseen allí algunas de las mas nobles y opulentas familias de Inglaterra. Tambien fueron aquellos sitios, escenas en que la superstición figuró sus quimeras maravillosas, y en que pasaron muchos sucesos importantes durante las guerras civiles. Allí vivió y se alimentaba de sangre el dragón de Wantley, allí se dieron muchas de las mas descomunales batallas en tiempos de las facciones de las Rosas; allí en fin señalaron su intrepidez las gavillas de bandidos, cuyas hazañas inspiraron tantas canciones a los poetas de aquel siglo.*

## Traducción de D. J. M. X:

*Viérase antiguamente, en esa hermosa comarca de Inglaterra que el Don baña y fertiliza, un inmenso bosque que cubriera casi todas las montañas y valles que se encuentran entre Sheffield y la graciosa ciudad de Doncaster. Aun el día de hoy subsisten considerables restos de él en las magníficas posesiones de Wentworth, de Warncliffe-Park, y en las cercanías de Rotherham. Este fuera precisamente el teatro de los estragos del fabuloso dragon de Wantley; aqui se dieran tambien algunas de las mas sangrientas batallas, á que dió ocasion la guerra civil entre la Rosa encarnada y la Rosa blanca, y aqui campearan por último aquellas bandas de valientes, cazadores de contrabando en un principio, y que, proscritos por este delito, se hicieron salteadores por necesidad, y cuyas hazañas han popularizado tanto los antiguos cantares ingleses.*

## Traducción del editor Bergnes:

*En aquel agradable distrito de Inglaterra por el cual pasea sus modestas aguas el río Don, había en lo antiguo una dilatada selva que cubría la mayor parte de las hermosas colinas y valles que median entre Sheffield y la linda ciudad de Doncaster. Aun en el día se ven los restos de un espeso bosque en las haciendas que poseen allí algunas de las mas nobles y opulentas familias de Inglaterra.*

*Tambien fueron aquellos sitios escenas en que la superstición figuró sus quimeras maravillosas, y en que pasaron muchos sucesos importantes durante las guerras civiles. Allí vivió y se alimentaba de sangre el Dragon de Wantley; allí se dieron muchas de las mas descomunales batallas en tiempo de las facciones de las Rosas; allí en fin señalaron su intrepidez las gavillas de bandidos, cuyas hazañas inspiraron tantas canciones á los poetas de aquel siglo.*

Nuestra traducción:

En aquella agradable comarca de la alegre Inglaterra que esta bañada por el río Don, había antaño un bosque de gran extensión que cubría la mayor parte de las hermosas colinas y valles que se encuentran entre Sheffield y la agradable ciudad de Doncaster. Todavía pueden verse los restos de ese espeso bosque en las nobles residencias de Wentworth, en el parque de Warncliffe y alrededor de Rotherham. Allí desarrolló sus correrías el fabuloso dragón de Wantley; allí tuvieron lugar muchas de las importantes batallas durante la guerra civil de Las Rosas y allí también florecieron en tiempo antiguo galantes bandidos, cuyos hechos han sido popularizados por el cancionero inglés.

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# A GENEVAN CAMILLA: THE FIRST TRANSLATION OF FRANCES BURNEY'S CAMILLA INTO FRENCH

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## **Abstract**

Frances Burney (1752-1840) was the most famous woman writer in eighteenth-century England. This paper is inscribed in a major project and offers a translemic analysis of the French version of *Camilla* (1796), Burney's third novel, as it appeared in a Genevan periodical, *Bibliothèque Britannique*, published by the brothers Marc-Auguste and Charles Pictet. After a contextualisation of the writer and her age, I will examine the target text taking into account the concept of literary polysystem and its diverse elements according to Itamar Even-Zohar. The aim is to describe how Burney was presented in continental reviews. *Camilla* is a complex novel recently praised by feminist critics, but it is also difficult to adapt to eighteenth-century French poetics. In this case, the Pictets stressed its didacticism by selecting specific features, so that the French-speaking readers were presented a novel quite different from the original one.

**Keywords:** Frances Burney, translation, *Bibliothèque Britannique*, eighteenth-century novel.

## **UNA CAMILLA GINEBRINA: LA PRIMERA TRADUCCIÓN AL FRANCÉS DE CAMILLA DE FRANCES BURNEY**

## **Resumen**

Frances Burney (1752-1840) fue la escritora inglesa más famosa del siglo dieciocho. Este artículo se inscribe en un proyecto más amplio y ofrece un análisis translémico de la versión al francés de *Camilla* (1796), tercera novela de Burney, tal y como apareció en una publicación

periódica de Ginebra, *Bibliothèque Britannique*, de los hermanos Marc-Auguste y Charles Pictet. Tras una contextualización de la escritora y su época, examinaré la traducción teniendo en cuenta el concepto de polisistema literario y sus diversos elementos según Itamar Even-Zohar. Se pretende describir cómo se presentaba a Burney en las reseñas continentales. *Camilla* es una novela compleja recientemente alabada por la crítica feminista, pero también resulta difícil de adaptar a la poética francesa del siglo dieciocho. En este caso, los Pictet enfatizaron su didactismo seleccionando características específicas, de tal forma que los lectores francófonos se encontraron con una novela bastante distinta de la original.

**Palabras clave:** Frances Burney, traducción, *Bibliothèque Britannique*, novela del siglo dieciocho.

## 1. Introduction

Frances Burney, Fanny Burney or Madame D'Arbly (1752-1840) was the most famous woman writer in eighteenth-century England. As the daughter of the famous musicologist Dr. Charles Burney, Frances had contact with artists and the higher classes since she was a girl. The lexicographer Dr. Samuel Johnson, the dramatists Richard B. Sheridan and Samuel Foote, or the actor David Garrick frequented the Burneys. After the anonymous publication of *Evelina* (1778), her first novel, and *Cecilia* (1782), Burney composed several comedies (*The Witlings* [1779], *The Woman Hater* [1802], *Love and Fashion* [1798] and *A Busy Day* [1800-2]), and she worked some years as Second Keeper of Robes of Queen Charlotte. In 1793, she defied parental authority and married the French exiled Alexandre d'Arbly. The family left Britain for France, where the writer lived for thirteen years before she published her last novel, *The Wanderer* (1814), in England. Though nowadays we know her mainly as a novelist and diarist and the greatest part of the Burney Studies have dealt with her fiction, Burney also wrote essays, such as *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* (1793). Research has lately focused on Burney's opus as a playwright—including her comedies and the tragedies *Edwy and Elgiva* (1788-89), *Hubert de Vere*, *The Siege of Pevensey* and *Elberta* (composed between 1789-91; Darby [1997], Kelly [2004] and Pitofski [2005]).

This article examines the first translation of Burney's *Camilla* (1796) into French in a Swiss publication, *Bibliothèque Britannique* (*BB*), which has been ignored so far. By describing the translated text diachronically, it is possible to draw some conclusions on Burney's reception on the continent at the end of the eighteenth century. For our translemic analysis, we will bear in mind two aspects: first, Itamar Even-Zohar's idea of the literary polysystem as "The network of relations that is hypothesized to obtain between a number of activities called 'literary' and consequently these activities themselves observed via that network" (18), and second, the fact that the literary text is dynamic, subject to diverse influences, and it corresponds to a certain demand. We adopt this approach since it privileges the complexity of the text and its elements —*institution, repertoire, producer, consumer, market* and *product*— as it is explained by Itamar Even-Zohar (37-41), and it can be applied to translation. Therefore, we will contextualise the author of the text, the translators, and the publication where the target text appeared. We will also take into account the most remarkable features of the later and the kind of readers or public that translators had in mind.

## 2. Burney's craft and *Camilla*

Didacticism and satire mixed in Burney's fiction. Her *oeuvre* was respected by Austin Dobson, who placed *Evelina* as the work which "carries the novel of manners into domestic life, and prepares the way for Miss Edgeworth and the exquisite parlour-pieces of Miss Austen" (204). Burney was a mannerist praised for her wit, and it is true that she transformed the sentimental novel cultivated by Samuel Richardson, but she also inaugurated "the expression of feminine outlook on life" in Brimley Johnson's words (Hemlow 12). Furthermore, Burney was one of the first women who vindicated her position as an *authoress*, claiming the same authority as male writers when women usually published anonymously and used their prefaces to position themselves towards the novel. The volumes edited by Sabor (2007) and Clark (2007) and the existence of The Burney Society demonstrate the actuality of Burney's *oeuvre*.

Burney's third novel, *Camilla* (1796), was avidly expected and written by subscription thanks to Mrs. Boscawen, Mrs. Crewe and

Mrs. Locke, as Edward A. Bloom and Lillian A. Bloom point out in the “Introduction” (Burney, *Camilla* xv). The manuscript was sold to Payne, Cadell and Davies for 1,000 pounds (Burney, *Camilla* xvii-xix), and critical reactions were very varied (Burney, *Camilla* xix-xx). In *Analytical Review*, the critic —probably Mary Wollstonecraft— highlighted that *Camilla* had some parts “superior to anything she has yet produced” (qtd. in Epstein 206). In fact, Mr. Tyrold’s sermon was later published with Dr. Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughter* (1774) (Epstein 291).

On the surface, *Camilla* is a feminine *bildungsroman* which does not depart much from the numerous feminocentric productions of these years (Elizabeth Inchbald’s *A Simple Story* [1791] or Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* [1801] are some good examples). Joyce Hemlow defines it as “a hybrid produced by modifications or variations of the courtesy-book and the novel of manners, to which Fanny already had made significant contributions; *Camilla* may be described as a courtesy novel” (249), but *Camilla* is also a fertile and mature work prepared for a long time. It means a step further in Burney’s concept of the novel exposed in the first chapter dealing with the Heart of Man. The narration begins like a fairy tale, when the Tyrold children receive their uncle, Sir Hugh Tyrold, an old bachelor who comes to live in the neighbourhood, and finishes with Camilla’s love trials. There is a good deal of intrigue and romanticism, and special attention is paid to family matters. To satisfy the taste of her readers, Burney added some touches of the Gothic —in fashion thanks to the success of Anne Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791)— and a mock representation of William Shakespeare’s *Othello*.

Burney’s novel questions some controversial issues of the time already stressed by feminists, such as the value of woman’s beauty and intellect with the character of Eugenia, and Burney envisions a particular kind of masculinity with Edgar Mandelberg, an irresolute hero or “quintessential sensitive male spectator” (Johnson 155). This is not the place to offer a summary of the feminist reassessments of the novel, but suffice to say that in her influential *The Iron Pen*, Julia Epstein already insists on the pervading role of pain and anger in Burney’s fiction as an answer “to protect herself by exposing the social codes she pretended to live by” (225). Margaret Anne Doody states in her biography of Burney that Eugenia is an answer to Homer’s Helen

and narcissism, and she has the faults traditionally attributed to cultivated women (243). Another critic, Eleanor Wikborg devotes an article to analyse the mentors in *Camilla*, and she points out that, through Edgar, Burney shows how even the perfect lover-mentor can become selfish and end up as a cruel oppressor (99). As we will see, the Genevan text presents a quite different *Camilla* to its readers.

### 3. *Bibliothèque Britannique*

In Britain, the last years of the eighteenth century were marked by a contradiction: while there was a group of liberal intellectuals who deeply admired the French Revolution as a model (William Blake and William Wordsworth, for instance), an intense feeling of Gallophobia prevailed in society and had been reinforced by the recent war with France for the American colonies. As for the continent, Britain was praised as a model after the development and technological changes introduced by the Industrial Revolution, which brought so much prosperity to the nation. The British Empire was consolidated, and, for the French, it was the most powerful rival. In the literary realm, book production raised paralleling the power of the avid middle class which demanded more and more literary products on the market. The prestige of writers became important as journalism and the novel flourished, and some genres, such as the Gothic novel and the novel of manners—in which Burney excelled—, had an undistinguishable British flavour.

Critics and *BB* are included in what Even-Zohar calls *institution*, which governs the production and consumption of literary products and is composed of the aggregate factors involved with the maintenance of literature as a socio-cultural activity (37-38). From the sociolinguistic point of view, the translation of an English work into French meant the insertion of that work in a higher culture. Leaving apart the efforts of Samuel Johnson and other scholars to affirm the English language, French was a model and a language of prestige associated with erudition. The Pictets chose French for their translation due to its international status.

Previous publications, such as *Bibliothèque italique* (1728-34) paved the way for *Bibliothèque Britannique ou recueil extrait des ouvrages anglais périodiques et autres, des Mémoires et transactions*

*des Sociétés et Académies de la Grande-Bretagne, d'Asie, d'Afrique et d'Amerique rédigé à Genève par une Société de gens de Lettres*, which was founded by the Pictet brothers and Frédéric Guillaume Maurice in Geneva in 1796. It would later be called *Bibliothèque Universelle des Sciences, Belles Lettres et Arts* until 1924, when it disappeared. The publication wanted to promote the knowledge of the British Isles on the continent, so the part relative to science was the responsibility of Marc-Auguste Pictet and Charles Pictet dealt with agriculture and literature. He also translated, compiled and adapted the texts. The Pictets were interested in all sort of British material, but *BB* wanted to serve the Republic of Geneva and to strengthen the contacts with the French Empire in particular. They had, of course, an economic aim in mind and cultivated different domains to attract as many readers as possible. Ruled by utilitarian criteria and under its antirevolutionary moral tone, *BB* selected its material as long as it was universal, and it avoided the frivolous one (Barblan 298; Bickerton, "A Scientific" 531). The Pictets also recommended certain readings and presented themselves as the moral guardians of their readers. They embraced liberalism and the existing social order, and it is not strange to perceive a certain antifeminist tone in articles and translations.

William Godwin, Jeremy Betham o Étienne Dumont wrote in *BB*, which was not restricted to political writings. Extracts from Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) were printed in *BB* before their translation in France, and *Pride and Prejudice* was in *BB* few months after its publication in London in 1814 (Bickerton, *Marc-Auguste* 490). Novelties, exotic travels, moral stories for children and pedagogic works such as Maria Edgeworth's *The Parents' Assistant* were familiar from 1797 onwards. More importantly, the Anglo-Irish author would certainly not be famous in Europe if it were not for *BB* (Bickerton, *Marc-Auguste* 534).

The Pictets preferred novels over other literary forms due to the difficulty to adjust the English theatrical structures and taste to the French-speaking readers. In general, they offered free translations, sometimes not very accurate but acceptable, with omissions, syntactic adaptations and the neutralisation of political connotations. The stylistic divergence was greatly taken into account (Bickerton, *Marc-Auguste* 490) since the English used long sentences, metaphors, and long adjectival phrases, which puzzled the French.

As for the readers or *consumers* of the literary product, the Pictets knew very well the subjects that they had to avoid:

La classe nombreuse des écrits qui appartoient [sic] à la politique du moment...tous les ouvrages de controverse, ceux qui portent l'emprunte d'une intolérance haineuse, ou de cet esprit de secte trop répandu en Angleterre, et qui devieat [sic] comme un des traits caracteristiques [sic] du pays. (Pictet 14)

This attitude does not surprise, bearing in mind that subscriptions came from Germany, Russia, Italy, France, Spain and Portugal. Marc-Auguste had contact with eminent people:

Le rédacteur de la Bibliothèque Britannique correspondra avec des littérateurs, tels Madame de Staël, Suard, Benjamin Constant, Madame Cottin, Maria Edgeworth, des chefs d'Etat comme Thomas Jeferson, la plupart des membres de l'Institut, des nombreux ministres et hauts fonctionnaires de l'Empire, des têtes couronnées comme les princes de Saxe-Gotha, de Wurtemberg et le Grand Duc de Toscane; autant de personnages, célèbres ou inconnus, de toute l'Europe. (Cassaigneau, and Rilliet 132)

Though Devonshire explains that Burney was not much read by the French because she was considered a moral and puritanical writer like Richardson (97), the reception of her work in her adopted country was rather positive. By 1797, both *Evelina* and *Cecilia* had been translated into French: the former by Griffet de la Baume in 1779 and by H. Renfner in 1784 and *Cecilia* by H. Rieu in 1783 (Devonshire 95). The author of *Les liaisons dangereuses* (1782), Choderlos de Laclos, who admired Burney and modelled Cécile on Evelina in his novel, praised the acute observations and pure moral message in *Cecilia* (119-20). Some anonymous novels were associated with Burney, who even had a competitor at home since the works of her half-sister Sarah Harriet Burney were also successful in France and would be translated there some years later: *Geraldine* (1811; republished as *Miss Fauconberg*, 1825), *Le Naufrage* (1811) and *Le Jeune Cleveland* (1824). *Les voisins de Campagne* (1820) by Sarah Harriet were attributed to Frances (Devonshire 94-95).



#### 4. *Camilla*

The first feature of the Genevan text is related to its date: it appeared in January 1797, just five months after the publication of the novel in England. By 1798 there was a five-volume abridgement, *Camilla, ou la Peinture de la Jeunesse* ("Note on the text", Burney, *Camilla* xxx), a translation attributed to MM. Desprez and Deschamps (Devonshire 95). The Pictets refer to Payne's edition (1796) published in London and rendered into French as "*Camille: ou le tableau de la jeunesse, par l'auteur d'Evelina & de Cecilia*." More than versioning the whole text or a specific part of *Camilla*, the Pictets offer a review with the translation of seventeen excerpts which appeared in the section called "Romans."

Gerard Genette refers to the paratext as a transaction area composed by the verbal and non verbal elements accompanying a text and guaranteeing its reception and usage (7). The paratext affects the critical interpretation of any work and is a

[...] lieu privilégié d'une pragmatique et d'une stratégie, d'une action sur le public au service, bien ou mal compris et accompli, d'un meilleur accueil du texte et d'une lecture plus pertinente & plus pertinente, s'entend aux yeux de l'auteur et de ses alliés. (8)

The introduction by the Pictets functions as a paratext. Initially, they wanted to devote three numbers of *BB* to *Camilla* (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 21). Then, they preferred to limit themselves to different extracts of *Camilla* stressing that Burney's creative genius has not diminished after marriage, so Madame D'Arblay is still as good a writer as Miss Burney was.

For the Pictets, many characters in *Camilla* are admirably portrayed: "soutenus avec un art qu'on ne peut trop admirer" (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 21), which was Burney's intention contrary to Burke's advice: as it is indicated in a letter to her father in 1795, she aimed at a "NEW WORK of the same species as *Evelina & Cecilia*; new *modified*, in being more multifarious in the Characters it brings into action" (qtd. in Doody 215). After offering a long summary of the plot (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 22-27), the Pictets insist that Burney portrays an English setting and characters «parce que, dans certaines nuances, les mœurs qu'il [le roman] peint avec une admirable vérité, sont exclusivement propres à ce pays-là» (Burney,



*Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 28), and that there is much drama and good dialogues:

Quand Mad. D'Arblay nous présente un personnage, nous croyons faire une connoissance [sic] nouvelle, dont les qualités, les défauts, les faibles, les ridicules, font un ensemble: rien n'est discord dans le caractères de ses acteurs: elle leur donne seulement cette juste mesure d'exagération qu'il faut à l'effet théâtral. Leur jeu est soutenu avec un art non moins étonnant: les dialogues sont vifs, animés, chaque interlocuteur parle son langue, & chaque conversation est, en quelque sorte, une scène dramatique. (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 28)

Burney is compared with the masters of the English novel with a difference:

Sans égaler Richardson & Fielding dans l'art de peindre & d'émouvoir les passions & les affections. Mad. D'Arblay s'assure, à cet égard, dans cet ouvrage un rang distingué parmi les romanciers Anglais; & elle les surpasse peut-être tous dans le but moral de son roman. (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 28-29)

The same idea appears in the advertisement to the 1798 French translation:

Le Lecteur retrouve Miss Burney dans une foule de vérités de sentiment mêlées à ses récits, dans une philosophie douce, aimable, toujours en action, toujours pleine de leçons utiles pour tous les âges. (Qtd. in Hemlow 270)

In general, the Pictets preserve the English original without making many changes. The brilliant opening about human nature and the novelist as the one who tries to study it is not altered in French:

The historian of human life finds less of difficulty and of intricacy to develop, in its accidents and adventures, than the investigator of the human heart in its feelings and its changes. In vain may Fortune wave her many-colour banner, alternately regaling and dismaying, with hues that seem glowing with all the creation's felicities, or with tints that appear stained with ingredients of unmixed [sic] horrors; her most rapid vicissitudes, her most unassimilating [sic] eccentricities, are mocked, laughed at, and distanced by the wilder wonders of the Heart of man; that amazing

assemblage of all possible contrarieties, in which one thing alone is steady—the perverseness of spirit which grafts desire on what is denied. Its qualities are indefinable, its resources unfathomable, its weaknesses indefensible. In our neighbours we cannot judge, in ourselves we dare not trust it. We lose ere we learn to appreciate, and ere we can comprehend it we must be born again. Its capacity o'er-leaps all limit, while its futility includes every absurdity. It lives its own surprise—it ceases to beat—and the void is inscrutable! In one grand and general vie, who can display such a portrait? Fairly, however faintly, to delineate some of its features, is the sole and discriminate province of the pen which would trace nature, yet blot out our personality. (Burney, *Camilla* 7)

L'historien de la vie humaine éprouve moins de difficultés à développer les événements qui la remplissent, que le peintre du coeur à en tracer les sentiments & les métamorphoses. En vain la fortune agite sa bannière colorée de toutes les nuances; envain répand-elle tour-à-tour les félicités de la création, & les horreurs sans mélange; ses vicissitudes les plus rapides, ses disparates les plus frappantes ne font rien auprès des incompréhensibles écarts du coeur humain: de cet assemblage de toutes les contradictions, qui n'est jamais semblable à lui-même que dans le désir pervers de tout ce qui est défendu — Ses qualités ne sauroient [sic] se définir, ses ressources sont sans bornes, ses faiblesses impardonnables. Nous ne pouvons ni juger les autres, ni nous fier à nous-mêmes. Tout nous échappe avant d'avoir été apprécié; il faudroit [sic] revivre pour comprendre le coeur humain; car sa capacité dépasse sous les limites, & tout ce qui est absurde s'y rencontre. Il existe pour sa propre confusion —Il cesse de battre; —& l'énigme de la vie n'est point devine!...Qui osera entreprendre de tracer l'ensemble de ce tableau? En saisir, en esquisser seulement quelques traits, c'est l'ambition de celle que veut peindre la nature, & respecter les personnes. (Burney, *Camilla*. *Bibliothèque Britannique* 31-32)

For editorial reasons, the paragraphs of the original do not always coincide with the translation into French:

Composed and strengthened by religious duties, he then desired to see Eugenia and Indiana, that he might give them his last exhortation and counsel, in case of a speedy end.

Mr. Tyrold would fain have spared him this touching exertion, but he declared he could not go off with a clear conscience, unless he told them the advice which he had been thinking of for them, between whiles during his illness.

Mr. Tyrold then feared that opposition might but discompose him, and summoned his youngest daughter and his niece, charging them both to repress their affliction, lest it should accelerate what they most dreaded. (Burney, *Camilla* 329)

Après avoir recouvré un peu de tranquillité & de force dans ces méditations religieuses, Sir Hugo désira de voir ses deux nièces Eugénie & Indiana, pour leur donner ses derniers conseils & sa bénédiction. Son frère voulut combattre cette idée; mais il déclara que, pour la paix de sa conscience, il falloit [sic] qu'il fit part à ses nièces des réflexions que son état de maladie lui avoit [sic] suggérées. —Mr. Tyrold craignit alors de lui donner du chagrin en résistant plus long-temps; & il appela la fille cadette & Indiana, en lettre recommandant de contenir l'expression de leur douleur, de peur de hâter le moment de sa fin. (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 87)

Similarly, *Camilla* has impressed on her mind the Tyrolds' words typographically reproduced in italics:

*"May the dread forfeiture [...] not extend through my daughters! [...] May heaven [...] spare me evil under your shape at least!"* (Burney, *Camilla* 867)

*"Puisse la malédiction [...] ne point s'étendre jusqu'à mes filles [...] Que le ciel n'épargne du moins des chagrins en ma fille Camille."* (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 129-30)

The French literary taste and French poetics heavily departed from the English ones concerning the unity of action, and this would be pointed out by the Pictets. First, there is not one single plot, but "huit intrigues distinctes, deux enlèvements, & six mariages" (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 30), and Burney «mérite sa part du reproche souvent encouru par les Ecrivains Anglais de ne pas discerner la ligne qui sépare ce qui amuse de ce qui fatigue, & de gâter en prolongeant, ce qui auroit plus en moins de paroles» (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 31). In English, we find an account of Eugenia's tragedy in

childhood when she contracts smallpox in the fair, then she is dropped by her uncle from the seesaw and becomes crippled for life. However, Eugenia is not a favourite character in the target text: while the source text describes her isolation and Miss Margland's words at the party, (Burney, *Camilla* 61-62), the Pictets leave out this part. Similarly, the source text gives details of the country boys' welcome to Mr. Tyrol, Camilla and Eugenia when they visit the idiot girl and the children praise them as their benefactors (Burney, *Camilla* 77). This incident and Mr. Tyrol's following advice are skipped in French:

The means, my dear Eugenia, are not beneath the objects: if it is only from those who unite native hardness with uncultured minds and manners, that civility is to be obtained by such sordid materials, remember, also, it is from such only it can ever fail you. In the lowest life, equally with the highest, wherever nature has been kind, sympathy springs spontaneously for whatever is unfortunate, and respect for whatever seems innocent. Steel yourself, then, firmly to withstand attacks from the cruel and unfeeling, and rest perfectly secure you will have none other to apprehend. (Burney, *Camilla* 306)

One of the key scenes in *Camilla* is the conversation between Eugenia and Mr. Tyrol about beauty. She regrets having spent her childhood surrounded by books and not in contact with the world. Eugenia blames the Tyrols for having concealed her deformity, and she envies Indiana (Burney, *Camilla* 301-05). While Mr. Tyrol and Eugenia watch the idiot girl, the former talks about flattery and beauty, so that Eugenia realises she has been wrong and selfish (Burney, *Camilla* 305-11). The Pictets retain the conversation (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 77-85), but not Eugenia's reproach to her parents.

As we can see, the French-speaking readers could not fully appreciate the novel because many characters and adventures disappear in the translation. Idiolects are rendered as standard French in the target text, which is related to the *repertoire* or the rules and material that govern the use and making of the literary product (Even-Zohar 39). The improvement of the youth is a prevailing theme in the novel. Nevertheless, the Pictets do not translate how Sir Hugh's affectionately advises Lionel to cultivate his intellect. Self-reproach is precisely one defining trait of Sir Hugh, a Quixotic character who regrets not having cultivated his mind at the same time that he considers erudition as

useless. Any translator would have some difficulty in translating his discourse into French due to the vitality of the original:

I was never so serious in my life: not that I should like to be horse-ponded in the least, though I would submit to it for a punishment, and out of duty: but then, when it was done, it would be over: now the deuce of study is, there is no end of it! And it does so little for one! One can go through life so well without it! There is not above here and there and old codger that asks one a question that can bring it into any play. And then, a turn upon one's heel, or looking at one's watch, or wondering at one's short memory, or happening to forget just that one single passage, carries off the whole in two minutes, as completely as if one had been working one's whole life to get ready for the assault. And pray, now, tell me, how can it be worth one's best days, one's gayest hours, the very flower of one's life—all to be sacrificed to plodding over musty grammars and lexicons, merely to cut a figure just for about two minutes once or twice in a year? (Burney, *Camilla* 243)

Another point not represented in French are Clermont's insults to Eugenia which are toned down:

Me, brother? la! I'm sure I think she's the ugliest little fright, poor thing! I ever saw in the world, poor thing! *such a little, short, dumpty, hump backed, crooked, limping figure of a fright...poor thing!* (Burney, *Camilla* 568, my italics)

Moi!... je dis...Hélas! sûrement; c'est une petite horreur, la pauvre petite créature; ça est petit, ça est de travers, ça est couture; *c'est une véritable petite horreur; pauvre petite créature.* (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 126, my italics)

The same happens when the translator has to reproduce the self-accusing discourse of Conscience. In English, we find some traits of an archaic register stylistically marked which is neutralised in the French version:

Those friends, it cried with thus impatiently thou seekest to quit, have they not loved, cherished, reared thee with the most exquisite care and kindness? If they are offended, who has offended them? If thou art abandoned, may it not be from necessity, or from accident? When thou hast inflicted upon

them the severe pain of harbouring anger against what is so dear to them, wouldst thou load them with regret that they manifested any sensibility of thy errors [sic]? Hast thou plunged thy house in calamity, and will no worthier wish occur to thee, than to leave it to its sorrows and distress, with the aggravating pangs of causing thy afflicting, however blamable [sic] self-desertion? Of coming to thee... perhaps even now!... with mild forgiveness, and finding thee a self-devoted corpse? — not fallen, indeed, by the profane hand of daring suicide, but equally self-murdered though wilful self-neglect. (Burney, *Camilla* 872-73)

«Ces parents,» lui dit une voix intérieure, «que tu es impatiente de quitter, ne t'ont-ils pas aimée, chérie, élevée avec ses soins les plus soutenus, la sollicitude la plus tendre? N'est-ce pas toi qui es coupable? L'abandon où tu te trouves n'est-il point dû à un accident du hasard ou à l'arrêt de la nécessité? Après les avoir forcés à la malveillance envers ce qu'ils chérissaient [sic], tu voudrais [sic] leur donner le regret d'avoir été sensibles à tes erreurs! Tu as plongé ta famille dans la douleur, & le vœu que tu formes, s'il est exaucé, accroîtra les angoisses de tes parents du regret de t'avoir délaissé!... Peut-être, tout-à-l'heure, viendront-ils à toi avec le pardon dans le cœur & sur les lèvres; ils trouvent leur fille sans vie! Ils pleureront sur le cadavre de leur enfant qui aura hâté sa mort en s'abandonnant elle-même!» (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 138-39)

Despite the omission of Macdersey's argument with Mrs. Arlbery when she complains of men nowadays (Burney, *Camilla* 252-56), the Pictets retain the longest —and most important— scenes. Sir Hugh's death constitutes one of the most moving scenes in *Camilla*, and here the Pictets preserve the italics and the announce that his fortune is for Eugenia and not for Camilla (Burney, *Camilla* 328-32; Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 89-90). Lionel's description of a perfect man to Camilla after having spent his parents' money is also present in the Pictets' version. He admits not being like Mr. Tyrold or Edgar because he hates studying and promises to reform (Burney, *Camilla* 238-43; Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 53-63). Likewise, for Mrs. Arlbery, Indiana is not a sensible girl, and Edgar is bound to be unhappy since Indiana's beauty will not last long. The part dealing with Camilla's sufferings when Lionel forces her to write a letter to Hugh asking him for

some money appears in the Genevan text, as well as Camilla's defence of Eugenia (Burney, *Camilla* 496-501; Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 93-94). Towards the end, Edgar discovers that Camilla is engaged to no one and they speak their feelings (Burney, *Camilla* 537-45; Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 103-07), which contrasts with Clermont's rejection of Eugenia and his lack of respect towards Sir Hugh. The Pictets purposefully preserve both (Burney, *Camilla* 561-68; Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 114-26), as well as the final scene, so much praised by feminist critics: Camilla discovers that Clermont is dead and reenounters her mother (Burney, *Camilla* 865-84; Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 126-48).

The Pictets objected to the hero, who was "uniformément irrésolu" (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 30) and «un amant généreux suit sa maîtresse avec la sollicitude du sentiment, il ne la surveille point avec l'inquiétude de la défiance» (Burney, *Camilla. Bibliothèque Britannique* 30). Edgar is not important in the Genevan text, and this determines the impression of French-speaking readers. In fact, Edgar's motivations are never clear: Camilla cannot understand him and the novel's main subject is precisely the Heart of Man as it is explained at the beginning. However, a considerable omission in the French text leaves unexplained why Edgar suddenly loves Camilla so much while she still sees him as "insensible and hard of heart" (Burney, *Camilla* 541). Besides, Edgar's letter to Camilla is not reproduced (Burney, *Camilla* 879), and the trial in which Camilla tries to defend herself also disappears:

[...] A voice hollow, deep, and distant, dreadfully pierced her ear, calling out: 'Thou hast but thy own wish! Rejoice, thou murmurer, for thou diest!' Clearer, shriller, another voice quick vibrated in the air: 'Whither goest thou?', it cried, 'and whence comest thou?'

A voice from within, over which she thought she had no controul, though it seemed issuing from her vitals, low, hoarse, and tremolous, answered, 'Whither I go, let me rest! Whence I come from let me not look back! Those who gave me birth, I have deserted; my life, my vital powers I have rejected' [...] (Burney, *Camilla* 874-75)

We have analysed the Genevan text by taking as a reference all the elements highlighted in Even-Zohar's theory of the literary polysystem.



It is clear that the Pictets's translation helped to consolidate Burney's image as a moral writer, the one prevailing in Great Britain and the Continent. They wanted to attract readers, and the Genevan text does not have any features of ideological discomfort which are so prominent in the English original. The Pictets's version was conditioned by taste and editorial constraints since they chose and adapted certain parts of a very complex novel summarised in their introduction. As a consequence, for the French-speaking audience, Burney promoted good values and *Camilla* was simply a sentimental novel which did not question any assumption of patriarchal society. Relevant parts remained hidden, and feminist scholars would later reveal them for Burney's twentieth-century readers.

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## **SOCIOCULTURAL REFERENCES IN CONTEXT: THE SCHOOL STORY SUBGENRE**

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### **Abstract**

Enid Blyton's *Malory Towers* series belongs to a long tradition of school stories in British juvenile fiction. Her books are a rich source of cultural references about a period and a social context, and have been enjoyed by successive generations of readers in ninety languages since their publication. After setting the novels in their historical, educational and social context, this paper examines one of the series of stories, *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers*, and compares it with a Spanish translation, discussing the aspects causing most difficulties for the translator. It is found that the translation has a tendency to misrepresent important cultural references, omitting some aspects and even adding details contrary to the spirit of the original text. The paper concludes that much more care is needed in translating children's fiction, so as not to deny the readers understanding and enjoyment.

**Keywords:** translation, children's literature, cultural references.

## **REFERENCIAS SOCIOCULTURALES EN CONTEXTO: EL SUBGÉNERO DE LOS CUENTOS DE INTERNADO**

### **Resumen**

La serie *Malory Towers*, de la escritora Enid Blyton, pertenece a una larga tradición de historias escolares dentro de la literatura juvenil británica. Sus obras son una fuente muy rica de referencias culturales acerca de una época y un contexto social, y generaciones de lectores han disfrutado de ellas desde su publicación en noventa idiomas. Después de situar a las novelas en su contexto histórico, educativo y

social, este trabajo analiza uno de los títulos, *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers*, y lo compara con una traducción al español, examinando los aspectos que causan más dificultades para el traductor. Se observa que esta traducción tiende a distorsionar algunas referencias culturales importantes, omitiendo algunas, e incluso añadiendo detalles que contradicen la intención del texto original. Se llega a la conclusión de que es necesario cuidar más la traducción de la literatura infantil para no negarles a los lectores la comprensión y el placer.

**Palabras clave:** traducción, literatura infantil, referencias culturales.

## Introduction

In the eighteenth century, at a time when educational methods and objectives were being questioned, especially with regard to the upbringing of girls, Sarah Fielding published *The Governess; or, Little Female Academy* (1749). It was the first British novel written expressly for girls, and also the first to be set in a boarding school environment. Before the appearance of novels such as this, children had little choice for reading matter: they had only adult works—*Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*—though they also had access to fables, nursery rhymes, chapbooks and ballads. However, attitudes and values were being challenged in a period of great social, intellectual and political change, and when the London publisher and writer John Newbery realised there was a market for juvenile literature, children were liberated by the introduction of works written especially for them, such as his own first contribution, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744). From this time onwards, children were no longer to be considered merely smaller versions of adults; they were to be instructed, but also entertained according to their interests and needs.

In the following century, Harriet Martineau's *The Crofton Boys* (1841), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848), and *David Copperfield* (1850) all prepared the way for two of the major works to establish the boarding school genre: *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) by Thomas Hughes, and Frederic W. Farrar's *Eric or, Little by Little* (1858). Both of these writers developed ideals of principled behaviour and loyalty in a self-contained male world—the

public school—far away from the female influence of home. By the 1880s the boys' public school story was a firmly established part of juvenile fiction. In 1881 Talbot Baines Reed published *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's*, at first in serialized form in the *Boy's Own Paper*. It was a reaction against the poor quality serial stories which appeared in the weekly "penny dreadfuls" of the time, and which were aimed at working class adolescents. Reed emphasized plot rather than character, with more humour and less didacticism than previous stories (Briggs and Butts 158). The immensely popular story set at St Dominic's established a pattern, with a particular structure, which later writers were to develop. Such stories showed how a limited format, consisting of the closed world of a public school, and a series of recurring elements in the formula, could be exploited successfully.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Sarah Doudney published her moralising tale of a girls' boarding-school, entitled *Monksbury College* (1876). From then onwards, girls' school stories also settled into a predictable popular formula. Unlike many of her contemporaries writing in this genre, Angela Brazil (1868-1947) wrote a collection, rather than a series of stories: each of her sixteen school novels stood on its own with different characters in every instalment. Her popular works dealt realistically with the usual concerns of contemporary middle-class adolescent schoolgirls. During the first years of the twentieth century, however, the success of boys' school stories was affected by a series of novels critical of the idealised, false world of public schoolboy heroes (Wells et al. 631). As a consequence, readership of full-length boys' school stories declined during the inter-war years. They were criticized as escapist, formulaic and elitist, but in spite of this, the period still produced important fictional figures full of cultural meaning for subsequent generations of readers.

The genre for girls continued to increase in popularity, and to introduce stories related to Girl Guides, founded in 1910, and schoolgirl 'detectives'. The writers credited with consolidating girls' school stories at this time were Dorita Fairlie-Bruce (the *Dimsie* series), Elsie Oxenham (forty *Abbey Girls* books published between 1920 and 1959), Elinor Brent-Dyer (*Chalet School* series), and Enid Blyton (the *St Clare's* and *Malory Towers* series). The *Malory Towers* series (1946-51) continues to be popular; special interest Internet pages cater to Blyton fans of all

ages and nationalities.<sup>1</sup> Readers' comments and reviews on such sites highlight the values contained in the original stories, and reveal certain nostalgia for the closed world of the boarding school. New editions are regularly published, and demand is so great that in 2008 six sequels to *Malory Towers* were commissioned (Enid Blyton Society).

In the last half of the twentieth century, the gender-specific boarding-school story inevitably evolved into the more common social experience of day-school. Thus there are stories about grammar schools, secondary moderns, primary schools and cathedral choir schools, where characters come to terms with contemporary issues such as racism, sexism and bullying. Their relationship with such issues means that they are more likely to coincide with the educational experience of the majority of modern readers, but at the same time these modern school stories may have a more limited lifespan than the classic school sagas. A curious by-product of the *Harry Potter* series has been a regeneration of school stories, adapting them to a coeducational boarding-school context, with politically correct attention to ethnic variety. J.K. Rowling's stories have even renewed interest in real-life education at a boarding school as an alternative for middle-class families disenchanted with state education in the UK. Boarding-schools have lost their negative image of anachronic institutions, as can be appreciated in the article by Middleton:

Thirty years ago, children went to boarding school in much the same way as convicts went to a penal colony. They didn't so much go, as were sent. Today, that's all changed. Going to boarding school is now a lifestyle choice, not so much on the part of the parents, as of the child. (para. 1)

In the UK state sector there are thirty-five boarding schools which charge only for accommodation, the education being free. Not surprisingly, all are over-subscribed, some with ten times more applications than places. Their success is due to the fact that "the combination of the excellent state-funded education and a stable boarding community enables pupils to make the most of their talents and abilities" (SBSA,

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<sup>1</sup> The *Malory Towers* series comprises six titles: *First Term at Malory Towers*; *Second Form at Malory Towers*; *Third Year at Malory Towers*; *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers*; *In the Fifth at Malory Towers*; *Last Term at Malory Towers*. The author intended them to be read consecutively, with the readers maturing as the protagonists also mature, but she also implied that each story was self-contained and as such could be read separately.

para. 2). It could be said, therefore, that the boarding-school story, both classic and modern, is maintaining a prominent position amongst young readers' preferences, and that it is made more relevant than might be expected by real life experience.

Two basic aspects—cultural references and colloquial language—in Enid Blyton's original text, *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers* and its translation into Spanish (*Cuarto Curso en Torres de Malory*) will be examined to show how they are often misrepresented to the target reader of the translation. The items chosen are notoriously difficult to translate, but understanding of the terms in question is necessary for the story to be acceptable and enjoyable for young readers of a different linguistic and cultural context.

The *Malory Towers* series was first published between 1946 and 1951. The books follow the school life of Darrell Rivers from first to final year. The six books were originally illustrated by Stanley Lloyd, but from the mid-fifties, the jackets were updated by Lilian Buchanan. The original dust jackets are an interesting source of visual cultural elements, revealing the girl's sports activities, leisure pursuits, classroom behaviour, attitudes, body language and even fashions. Due to lack of space they will not be examined in this paper, but the line drawings contained in both versions will be mentioned in section 2.5 below.

## 1. Cultural references

A large number of the references dealt with here are obviously part of the academic context, in particular a private boarding-school in post-war Britain. The social level is also necessarily upper-middle class, with its own leisure activities, food, clothes and social markers. It is therefore distant in time, space and social level with regard to the experience of the present generation of young readers. For the purpose of this study, all the occurrences of cultural references likely to be wrongly interpreted or simply not understood were located. Some of them would probably cause comprehension difficulties both for modern native and non-native addressees, while others would possibly only cause confusion for the non-natives. Due to limitations of space only a selection of items will be presented, emphasizing how in many

instances the original meaning has been either deformed or ignored by the translator, giving a distorted image to the Spanish addressee. The terms under discussion have been italicized in both languages, and where appropriate, other possible translations have been suggested, and are highlighted in bold script.

### 1.1. School organization and boarding-school.

She was almost thirteen, and should have gone to Malory Towers two *terms* before... (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Tenía casi trece años, y hubiera podido ir a “Torres de Malory” dos  *cursos*  antes ... (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso* 11).

Now it was the *summer term*... (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Ahora se trataba del *curso de verano* ... (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso* 11).

The translator equates *term* with *year* or *form*, whereas *term* refers to one of the three parts of the academic year: autumn (Christmas) term, spring term and summer term. Moreover, by translating *summer term* as *curso de verano*, the addressee will assume that the pupils are at school because they have failed their exams, have to repeat a course of study, or are taking part in an extracurricular activity.

Miss Potts was the first-form mistress, and also the *house-mistress* for North Tower; the tower to which Darrell belonged, and to which her young sister would go too. (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / La señorita Potts era la profesora del primer curso, y también la *encargada* de la “Torre Norte”, a la que pertenecía Darrell, y a la que también iría este curso su hermana pequeña. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

Malory Towers is a fortress-like structure with a tower at each corner, named North Tower, South Tower, West Tower and East Tower, and accordingly, the pupils are divided into four teams or houses which also take these names. This division of pupils into houses was and still is a common practice in boarding-schools, and is felt to be an important part of education:

A boy's House is very much the focus of his daily life, and provides a community within the school to which he relates particularly closely. ... The House system at Tonbridge retains a traditional strength and encourages the loyalty which grows



from security within a close-knit community of manageable size. (Tonbridge para. 1)

As boarders, pupils would eat, sleep, study and have recreational activities in their respective houses, winning or losing points for the inter-house competitions, and each house would have a tutor or house-master/house-mistress. The house system was a means of instilling team spirit, all important to the Anglo-Saxon cultural ideal of collective effort over individuality. This concept is probably opaque for the modern young Spanish addressee, and referring to a teacher as *encargada* does not help to explain the system. More than a teacher, she might be taken as being a member of the auxiliary staff.

We've all got to work for *School Certificate*. (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Tendremos que trabajar de firme para conseguir el *diploma del colegio*. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

The School Certificate was an examination in any of a range of subjects taken in British schools between 1917 and 1951 (Summers 1178). This was replaced by the G.C.E. 'O' level examination, later replaced by the G.C.S.E. examination.<sup>2</sup> Native addressees today would probably assume it was the previous equivalent of the G.C.S.E., while non-natives might think it was a diploma issued only by that school (*del colegio*), with little or no validity outside that context. In other parts of the translation, it is sometimes rendered as *Diploma Escolar*, which is probably more acceptable, since it does not give the impression of depending on that particular school, although the translator could have offered *Certificado Escolar* or even *Graduado Escolar*, both of which would at least offer an approximation.

I know we're supposed to go to *Matron* and give in our health certificate and our term's pocket money. (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Sé que hemos de ir a encontrar al *ama* para entregarle nuestro certificado médico y nuestro dinero para gastos. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

A matron is a woman in charge of domestic and medical arrangements at a boarding school, while *ama* could be any of several definitions given by the Real Academia Española (RAE), including an

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<sup>2</sup> G.C.E. "O" level: General Certificate of Education; G.C.S.E.: General Certificate of Secondary Education.

owner, a woman in charge of servants, the main servant in a household, or even a wet nurse, none of which give the idea of status possessed by *matron* in English. In Blyton's times, the connotations of *Matron* (with a respectful capital letter) would have been those of a strict figure of authority; there is no implication of this in the Spanish translation.

The North Tower fourth-formers went eagerly to their classroom after *Prayers*. (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Las de la "Torre Norte" estaban deseando ir a su clase después de las oraciones. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

*Prayers* used to be the first communal activity of the morning in British schools, both in the public and private sectors. Now it is usually replaced by Assembly, which, depending on the school, includes some kind of brief religious service, followed by the announcement of information for pupils. Nowadays, pupils may opt out of these daily meetings on the grounds of religious incompatibility. *Prayers* is written with a capital letter, in keeping with its importance in the system at that time.

That's what comes of going to a good prep school — you always find you're in advance of the lowest form work when you go to a *public school* — but if you go to a rotten prep school, it takes years to catch up. (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Eso es lo que ocurre cuando se va a un buen colegio preparatorio — siempre se descubre que se está más adelantado que el mismo curso cuando se va a un *colegio público*; pero si se ha ido a una mala escuela preparatoria cuesta años alcanzar a las demás. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

In Britain, a preparatory or prep school is a private school for children between the ages of 8 and 13, where they are made ready to attend a private fee-paying school for older pupils (referred to as a public or independent school). Unfortunately the translator has fallen into the obvious trap, giving *public school* its literal value. The translation not only gives false information about the contrasting private and state sector options, but could also be confusing for the reader, who will have understood at this point that the girls in this story would never have gone to a state school because they were members of a higher social level.

I shall take my *prep* out into the open air tonight. (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Esta tarde voy a estudiar al aire libre. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

Only at public (private or independent) schools is homework referred to as *prep*. The speaker shows, therefore, that she belongs to a certain social class and that she knows the appropriate vocabulary in English, but in Spanish she only states that she is going to study. The reader does not know if it is because she is a diligent pupil who spends time after class revising the lessons on her own initiative; the translator could have offered “voy a hacer los deberes” instead of simply “voy a estudiar” in order to complete the sense of the original.

*head girl / jefa de clase.*

The most important pupil in a British school, chosen for his/her academic merits, sense of responsibility and leadership qualities is the head girl/head boy. In co-educational schools there is both a head boy and head girl. In Blyton's text, there appears to be a head girl in each year group. Perhaps the translation could have made use of the term *delegada de curso*, which would have been more meaningful for target readers, even though it does not have the connotations of merit attached to *head girl*.

*half-term / mitad de curso.*

*Half-term* is usually a break of a few days or a week half-way through each term. The translator continues to confuse *term* and *year*. As there were three terms, they could have three of these breaks, but the Spanish version divides the whole school year into just two halves, with only one break of this kind. The girls in Blyton's text are visited by their families, but in state schools students would nowadays go away for a short holiday, or simply stay at home. As the school year, and consequently the individual terms, are longer in Britain than in Spain, break at half-term is necessary, although Spanish school calendars often create (unofficial) breaks of three or four days by linking a public holiday and the weekend, including the working day(s) in between.

The *upper-fourth / el cuarto curso (grado) superior*.

The numbering system for school classes has changed over the years and the Malory Towers scheme may seem strange to modern readers, both native and non-native. The reader is told that Darrell's younger sister, Felicity, is nearly thirteen and in the first form, while Darrell is fifteen, “going on for sixteen.” The following distribution can, therefore, be deduced:

1st form	12-13 years		
2nd form	13-14 years		
3rd form	14-15 years		
Lower 4th	15-16 years	{ promotion based on terms, not years	
Upper 4th			
Lower 5th	16-17 years		
Upper 5th			

While the first three years, until reaching the minimum school leaving age of fifteen (at the time the story was published), imply promotion each school year, the subsequent groups are promoted on the basis of terms and according to each pupil’s performance. The text supplies proof of this on several occasions.

‘I think probably most of you will know that Jean, who passed School Cert last year, has gone up into the next form,’ said Miss Williams. ‘She does not need to work with the School Cert form *this term*. She was head girl of the upper-fourth, and now that she has gone, we must have another’ (Chapter V, emphasis added).

‘Well — Connie thought that if she failed and I passed, I’d go up into the lower fifth *next term*, and she would have to stay down in the upper-fourth and take the exam again *another term*,’ went on Ruth (Chapter XXI, emphasis added).

Present-day numbering systems in the UK have done away with upper and lower divisions, and are based on complete academic years. Year 1 (in Key Stage 1) represents the first year of compulsory schooling, at the age of five, and Year 11 the last, at the age of sixteen (Key Stage 4), though pupils can continue in full-time education for two more years on a voluntary basis. According to this modern scheme, Felicity would be in Year 8, and Darrell in Year 11. However, for translation purposes it may be more appropriate to forget about numbering systems and refer in a more general way to the first or last years of compulsory education/secondary education.

It was doubtful if she would pass, if she *completed* the rest of her *papers* badly (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Era dudoso que aprobase si *llenaba* el resto de los *papeles* tan mal. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

The *papers* in question are exam papers, but if they are translated as *papeles*, together with the verb *llenar* (*rellenar*, would be more normal),

it seems to be more a question of bureaucratic form-filling than actually taking examinations.

I glanced at all the exam papers before sending them *up* (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / He mirado los exámenes antes de enviarlos *arriba*. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

External exams, such as the School Certificate in its day, as opposed to internal exams carried out in individual schools, were and still are evaluated by anonymous correctors employed by the appropriate examination board.<sup>3</sup> If the headmistress speaks, therefore, of having sent the exams *up*, it implies they have been forwarded to London, Oxford, Cambridge, or wherever the board has its headquarters, and not literally *up* (*arriba*), as in the translation, which leads the reader to believe the exams are corrected in the same school on an upper floor.

### 1.2. Social markers.

It was the day to return to Malory Towers, *her boarding school* (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Era el día de su vuelta a “Torres de Malory”, *su internado*. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

The use of the possessive adjective *her*, implies normality, in that most girls of Darrell’s social class at the time the text was written would attend a boarding school.

*her* old governess / *su* institutriz

Similarly, most girls of the upper middle class at that time would have had a governess or two before attending prep school and then boarding school.

The letter was addressed to “*The Honourable* Clarissa Carter.” (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / La carta iba dirigida a “*La honorable* Clarisa Carter.” (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

According to Debrett’s (2010), the ultimate authority on the etiquette of forms of address, *the Honourable* classifies the holder of this title as the daughter of a viscount or baron, but the translation leaves the reader in considerable doubt as to the exact social status of Clarissa.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Joint Matriculation Board, Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board, Southern Universities’ Joint Board for School Examinations, etc.

To her surprise she saw *an old car* in the drive, and out of it stepped *a most ordinary-looking* woman. (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Con sorpresa, observó que se trataba de un “Austin” antiguo, del que se apeaba una mujer *con el aspecto más vulgar del mundo*. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

The translator has chosen to add a social marker not present in the original (the make of car), but the result is not more explicit. Whereas Blyton describes the woman as *ordinary-looking*, the translator makes her have *el aspecto más vulgar del mundo*, which is aesthetically and socially quite inferior. What the author meant was that, in contrast to the description of the mother of “the Honourable Clarissa Carter” (*a charming auburn-haired woman, beautifully dressed*) or Darrell’s mother (...*very pretty in a simple grey suit with a little blue blouse*), this woman was not elegantly dressed like the other pupils’ mothers (she turns out, in fact, to be an ex-governess who has come to visit her former charge), but she was far from being *vulgar*. At the beginning of the story it is made quite clear that outward appearances are very important at this social level:

Parents mattered a lot when you were at boarding school! Everyone wanted to be proud of the way their fathers and mothers looked and spoke and behaved. It was dreadful if a mother came in a silly hat, or if a father came looking very untidy (Chapter I).

### 1.3. *Food and drink.*

In 1949 British children reading Blyton’s work were still suffering the effects of Second World War food rationing, which had started in 1940 and continued until 1954, but which in practice still conditioned many family’s diets for the rest of the decade. A list of food containing the examples below taken from ‘feasts’ and picnics in Blyton’s story would, therefore, sound wonderful to the children of even the most comfortable families. Modern native addressees would probably still find most of the items on the list attractive and more importantly, they would be able to interpret correctly their ingredients, format, taste and value. In cultural terms, it is significant that most of the items imply both time spent by mothers/carers in preparation, and the importance attached to home-made delicacies, as opposed to today’s supply of instant or take-

away food. Unfortunately, some of the translations leave much to the imagination of the non-native reader, and therefore do not have the same effect on the addressee. Some explanation would be needed to convince non-native addressees of some of the treats translated rather literally. Suggestions for more intelligible translations are offered in parentheses:

- potted meat / carne en conserva (**paté de carne**)
- shortbread / tarta de Manteca (**galletas de mantequilla**)
- tongue sandwiches with lettuce / bocadillos de lengua con lechuga (**bocadillos de fiambre con lechuga/ensalada**)
- great chunks of new-made cream cheese / grandes pedazos de queso recién hecho (**queso fresco en trozos grandes**)
- a great fruit cake with almonds crowding the top / un gran pastel de bizcocho con almendras (**un gran bizcocho de uvas pasas, adornado con muchas almendras**)
- jam sandwiches / pastelitos de mermelada (**sandwiches de mermelada**)
- cold ham and tomatoes / jamón frío con tomates (**jamón de York con tomate**)
- potatoes roasted in their jackets / patatas asadas (**patatas asadas con piel**)
- cold apple pie and cream/ pastel de manzana y crema (**tarta de manzana con nata**)
- biscuits and butter / galletas y mantequilla (**galletas saladas con mantequilla**)
- big jugs of icy-cold lemonade / grandes jarros de limonada muy helada (**jarras grandes de granizada de limón**)

Food is a cultural element not to be underestimated, since “the semantic fields culture-specific words usually pertain to include the domains of food and drinks, articles of dress, customs, holidays, dances, games, sports, politics and economics” (Neagu para. 4). There can be no doubt that food forms part of our earliest memories and it exerts a powerful influence over our perception of foreign or familiar gastronomy. Cultural embedding of gastronomic references is illustrated by the following example from the text.

Connie and Ruth put their noses in the air and sniffed hungrily. “*The Bisto Twins!*” said Alicia / Connie y Ruth alzaron

las naricillas en el aire, respirando con fruición. (*Reference omitted.*)

The story introduces Connie and Ruth as non-identical twins, and Alicia as the joker always making humorous comments to her group of friends and classmates throughout the story, but the mention of *The Bisto Twins*, and the effect it produces in the original, is perhaps the most opaque in the whole story. Not surprisingly, it is not translated in the Spanish version. *Bisto* was a brand name for a product to make perfect gravy, invented in 1908. In 1919 the image of the *Bisto Kids* was introduced as an advertising strategy. The *Kids*, or *Twins*, with their cast-off, over-sized clothes and cheeky look, were an instant success and by the 1920s and 1930s they had become cult figures. The introduction of the National Health Service and the promise of a better and more prosperous Britain at the end of the Second World War meant that the *Bisto Kids* began to seem out of place. As a result, their appearance in advertising was significantly reduced. However, in response to customer feedback, the *Bisto Kids* were given an updated image and made their advertising come-back in 1976, resurrecting the famous “Ah! Bisto!” slogan. This come-back lasted until the mid 1990s, when the protagonists were finally retired in favour of the image of a modern family. According to Jane Cantellow, from the advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi, “The marvellous thing about the Bisto brand is that it has something that goes very deep. People feel very warmly about it. The trick is to keep the brand fresh and striking a chord with people today” (BBC). The cultural reference contained in this brand name and advertising slogan continues to be familiar for native readers, but only those of a certain age. The translator has probably opted for the most sensible solution by omitting the direct reference. Nevertheless, a humorous comment embedded in the culture common to both narrator and addressee has unfortunately been lost.

#### 1.4. Leisure activities.

Tennis-rackets to carry, and our *riding hats* (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Las raquetas de tenis y las gorras para montar a caballo. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso* 14)

I'll change into my *jodhpurs* quickly (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Iré a cambiarme en un momento. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso* 128)



*A talent-spotting competition (Blyton, Upper Fourth) / un concurso de talentos. (Blyton, Cuarto Curso 79)*

Riding was a characteristic (upper-)middle class activity. Together with swimming and tennis, it was considered a suitably healthy sporting activity for young ladies. However, riding hats all over the world are made of hard, resistant material, which is not reflected in the translation as *gorras*, which sound much too flimsy; a more appropriate rendering would have been *cascos*. Instead of using *pantalones de montar* for *jodhpurs*, the translator has used the ambiguous expression *iré a cambiarme*, (I'll go and get changed) without specifying what clothing is necessary. In the translation of the third example above, it is not absolutely clear what kind of competition is involved. The original refers to the opportunity of performing in public (singing in this case) with a view to being "spotted" and signed up by a professional entertainment agency.

### 1.5. Illustrations.

The English text used in this analysis includes black and white line drawings. There are no credits for these illustrations, but from the dress, hairstyles and body language they would appear to be the original 1949 illustrations. The Spanish version also includes black and white line drawings, and these are credited to José María Bea. However, these illustrations contradict the period, class and general context presented in the story. They are of doubtful quality, and would be more appropriate in modern comic strips or cheap cartoons. If it was an effort to modernise the story through the pictures, a similar process has not been carried out with the written text. Consequently, the Spanish editors have done the story no favour, producing a confusing socio-cultural combination by making the images contradict the text.

## 2. Colloquial language

Colloquial language becomes dated very quickly, and in the case of Blyton's text over sixty years have passed since it represented the way of speaking of a particular class. The register used is upper-middle class, which is appropriate to the social context of the private school and its clients. There are no girls with regional accents, and the local people of

Cornwall have no spoken role in the story, since the plot develops inside the buildings and grounds of the school, with the result that all the characters speak in a uniform way, except the native French teacher, *Mam'zelle*, who deviates from standard English due to interference from her own language. She would have been an essential part of any upper-middle class educational establishment, and the author uses her to provide a touch of humour.

### 2.1. *Colloquial abbreviations.*

Generations of students commonly elaborate a set of abbreviated forms for words in common use in their immediate context. This jargon is understood by those of the same age group, but it goes out of fashion very quickly, soon becoming incomprehensible to successive generations:

Did you have good *hols*? / ¿Pasaste buenas vacaciones?  
(*holidays*)

It was a nice *dormy* / Era un bonito dormitorio  
(*dormitory*)

That French *dicky* / el diccionario de francés  
(*dictionary*)

Susan's too *pi* for words / Susana es demasiado recta (*pious*)

She was taken to the *san* / Fue llevada a la enfermería  
(*sanatorium*)

At a distance of over sixty years, native readers today may have difficulty deciphering such abbreviated colloquialisms, and it is therefore reasonable to eliminate these elements in a translation, as the translator has done, since substitution of any current alternative could also date very quickly, and give an artificial impression.

### 2.2. *Colloquial intensifiers.*

Most of these intensifiers are still in use today, but mainly among the older generation of upper-middle class people. They have been translated by fairly neutral terms:

I'm *jolly* lucky / soy muy afortunada

I'm *frightfully* hungry / Tengo un apetito atroz

Thanks *awfully* / Muchísimas gracias

We'll feel *jolly* old before this term's out / nos sentiremos *todavía más* viejas antes de que termine el curso.

In the last example the translator has taken the liberty of adding a comparative reference not present in the original: "Nos sentiremos *todavía más* viejas" (We'll feel *even older*), while the original only says the equivalent of *we'll feel very old*.

### 2.3. Social connotations of adjectives.

Favourite adjectives come and go, even within the same generation's lifetime (*fab*, *groovy*, *cool*, *wicked*, *awesome* ...are typical of the last decades of the twentieth and first years of the twenty-first centuries, but are falling or have fallen quickly out of use, being replaced by others). The examples below are no longer part of current usage among the young. The translator has been unable or unwilling to differentiate between *dreadful*, *beastly* and *awful*, rendering them all as *terrible*. In other cases, the meaning is adequately rendered. Where appropriate, some alternative translations have been offered:

She's a bit *starchy* — *very prim and proper* / Es un poco *estirada...orgullosa y muy suya ... (...tan correcta y formal)*

Oh, dear — yes, I was *dreadful* ... really *awful*... / ¡oh sí, sí, fui *terrible* ... realmente *terrible* ... (¡Ay! ¡Qué cosa!...fui **malísima ... me porté fatal**)

This is a *dreadful* family to collect / ésta es una familia difícil de reunir (**ésta es una familia a la que es difícil reunir**)

It was *dreadful* if a mother came in a silly hat / Hubiera sido *terrible* que una madre se presentase con un sombrero ridículo (**Hubiera sido espantoso/horrible...**)

We get a *wizard* supper the first evening / la primera noche tenemos una cena estupenda.

This *beastly* getting up early / Es *terrible* tenerse que levantar temprano (**Es muy desagradable...**)

"*Smashing!*" said Alicia, which was the favourite adjective of all the first-formers at the moment / "¡*Fantástico!*" aprobó Alicia, empleando el adjetivo favorito del momento, de las de primer curso.

Miss Grayling's *grand* / la señorita Grayling es *magnífica*.

The last adjective (*grand*) appears to have made a comeback among people who had not even been born when Blyton's protagonists were using it. It is used along with *cool* nowadays to express the positive qualities of a person or thing.

#### 2.4. Social connotations of exclamations.

Exclamations also date very quickly and can sound rather quaint, or even odd, in both languages. The last example in the following list has been translated literally, giving an artificial feeling to words which would have sounded spontaneous in the original context:

Jolly good! / ¡Estupendo! (**¡Bárbaro!**)

Dash it! / ¡Caramba!

Gracious! / ¡Cielos! (**¡Alabado sea Dios!**)

Golly! / ¡Caracoles! (**¡Qué bien!**)

Blow! / ¡Maldición! (**¡Maldita sea!**)

Beasts, all of you! / ¡Sois unas salvajes! (**¡Qué bestias!**)

Good old Malory Towers! / El viejo y querido "Torres de Malory"  
(**¡Viva Malory Towers! / ¡Bien por Malory Towers!**).

#### 2.5. Idiomatic expressions.

All of the following expressions are somewhat dated, and may be outside the typical modern native addressee's scope. In (b) the translator has transformed a fit of anger into preoccupation, and in (c) and (d) withholding social contact with a classmate as a means of expressing disapproval has been turned into what seems more like institutional punishment. The translation of the proverb in (e) is more problematic, since the original text means that a person's plight is hopeless once his reputation has been blackened, but the Spanish translation fails to communicate this idea, because it is incomplete, giving only the first part of a well-known saying which is the positive element:

- a) You really are *a mutt* (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / realmente eres un desastre (**eres un estúpido / eres totalmente incompetente / eres una nulidad**) (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

- b) Darrell's *in an awful wax* (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Darrell *está muy preocupada* (**Darrell está muy enfadada / fuera de sí**) (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)
- c) A week of being sent to Coventry (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Una semana de aislamiento (**Le han hecho el vacío durante una semana**) (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)
- d) She's in Coventry, you know (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Ya sabes que está castigada (**Ya sabes que no le hablamos**) (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)
- e) Give a dog a bad name and hang him (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / Coge fama y échate a dormir (**Coge buena fama y échate a dormir, y coge mala fama y échate a morir**) (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

## 2.6. Mam'zelle's English.

The French teacher's variety of English shows certain stereotyped characteristics for foreigners in general and the French in particular. In example (a) she places an emphatic object pronoun in front of the pronoun and verb (*Me, I ... suffered*), by which the author probably tries to indicate interference from French. There are also two instances of the intrusion of the definite article in (a); confusion over a plural noun used incorrectly in the singular, and difficulty in pronouncing /θ/ in (b); and in (c) she uses *measly* as though it were the adjective corresponding to *measles*, but her pupils know that it really means ridiculously small, or insignificant. Her speech causes great amusement to her pupils, but the humour is completely absent in the translation:

- a) "You have *the* palpitations! ... cried Mam'zelle. "*Me*, I once suffered in this way when I was fifteen!" ... "*The* brave Gwendoline!" (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / "¡Tienes palpitaciones!" ... le gritó mademoiselle. "A mi me pasó una vez cuando tenía quince años!"... "¡La valiente Gwendoline!" (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)
- b) I know *nuzzings* more. (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / No lo sé. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)
- c) "You have had a bad time with your *measle*?... It's good no one got the *measle* from you. ... We will have no more *measly* talk," she said firmly, and wondered why the girls laughed so much at this. (Blyton, *Upper Fourth*) / "¿Lo has pasado muy mal con tu sarampión? ... Ha sido una suerte que no contagiaras a nadie ...

No se hablará más del sarampión,” dijo con firmeza preguntándose por qué las niñas se reían tanto con eso. (Blyton, *Cuarto Curso*)

## Conclusions

This short story of only 170 pages contains a surprising number of cultural references, of which only a selection has been classified here, highlighting school organisation, social markers, food and drink, and leisure activities, together with aspects of colloquial language. The Spanish translation of Blyton's story is inadequate in many aspects, since meaningful cultural references have been distorted or omitted. The result is the misrepresentation of a cultural context, making such a work difficult to understand and enjoy as its author intended. Little effort has been made to communicate efficiently the cultural flavour of this example of a particular genre. This lack of attention may be part of a generalized pattern in the translation of juvenile works into Spanish. In the rush to market translations of best-selling original texts, not enough care is taken choosing the right translation strategies. These can range from exoticism (leaving the 'untranslatable' elements in the original language) to cultural transplantation (converting the source setting into one recognisable in the target culture), as well as other intermediate solutions. The finished product is bought by a young audience unaccustomed to voicing their discontent with the translation. Moreover, the addressees usually lack the experience and background knowledge to detect where they have been cheated in the translation, and if certain aspects sound strange, it is easy to attribute them to the 'foreignness' of the source text. If addressees are likely to be lacking previous contact with the source culture and context, as is the case with this story, the translator ought to provide compensatory information or adopt adequate strategies.

As shown above, the boarding school in fiction and in real life is enjoying a revival. In spite of criticisms of “its narrow preoccupation with elitist middle-class education, artificiality and lack of realism” the genre has survived the passage of time (Wells et al. 630). A more sensitive translation of stories such as the one examined here would help to make them more appealing to modern readers.<sup>4</sup>

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**TEFL**



# **A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE INTO ESL/EFL READING STRATEGY RESEARCH**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to approach and evaluate different studies that examine ESL/EFL reading strategies. It intends to provide an extended discussion and analysis of the investigation carried out in the last decade. This review is by no means exhaustive but rather the selected studies serve to illustrate the state of the art into ESL/EFL reading strategy investigation. An examination of the studies shows quite diverse participants, of different ages and backgrounds, as well as differences in research methods, tasks to examine strategy use and reading materials. Even though there are many differences in the investigations, some generalizations are extracted.

**Keywords:** review, reading strategies, research, English as a second language, English as a foreign language.

## **UNA REVISIÓN DE LA LITERATURA ACERCA DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN EN ESTRATEGIAS DE LECTURA EN INGLÉS COMO SEGUNDA LENGUA E INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA**

## **Resumen**

El objetivo de este artículo es llevar a cabo una revisión de la literatura con el fin de evaluar los estudios que examinan las estrategias de lectura en inglés como lengua segunda e inglés como lengua extranjera. Se realiza una selección de estudios que nos sirven para ilustrar el estado de la cuestión en la investigación dentro de las estrategias de lectura en inglés como lengua segunda e inglés como lengua extranjera. El análisis

de estos estudios muestra diversos participantes, de diferentes edades y procedencias, así como diferencias en los métodos de investigación, tareas para examinar el uso de las estrategias y materiales de lectura. A pesar de las diferencias observadas entre los diferentes estudios de investigación, se extraen algunas generalizaciones.

**Palabras clave:** revisión de la literatura, estrategias de lectura, inglés como lengua segunda, inglés como lengua extranjera.

## Introduction

Comprehension supposes extracting the meaning in the light of all available linguistic cues in combination with the learner's general knowledge of the world. Readers use a top-level and a bottom-level to aid comprehension. The top level is constituted by the knowledge system, that is, the schematic knowledge. Complementarily, the bottom level is constituted by the language system, that is, the systemic knowledge.

There has been an ongoing debate in the reading research literature as to the relative importance of each of these processing levels in fluent reading comprehension. Some researchers have argued for the primacy of higher-level skills, minimizing the role of basic lower-level word recognition processes in fluent reading (e.g., Czico, 1980; Goodman, 1988, 1996; Smith, 1971, 1994). Other researchers have argued for the importance of lower-level textual and word recognition processes in addition to that of higher-level processes even in advanced readers (e.g., Bell and Perfetti, 1994; Carr, Brown, Vavrus, and Evans, 1990; Cunningham, Stanovich, and Wilson, 1990; Daneman, 1996; Perfetti, 1991; Stanovich, 1991, 1993, 2000).

Most current reading comprehension models are interactive in that L2 reading comprehension is considered a process involving the combination and integration of various sources of knowledge including both lower-level and higher-level knowledge sources (e.g., Bernhart, 1991; Carrell, Devine, and Eskey, 1988; Lee, 1997; Nuttall, 1998; Nassaji, 2002). These models take both levels into account. They acknowledge discourse as the actual process of meaning negotiation between participants in a communicative interaction, in the case of reading, the reader and the writer.

Efficient reading thus requires sophisticated bottom-up and top-down reading skills, with readers drawing upon various strategies depending on their reading purposes and the type of text with which they are interacting. Nunan (24) points out that “integrative language skills” are used in reading. Saricoban (2002) found that good readers use a combination of bottom-up and top-down strategies. Brown (2001) also states that both top-down and bottom-up strategies may need to be emphasized depending on individual needs and proficiency levels. Vacca and Vacca (2005) defend that reading instruction should help students realize that reading is actually an interaction between the reader who draws upon background knowledge (schema) and language skills to process ideas and the writer. This involves complex cognitive processing operations, especially when operating in a second language. Noor (2006) expresses concern that a focus by teachers on a surface approach during high school years often leads to problems for learners when they enter university, where academic reading is more likely to be linked to cognitive tasks demanding both surface and deep approaches.

## Reading Strategies

As we have said above, efficient reading requires sophisticated bottom-up and top-down reading skills, with readers drawing upon various strategies depending on their reading purposes and the type of text. Oxford (8) defines learning strategies as: “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations”<sup>1</sup>.

Readers engage in a very complex process in decoding the writer’s intended message using background knowledge. In this process, readers use different reading strategies. Some authors see them as conscious mental processes (e.g. Cohen, 1990). Other authors see them as an action, or a series of actions that a reader employs in order to construct

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<sup>1</sup> Two very well known accounts of categorization of learning strategies belong to Oxford (1990) and O’Malley and Chamot (1990). O’Malley and Chamot listed learning strategies in three categories: metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective. Oxford’s (1990) six types of learning strategies are categorized in two groups; direct and indirect. Oxford listed ‘cognitive’, ‘memory’ and ‘compensation’ strategies in the direct group, while ‘metacognitive’, ‘affective’, and ‘social’ strategies were in the indirect group.

meaning in the reading process and solve comprehension difficulties (e.g. Block, 1986, 1992; Garner, 1987; Hudson, 2007; Macaro, 2001; Macaro and Erler, 2008; Zhang, 2001).

Reading strategies include skimming, scanning, inferring, activating schemata, recognizing text structure, using mental imagery, visualizing, generating questions, monitoring comprehension, evaluating strategy use, etc. (Anderson, 1991; Carrell, 1989; Block, 1986; Cohen, 1990; Pressley, 2002; Zhang et al., 2008).

As Cohen (2003, 2007), Paris (2002), Zhang (2003) and Grabe (2004) point out, strategies themselves are not inherently good or bad, but they have the potential to be used effectively or ineffectively in different contexts. Moreover, metacognitive awareness of reading strategies is recognized as an important aspect of skilled reading (Carrell, 1998; Carrell et al., 1998; Cohen, 2007; Hudson, 2007; Wenden, 1998; White, 1999; Zhang, 2008).

### **Recent Experimental studies into ESL/EFL reading strategies**

Numerous studies examine the reading strategies ESL/EFL readers use to process a text. The aim of this article is to approach and evaluate different studies that examine ESL/EFL reading strategies. It intends to provide an extended discussion and analysis of the investigation carried out in the last decade. This review is by no means exhaustive but rather the selected studies serve to illustrate the state of the art into ESL/EFL reading strategy investigation. An examination of the studies shows quite diverse participants, of different ages and backgrounds, as well as differences in research methods, tasks to examine strategy use and reading materials. Because of these differences in the investigations it is difficult to formulate generalizations, which will therefore limit the instructional implication.

Schueller (1999) tested the effects of top-down and bottom-up reading strategies instruction on the comprehension of two different literary texts. To assess comprehension, she used both written recall and written multiple choice questions. Participants were 128 (78 females and 50 males) second year university-level male and female students of German. Females did better than the males regardless of strategic training although only males with top-down strategy training did

better than females on multiple choice (but not on recall). Most previous studies viewed successful readers as ones who used top-down strategies rather than bottom-up (e.g. Hosenfeld, 1977; Block, 1986, 1992; Carrell, 1989). Schueller tested for the first time the possible different effect of bottom-up and top-down strategy training on men and women and recommended teachers to focus on top-down strategy training because, according to her, this would help both men and women. Her findings became the starting point for more research of this type.

The relationship between readers' gender, comprehension and strategy use is also analysed by Brantmeier (2000) through written recall and written multiple-choice questions. Subjects were 78 native English readers of Spanish from an intermediate level Hispanic culture course. She found no significant gender differences in the overall number of global and local strategies that subjects used to process the texts in the study. She found a gender-related difference in reading comprehension, but no gender-related difference in strategic behavior.

Strategic awareness and monitoring of the comprehension process are recognized as critically important aspects of skilled reading (Pressley and Afflerbach, 1995; Sheorey and Mokhtari, 2001). Such awareness "entails knowledge of strategies for processing texts, the ability to monitor comprehension, and the ability to adjust strategies as needed" (Auerbach and Paxton 240-41).

Recent studies highlight the importance for all readers, native and non-native, to be aware of the significant strategies proficient reading requires and point out how teachers can play a key role in increasing students' awareness of such strategies and in helping them become active readers. Thus, in their study, Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) examine differences in the reported use of reading strategies of native and non-native English speakers when reading academic materials. Participants were 302 college students (150 native-English-speaking US and 152 ESL students), who completed a survey of reading strategies. Results of the study revealed, first, that both US and ESL students display awareness of almost all of the strategies included in the survey. Secondly, both groups attribute the same order of importance to categories of reading strategies in the survey, regardless of their reading ability or gender: *cognitive strategies* (the deliberate actions readers take when comprehension problems develop), followed

by *metacognitive strategies* (advanced planning and comprehension monitoring techniques), and *support strategies* (the tools readers seek out to aid comprehension). Thirdly, both ESL and US high-reading-ability students show comparable degrees of higher reported usage for cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies than lower-reading-ability students in the respective groups, and while the US high-reading-ability students seem to consider support reading strategies to be relatively more valuable than low-reading-ability US students, ESL students attribute high value to support reading strategies, regardless of their reading ability level. This study also shows that, in the US group, the females report significantly higher frequency of strategy usage; this gender effect is not reflected in the ESL sample.

This study thus shows that there is a positive interaction between reported strategy use and reading ability, that native and non-native students display the same awareness of strategies and attribute the same order of importance to categories of reading strategies, regardless of their reading ability or gender and that female students report using certain strategies more frequently than do their male counterparts.

Mokhtari and Reichard (2004) studied possible significant differences between first and second language readers in their metacognitive awareness and perceived use of specific strategies when reading for academic purposes in English. Three hundred and fifty college students (141 US and 209 Moroccan) completed an instrument designed to measure their metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. The results revealed that both student groups reported remarkably similar patterns of strategy awareness and reported usage when reading academic materials in English. Both US and Moroccan students demonstrated a moderate to high awareness level of reading strategies. This study shows that many of the strategies associated with skill reading are used uniformly by successful native and non-native speakers of English. This is inconsistent with claims that certain societies fail to promote this type of strategies. These authors think that the differences and similarities between second language readers and those reading in their first language, “have only been seen in terms of deficiencies but not in other, presumably more beneficial or even neutral ways” (1).

Zhang and Wu (2009) carry out a study that assesses metacognitive awareness and reading-strategy use of Chinese senior high school



students who are learning English as a foreign language. This was measured through their reported use of EFL reading strategies. The results showed that the students reported using the 3 categories of strategies they had been classified into at a high-frequency level: global (the intentional, carefully planned techniques by which learners monitor or manage their reading); problem-solving (the localized, focused techniques used when problems develop in understanding textual information); and support (the basic support mechanisms intended to aid the reader in comprehending the text). They were aware of multitude of reading strategies available for use. Both the main effect for strategies and the main effect for learners' proficiency were significant. The high-proficiency group outperformed the intermediate group and the low-proficiency group in overall strategy use; it also outperformed the intermediate group and the low-proficiency group in 2 categories of reading strategies: global and problem-solving; but no statistically significant difference was found among the 3 proficiency groups in using support strategies.

This study showed a relationship between global strategy use and language proficiency level. Thus, the effective use of global strategies was found to be correlated with the students' higher English achievements.<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between strategy use and proficiency is also found in Bang and Zhao (2007) who examine the reading strategies used by advanced Korean and Chinese ESL learners when reading academic texts. The methods employed to elicit reading strategies include oral recall and semi-structured interviews. Results confirm their hypothesis that Korean ESL learners tend to rely on phonological, while Chinese ESL learners tend to rely on visual orthographic strategies when reading English texts. Another interesting finding from their study is that the learners' English language proficiency may be a more important factor contributing to the level of L2 reading comprehension achieved than the strategies used. The authors observe reading behaviours and strategy use differences between less proficient and more proficient readers. The Korean participants (whose English proficiency was lower) relied on reading strategies identified as characteristic of less skilled readers

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<sup>2</sup> This result correspond with previous studies (eg. Hosenfeld, 1977; Block, 1986, 1992; Carrell, 1989; Schueller, 1999)

(e.g. reliance on dictionaries, habit of translation, and use of personal background knowledge). In contrast, the Chinese participants (of higher proficiency) preferred using contextual clues, discussion with colleagues, and help of peers or teachers as ways of achieving comprehension of academic texts, all of which have been recognized as habits of more skilled readers. They also conclude that ESL learners tend to use the processing strategies developed in their L1 when reading L2 texts, particularly in trying to determine meanings of unfamiliar words.

The aim of Ikeda and Takeuchi's (2006) study is to clarify the possible differences in the learning process of reading strategies during the strategy instruction between EFL learners at a higher proficiency level and those at a lower level. Participants were 37 female non-English majors at a Japanese university. Five students among them were selected respectively for the higher and the lower proficiency groups based on the results of a 45-item cloze test and in-class review quizzes. During the period of eight weeks, the participants received a 20-minute session of explicit strategy instruction in every class, which met once a week for 90 minutes. In addition to the instruction in each class, as out-of-class assignments, the participants were required to make portfolio entries on strategy learning every week. These portfolios made by the participants were analyzed.

As a result of the qualitative analysis, six major differences were identified between the higher and the lower proficiency groups. First, the two groups were different in the number of strategies reported and the amount of descriptions of one strategy use in the portfolio. In other words, the students in the higher proficiency group tended to report on the use of more than one strategy in detail in every entry for the portfolio submitted. The students in the lower proficiency group, on the other hand, were inclined to report on the use of a single strategy with little detail in each entry. The second difference was in the understanding of the purpose and the merit of each strategy use. Unlike the students in the lower proficiency group, the students in the higher proficiency group tended to write descriptions that showed that they had well understood the purpose and the merit of using a strategy. The third difference was in the understanding of the purpose and the importance of each strategy use. The participants in the higher proficiency group showed that they had understood the conditions in which a strategy could be used efficiently. The participants in the lower proficiency group,

however, showed in their portfolio entries that they actually did not sufficiently understand the conditions of using the strategies taught. The fourth difference is found in the degree of understanding of the combined use of strategies. Learners in the higher proficiency group showed in their portfolio entries that they had effectively utilized more than one strategy in combination. The learners in the lower proficiency group did not report on such a combined use of strategies at all.

Finally, the timing for and the method for evaluating the efficacy of strategy use were different between the two groups. The learners in the higher proficiency group tried to use the same strategy again in a different context or in different combinations. The students in the lower proficiency group, however, tended to assess the efficacy of strategies based on one-time use. The students in the higher proficiency group were likely to confirm the degree of their understanding attained by the strategy use through, for instance, turning to the outside resources such as dictionaries. The learners in the lower proficiency group, on the contrary, tended to evaluate the efficacy of the same strategy without such confirmation.

These authors propose some pedagogical implication. Thus, in strategy instruction they suggest presenting concrete examples of effective strategy use drawn from learners with higher proficiency to learners with lower proficiency, rather than giving abstract explanations.

A remarkable number of works focus on the possible effects of reading strategy instruction on reading. Salataci and Akyel's (2002) study addresses whether strategy instruction in EFL reading affect EFL reading strategies and reading comprehension in English and in Turkish. The participants were 8 Turkish students in a pre-intermediate level class. Think-aloud protocols, observation, a background questionnaire, a semi-structured interview and the reading component of the PET (the Preliminary English Test) were used to collect the data. Participants received a 4-week (3 hours a week) course on reading strategies. This instruction was intended to activate their background knowledge and help them monitor their comprehension and become aware of the strategies they used during the reading process. The results indicated that the strategy instruction the participants were exposed to in English affected their use of reading strategies in Turkish and English.

Strategy instruction had a positive effect on both Turkish and English reading strategies and reading comprehension in English.

Dreyer and Nel (2003) conducted research on strategic reading instruction. The purpose of the study was to find out if the students in the experimental group who followed strategic reading instruction attained statistically and practically significantly higher mean scores on their end-of-semester English reading comprehension tests and if they differed in terms of their reading strategy use. The strategic reading instruction component consisted of a printed interactive study guide focusing on explaining the main features of strategies and explaining why that strategy should be learned. There were also contact sessions (face-to-face) to give the students additional information on the strategies, model the strategies for the students and to provide practice opportunities both individually and in groups. The instruction also included a technology-enhanced feature, a Learning Content Management System. The participants were 131 first-year ESL students taking an English for Professional course at the Potchefstroom university for CHE, in South Africa. The instruments used were a reading strategies questionnaire, the TOEFL test to determine the English proficiency of the students and two reading comprehension tests. The results indicated that both successful and at-risk students who received strategic reading instruction obtained both statistically and practically significantly higher marks on the reading comprehension measures than did the students in the control group. Moreover, the strategic reading instruction received facilitated the students' reading strategy use.

Li and Wilhelm's (2008) study is aimed at providing increased awareness of how strategies can be effectively taught. They compare reading lessons given by two teachers in senior middle school classrooms on China's mainland. Classroom observation focused on lesson stages and activities as well as student responses. Follow-up interviews with the teachers aimed to discover the decision making processes and choices made when teaching the lessons. It appeared that while the more-experienced teacher was more concerned with testing outcomes and appeared to be much more comfortable with a teacher directed approach, the less-experienced teacher was more aware of integrating theory into actual practice while taking a more learner-centered approach. She reflected upon the strategies used when reading a

text. She was concerned about “developing students’ skills in reading, autonomy, the ability to discover things for themselves” (101). She spent time and effort to involve students in strategy use. Li and Wilhelm’s (107) highlight the importance in teaching of promoting autonomous teaching and developing strategy use.

Dewitz, Jones and Leahy (2009) also point out the importance in teaching of developing strategy use. Their analysis of the skills and strategies recommended to be taught in some reading programs revealed that core reading programs recommend teaching many more skills and strategies than the researchers recommend and may dilute the emphasis on critical skills and strategies. In addition, comprehension strategy instruction does not meet the guidelines of explicit instruction as recommended in a number of research studies. They conclude that the programs do not provide the amount of practice for skills and strategies that were employed in original research studies.

Dhieb-Henia (2003) investigates into the reading processes of English as a foreign language/English for specific purposes (EFL/ESP) students with respect to research articles in their speciality area: Biology. Specifically, the study was aimed at exploring how metacognitive strategy training influenced a group of readers’ declarative and procedural knowledge, and their choice and use of strategies while reading research articles. Two groups of undergraduate Biology students (62 in all) from two science institutions took pre- and post-course reading tests, and 12 participated in retrospection. The purpose of this study was to find out if, and to what extent, a metacognitive strategy training course in the study skills and strategies necessary for reading scientific research articles can help ESP students in an EFL context read more efficiently and rapidly in their subject area. The general hypothesis of this study was that the students who received this strategy training would show enhanced declarative and procedural knowledge (as indicated by their higher scores and lower task-achievement timings) at the end of the course. The tests and protocols provided evidence of the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy training in improving the subjects’ familiarity with and proficiency in reading research articles. Specifically, after the course, subjects recognized the research article genre and this recognition allowed them to predict the content of the text’s sections and adopt a suitable reading strategy. The subjects recognized the importance of the course for reading in their specialty area. It familiarized them with

different text genres and a repertoire of strategies for processing them. The students also showed a tendency to self-evaluate their performance and self-repair when necessary.

Qian (2005) discusses the need to develop learners' metacognitive awareness of how and when they use strategies to help to foster learner autonomy and prepare students for self-access learning. He suggests that, as part of classroom instruction, the teacher introduce the terminology for each strategy and clearly explain how it can aid reading comprehension. Within this framework, students are then asked to reflect on their reading processes, working with checklists to identify strategies used at the three stages of before, during and after reading<sup>3</sup>.

## Conclusion

In the studies we have examined several research methods and different populations were used to examine the reading strategies of ESL/EFL learners. Each study contributes to the investigation on L2 reading strategy use. Even though there were many diverse aspects to these investigations, we can extract some generalisations:

- There is a relationship between reading strategy use and proficiency. Thus, recent and earlier studies view successful readers as ones who use top-down and global strategies rather than bottom-up and local strategies.
- In general native and non-native students display the same awareness of reading strategies and attribute the same order of importance to strategies regardless of their reading ability or gender.
- There is a positive relationship between reading ability and reading strategy awareness and reported use among native and non-native readers.
- Females report significantly higher frequency of strategy usage.
- Students who receive strategic reading instruction improve their reading comprehension performance.

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<sup>3</sup> Gardner and Miller (1999) had proposed as another way to help students become aware of what they have learned to ask them to generate post-reading questions.

- There is consensus about the need to develop learners' metacognitive awareness of how and when they use strategies to help foster learner autonomy and improve reading performance.

The examination and discussion carried out reveals that more research remains to be done in this area. More studies with different samples and under new conditions would allow making more and more sustained generalizations.

From a pedagogical point of view, research shows the positive effect of strategy instruction on reading strategies and reading comprehension in English. We have also found evidence of the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy training in improving reading comprehension in English. It then seems important to teach students to become active and autonomous L2 readers using strategy instruction and metacognitive strategy training which should be based on solid empirical research.

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# CREATIVE EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH DIGITAL STORY

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## **Abstract**

Assessment of oral skills in language learning has traditionally been carried out by means of an oral interview. In overcrowded courses these sessions become tiresome for evaluators and for students, who are negatively influenced by a stressful environment. This article delves into new teaching and oral assessment alternatives in the context of ECTS and of the European Framework of Reference for Languages, with a strong emphasis on communicative competence and ICT academic integration. We discuss a method of oral testing through Digital Story presentations for a C1-levelled English Course; the assessment approaches therein combining teacher and peer-evaluation, which are supported by an educational online network and by online survey software. In the light of our preliminary results, we can claim that this new assessment method strengthens students' communicative competence, and also their acquisition of further social and digital skills required in the ECTS context.

**Keywords:** communicative competence, digital story, peer-assessment.

## **EL DESARROLLO DE LA COMPETENCIA COMUNICATIVA A TRAVÉS DEL RELATO DIGITAL**

### **Resumen**

En el aprendizaje de lenguas, las habilidades orales han sido tradicionalmente evaluadas por medio de una entrevista. En asignaturas

con un elevado número de estudiantes, las sesiones evaluativas resultan extenuantes para evaluadores y alumnos, que suelen verse afectados negativamente por un ambiente tenso. En este artículo, analizamos nuevas alternativas de evaluación oral en el contexto del ECTS y del Marco Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas, haciendo hincapié en la competencia comunicativa y en la integración académica de las TIC. Describimos un nuevo método, implementado en una asignatura de Lengua Inglesa de nivel C1, y basado en la presentación oral de un Relato Digital. Este método combina además una doble evaluación realizada por profesores y por pares con la ayuda de una red educativa y de un software de encuestas online. Los resultados preliminares muestran cómo este nuevo método refuerza la competencia comunicativa del alumnado, así como la adquisición de habilidades sociales y digitales adicionales necesarias en el contexto del ECTS.

**Palabras clave:** competencia comunicativa, relato digital, evaluación por pares.

## Introduction

Assessment of oral skills in language learning has generally been quantified by means of a traditional oral exam where students exhibit their linguistic competence in an interview which covers individual tasks and speaking activities in interaction with a teacher or independent evaluator.<sup>1</sup> In overcrowded disciplines such as English Studies at the UVEG, where the large number of students clearly represents a drawback, these sessions become long and painstaking for teachers who have to evaluate, and for students, who are negatively influenced by the stressful environment the interview entails. The new European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which favours gradual integration of ICT in the academic context, together with the European Framework of Reference for Languages, with its strong emphasis on communicative competence, offers teachers a suitable environment to

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of Cambridge Advanced or Proficiency exams, students generally interact with one or two anonymous evaluators, often pairing up to carry out some of the speaking activities required to get a certification.

try creative teaching and assessment alternatives that can complement or substitute entirely this oral interview.

In this article we describe a case study that focuses on a new method of communicative competence testing through Digital Story (DS) presentations and peer-reviews. This new assessment methodology was implemented in English Language III, which is equivalent to a C1 level, during the 2009-10 academic year at the UVEG.<sup>2</sup>

After contextualising the teaching and learning of competencies in the context of English as a Foreign language in tertiary education and discussing a key concept to this study, that of communicative competence and its importance both in the Common European Framework for Languages and in our teaching methodology, we aim at analysing, in the second section, how this new method is implemented. To that end, we delve into specific software management, as well as integration of curricular items in the Digital Story and its components: the initial script, and, secondly, the “DS Festival” or “oral exam.” Finally, we suggest a new assessment approach, which combines teachers’ evaluation and peer-assessment questionnaires, the latter supported by an educational social network, NING, and by free online survey software.

In light of the results obtained so far, we can claim that this new methodological approach to assessment practices clearly enhances students’ communicative competence and fosters the acquisition of additional social skills and digital competencies linked to the integration of ICT in the context of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

## **1. Communicative Competence: a key concept in language learning**

Today, the concept of communicative competence is a key notion in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. This fairly recent concept has dramatically changed the teaching of languages which, in

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<sup>2</sup> We owe special gratitude to Dr. Carmen Gregori and Dr. Bernard Robin for their enlightening insights on the uses of Digital Storytelling and for making available their experiences resulting from the implementation of Digital Story in the academic context of tertiary education. Our most sincere gratitude to Dr. Rosana Dolón and Hellenia López as well, for greatly contributing to the shaping of our class social network and the testing methodology described in this article. Needless to say, we assume full responsibility for any flaws that may follow from our premise and results.

the past, was reduced to the internalizing of grammar structures of the foreign languages, while providing little opportunity for communication in any meaningful context.

Chomsky was the first to introduce the notion of competence, the description of which was made through its diametrical opposition to another key concept, that of performance. By competence, Chomsky referred to the ideal “speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language” (4). This knowledge is what enables a language user to produce and grasp an unlimited number of sentences from a definite set of structures/rules. Performance refers, on the other hand, to “the actual use of language in concrete situations” (ibid).

Though extremely innovative and inspiring at the time, real practice rules out both the existence of an *ideal speaker-hearer* and that of “homogenous speech communities” (Chomsky 3) as language teaching today, especially in secondary and tertiary education, takes place in a rather heterogeneous context, with students exhibiting different educational backgrounds and heritages, and displaying varying linguistic levels.

Such is the criticism of Hymes who claims that linguistic theories should accommodate socio-cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. His definition of competence is therefore a knowledge of the rules which are necessary in order to understand and produce both the referential and the social meaning of language. As a result, he introduces, for the first time, the concept of “communicative competence.”

Savignon defines communicative competence as

the ability to function in a truly communicative setting, that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors (8)

Thus, Savignon seems to equate communicative competence with language (including non-verbal) proficiency. Yet while it is true that mastery of L2 is a prerequisite for communicating in a foreign language, there are other components which need to be taught in order to communicate efficiently in that foreign language, since communication entails other factors which are not merely linguistic, but rather sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and strategic (Canale and Swain; Widdowson; Ohno).



Canale and Swain expand this new notion of communicative competence, defining the concept in terms of three components: grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic —grammatical competence being, in this view, as important to the study of communicative competence as sociolinguistic competence.

Though we believe that these components are indeed inseparable in order to communicate effectively in a foreign language, in our particular case, teaching English at an advanced level, the strengthening of sociolinguistic (rules of discourse) and strategic elements (implemented when the previous two competences fail) was facilitated by the fact that students already had a sound grammatical competence. Hence, we were able to spend quality classroom time on the teaching of the other components.<sup>3</sup>

The second of these, sociolinguistic competence, can be defined as the necessary knowledge and skills for appropriate language use in a social context, i.e., language elements that mark social relationships and protocols, expressions of popular wisdom (sayings, proverbs and idioms), differences in register, and dialectal variation, among other things. We have incorporated the study of registers and dialects into our methodology, establishing a comparison between standard English and its different dialectal varieties where possible, and giving priority to the study of registers particularly in the practical sessions, where these have been tackled through writing and oral tasks.<sup>4</sup>

The final component of these offered by Canale and Swain, strategic competence, is “composed of knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that are recalled to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to insufficient competence in one or more components of communicative competence” (Bagari and

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<sup>3</sup> Grammatical items were reviewed mainly in the theoretical sessions and practiced in the seminars, which, combined with the necessary oral, writing, and reading skills provided students a C1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

<sup>4</sup> A clear illustration of this would be the description of “stative verbs.” In traditional textbooks and grammars students are required to learn that the -ing ending in stative verbs is not grammatically correct in Standard English. The sociolinguistic expansion aims at showing students that what might be incorrect in Standard English might be true in other varieties of English, which are equally important to identify, in order to be fully proficient. For instance, stative verbs are often used in the gerund form in Scottish English, where “I’m wanting a drink” is a usual remark.

Djigunović 97). These strategies include paraphrasing, circumlocution, repetition, reluctance, avoidance of words, structures or themes, guessing, changes of register and style, modifications of messages, etc. In class, students generally implement this strategy when they want to make themselves understood but they cannot find the appropriate word because they do not know it. In these cases, we have encouraged resorting to mechanisms such as paraphrasing rather than translating into L1. Students have also displayed such competence during the oral defense of their Digital Stories; that is, we have been able to assess strategic competence in a real context of communication, as we will further discuss. We have, in fact, termed such a skill “spontaneous adapting ability,” —a skill which requires a command of pragmatic aspects in interaction, and which we believe is fundamental in any communicative approach, where effective communication must prevail over linguistic perfection.

In this line, we agree with Savignon who claims that communicative competence is dynamic, relative, and interpersonal rather than static, absolute and intrapersonal (Savignon; Bagarić and Djigunović 96). Hence, the importance of providing linguistic and communicative contexts that foster student interaction in naturalized settings<sup>5</sup>.

Communicative competence is also a key concept within the Common European Framework (CEF). In this framework for language learning, it is described as including three basic components: language competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence (Council of Europe 2001).

According to the CEF, language competence includes lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences. A striking aspect of this is that strategic competence is not considered a component in this model. The CEF does mention, however, pragmatic competence, which includes discourse competence (ability to participate effectively in conversations) and functional competence (ability to accomplish communication purposes in a language). The discipline of pragmatics is indeed central to the field of language learning, since it focuses on the speaker’s intention and on the inferred meanings

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<sup>5</sup> A few examples of real communicative contexts that have been worked in class are: interviewing native speakers, selling real products, asking for advice on real issues, and the very defense of their digital stories at the DS Festival.

behind the uttered sentence, which is essential if we are to correctly interpret a conversation and, as a result, communicate effectively (Austin; Grice and Sperber and Wilson among others). In class, we have studied discourse markers and hedges and have implemented exercises that foster student interaction in different linguistic environments.

Overall, we agree with the CEF that the incorporation of pragmatic and sociolinguistic features should be a fundamental requisite in the implementation of any language teaching methodology and, while overlapping with these at times, we would also add Canale and Swain's strategic component to this list.

Lastly, as a result of our addressing sociolinguistic, pragmatic and strategic aspects in language teaching, our students' full understanding of communicative competence was clearly displayed in the defense of the DS, where they often resorted to many functional elements such as suggesting, questioning, clarifying, irony, politeness, etc. —practices which are not normally part of a traditional oral exam, and which appeared rather spontaneously in this new environment.

We can thus affirm that our context of examination provided indeed a more naturalized setting, as students were more spontaneous, forgetting even that they were in an "exam", and so enabling us to assess their real competence in performance.

## **2. Creative Assessment Methodology: From Guided Interview to Self-managed Oral Interaction**

Considering the expectations regarding communicative competence that are now part and parcel of ECTS' foreign language teaching requirements, our main aim with this experience was to set into motion a combined grid of creative assessment alternatives to the traditional and linguistic accuracy-oriented oral exam. Although we believe that the oral interview is still a valid and thorough method of assessment, we suggest that there are other complementary alternatives that may be more in tune with current approaches to L2 acquisition and ECTS testing.

Several factors influenced our decision to try out a different assessment format in our co-taught module "English Language III" (*Advanced English*) at the UVEG, during this academic year of 2009-

10. The most important was, perhaps, the fact that at least in our own educational backgrounds, oral assessment practices have too often been narrowed down to the aforementioned monotonous interview, with an instructor or two evaluating specific aspects of communication —above all, the correctness of grammar and vocabulary used by the student and his/her ability to understand questions. 90% of surveyed students in our class confirmed this hypothesis, admitting that the teacher-student interview was the ONLY format of oral assessment they had been exposed to in their foreign language classes in tertiary education (Figure 1).

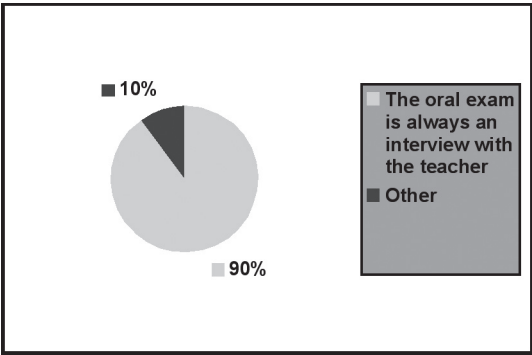


Figure 1. Methodologies of Oral Testing

Because oral testing has traditionally been limited to the acquisition of targeted grammatical structures and vocabulary (linguistic items which are often memorized and parroted in a constrained and artificial setting during the five-minute interview), the *washback effect* (Alderson and Wall) of this type of assessment on the students’ learning progress has been, in our opinion, barely non-existent.

Moreover, traditional interviews are often the source of constant nightmares and overwhelming test anxiety —a psychological condition that may seriously affect student performance (Figure 2). These interviews, as carried out in previous academic years, have often proven to be insufficient in measuring a student’s communicative progress, especially in large overcrowded groups where no personal rapport has been established between a student, his/her peers, and the instructor

—and therefore where the 5-10 minute interview seems particularly unnatural and limiting.

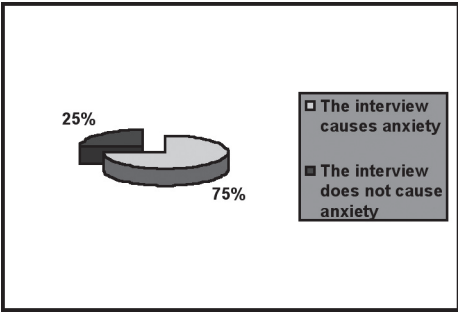


Figure 2. Results of Student Survey on Oral Testing Anxiety

The amount of time spent in the end-of-the-semester scheduling of these interviews was a last motivation that triggered our search for a new assessment vehicle. We were particularly interested in finding a flexible format that would enable us to measure a student’s ability to command a real-life communicative situation in a more effective and autonomous manner —one that would be managed entirely by him/herself, from the bottom up, with the help of a small group of student peers.

Research carried out by Robin and Gregori inspired us to introduce an innovative type of performance-based assessment, that is, a form of testing that measures the ability of a student to perform a certain practical task, where the language is used in a naturalistic setting and in a contextualized manner (Omaggio; El-Koumy).<sup>6</sup> Our aim was to let students manage the whole process, and to take central stage in their demonstration of oral proficiency competence.

We thus organized our students into groups of three or four members (of their own choice), and asked them to create a *digital story* that integrated the most important curricular items (mostly grammar

<sup>6</sup> Although traditional end-of the year instructor-student oral interviews are also a type of performance-based assessment, they are often framed as an artificially designed and monotonous situation in which an anguished stammering student has to be closely guided by the instructor word for word.

and vocabulary but also pragmatic knowledge) from one of the units studied during the semester.<sup>7</sup> The success of the project demanded, among other things, an assimilation of the linguistic and situational content covered during the semester, effective peer interaction and negotiation, as well as the implementation of “creative critical thinking skills” (Brígido 2011). Given the large number of students (a total of 44 students embarked in the pilot project), we worked with two separate groups and scheduled two separate DS Festivals in order to give each sufficient time to defend their projects on stage, and to give us, as co-evaluators, time to closely monitor their progress. Eventually, we ended up with 28 students and 10 digital stories in the first Digital Story Festival, which took place in February 2010. Our case study, that is our statistics, results, and conclusions are all derived from this first Festival/exam.

Following Bernard and Gregori, the process of DS elaboration was divided into three main steps sprinkled throughout the semester: 1) the submission of an initial script or storyboard, 2) tutorial sessions between the group members and one of the instructors aimed at solving any technical or linguistic doubts, and 3) submission of the finished product.

To these steps we added two more: 4) oral defense of the digital story in front of the whole class at the Digital Storytelling Festival—a defense which included a didactic introduction to the project, and a Q&A with their classmates and instructors addressing their main achievements and shortcomings (i.e. an enhanced and multidirectional version of the traditional oral interview). 5) Peer-assessment of each group project and its corresponding oral defense using a free online questionnaire

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<sup>7</sup> A digital story is a short 3-5 minute video elaborated through user-friendly educational software such as Photo Story 3 or Windows Moviemaker. It consists of simple voice narration that accompanies a selection of photographs (either taken by the makers or borrowed from another source) over background music (Robin 2006; Lambert 2007; Gregori 2008). An interesting advantage of using a multimodal open source software application such as Photostory or Windows MovieMaker to create oral narrations is that each student's voice is wrapped up and supported by a variety of complementary devices (visual aids, music...), which act both as stimulus and support to the narration. In fact, the use of visual cues articulating or prompting an oral response is not unfamiliar to traditional oral proficiency testing, where students are often asked to react to images and photographs of various kinds. In contrast, in our proposal for alternative assessment practice, inspired in previous work by Bernard (2006) and Gregori (2008), students get to choose the best visual cues to accompany their narrative and, therefore, to strengthen their communicative competence.

([www.SurveyMonkey.com](http://www.SurveyMonkey.com)), with the intention of strengthening further assimilation of key linguistic and pragmatic concepts through detailed critical reflection of each class presentation.

As a result, while each group concentrated on the curricular items developed in one semester unit, they were all exposed to most learning targets again during the Festival, which deepened their understanding of the vocabulary and grammar in a new contextualized setting (designed by their classmates).

Assessing their peers' stories also sharpened the students' reflective learning skills and made them more aware of their own linguistic competence. Having to analyze and assess their peer's performance (through the digital story and on stage) clearly enhanced student awareness of what linguistic competence at an advanced level entails, and helped put their own mark into perspective making the entire process more fair in their eyes.<sup>8</sup>

Incidentally, we would like to point out that, in addition to this collective mark, individual communicative competence in a classroom setting (the most important situational context for ESL students, if we take into account that most of these students will most likely become teachers), was measured by means of a complementary rating scale filled out by the instructors, as we will explain in the next section.

The advantages of implementing this manifold assessment methodology to measure linguistic competence are numerous, but we would like to highlight four of these: it enhances linguistic and situational learning through peer-cooperation, it manifests itself as a fully-managed student experience (rather than instructor-guided), it extraordinarily increases our students' motivation and self-esteem in public speaking, and lastly, it minimizes test anxiety by providing an informal, non-threatening and gregarious scenario of assessment practice: the Digital Storytelling Festival<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> All digital stories were also shared with the class after the festival for later viewing (or re-viewing) using an educational social network, NING, which we had incorporated as part of language practice during the semester. Moreover, the whole festival was videotaped so that individual performance could be reviewed, as necessary, by the instructors.

<sup>9</sup> Some of these advantages have already been pointed out by previous researchers of performance-based assessment. See El-Koumy (2003) for a thorough review of these studies.

Taken as a whole, our assessment did not merely measure a series of linguistic achievements as reflected in a final product, but also contemplated, on the one hand, the students' process/progress to create it (as both instructors closely monitored all the steps prior to the oral defense of the digital stories), and, on the other hand, each student's ability to defend it orally, thus exhibiting linguistic, pragmatic and strategic competence in classroom discourse.

### **3. Balancing the Final Mark: Peer-assessment through Online Questionnaires**

To strengthen this alternative method of oral proficiency testing in the new ECTS modules, the making and defense of a digital story, we decided to implement a complementary assessment approach. This new system integrated traditional teachers' evaluations, but also opened a new space for peer-evaluations (students evaluating each other's work). Peer-assessment practices are very stimulating because they keep teachers' appraisals in balance, and because they most certainly increase student motivation.

Following Brígido's previous study of a performance-based assessment for a *Pre-19<sup>th</sup> Century British Theatre* class (2009), we created an analytic rubric that was made accessible to students prior to the DS Festival (via our e-learning platform at the UVEG, *aula virtual*). Familiarity with the assessment rubric clearly enhances student awareness of the rating scales that will be applied when measuring their level of competence (Omaggio), and therefore, we believe it increases the quality of their performance.

To ensure a certain degree of success, this particular rubric consisted of very specific, structured guidelines, although an important element of creativity (story composition, choice of images and music), which demanded a more subjective reaction, was also introduced. We hoped that this creative component would foster the development of different learning styles, which would in turn also enhanced student motivation.

Our DS rubric (partially adapted from Robin) included the following items, which were measured on a 1-4 scale:

Content: Structure, Exposition and Point of View



Language: Pronunciation, Intonation and Clarity of Voice

Didactic Purpose: Integration of Vocabulary and Grammar from Selected Unit

Appearance: Editing, Choice of Photographs, Music

Creativity: Overall Effort and Originality

Although previous studies have shown that it is extremely difficult to eliminate the subjectivity component in raters,<sup>10</sup> the introduction of peer-assessment as a second checking device helped us keep the final mark in balance, and avoided potential teacher biases. Thus, student peer-assessment was worth 25% of the final mark, instructors' marks were worth 40% (20% each), and the final 35% measured individual performance. This latter individual component was designed to avoid granting undeserved group work credit to underperforming individual subjects. The rubric for individual assessment contemplated items such as effort/amount of language produced at the oral defense, pronunciation (within the DS and during the Q&A), grammar, vocabulary, and also "spontaneous adapting ability", that is, contextualized situational knowledge, which includes pragmatic sociolinguistic, and strategic competences.

As seen in previous research (Brígido 2009), the average mark that rose from the student peer-assessment questionnaires only varied from that of the instructors in 1%-0.5% in some cases (the same variation that appeared when contrasting instructor comments and marks), and was practically identical for 80% of the subjects. Moreover, 100% of the students in this pilot project, students that showed clear evidence of their hard work throughout the entire process culminating in their final public defense, passed this oral exam.

Although recent studies analyzing the validity of peer-evaluation assessment practices have shown that students' evaluations of each other's work are honest and fair overall (Maíz; Langendyk, Brígido 2009), we suggest that such peer-assessment methodologies be implemented within controlled groups, that students are given very structured and specific analytic rubrics to be followed, and that the percentage of the final mark allotted to these is representative, yet limited. It is particularly important to keep peer-assessment experiences closely

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<sup>10</sup> See discussion in El-Koumy (2003).

monitored in groups where interpersonal relations and solidarity levels among students are relatively high, since external factors such as friendship, fellowship, etc. may bring about imbalanced results. Finally, in groups where students' L2 grammatical background is very weak, the percentage allotted to individual performance should be higher than the group mark, and should be closely monitored through follow up interviews in order to neutralize and fail underperforming students who would otherwise benefit too much from their group mates' efforts. Such additional interviews could be scheduled after the Festival in order to further evaluate these borderline students.

Overall, although our project was time-consuming for both instructors and for students (challenging to organize, lengthy to monitor, and complex to evaluate), we all agreed that it took less time and was far more rewarding than scheduling face-to-face oral interviews with 44 students at the end of the semester, so we certainly recommend it for large, responsible groups in advanced levels.

## Conclusion

In this article we have discussed the concept of communicative competence, which is central to our teaching methodology —following the latest trends in language learning and the Common European Framework for Languages. We have seen that this is a fairly controversial notion, linguists often including or excluding different components of the concepts in their definitions. We believe that communicative competence necessarily has to incorporate a linguistic component but that sociolinguistic, pragmatic and strategic aspects are equally important in order to ensure effective communication. This is why one of our final recommendations is that sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors should be taken into consideration in the evaluation process as well.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> We are aware that sociolinguistic aspects were rarely introduced in the stories, nor were they displayed in the oral defense as often as pragmatic or strategic elements. This is probably due to the fact that we did not explicitly emphasize to our students the need to incorporate some as further evidence of sociolinguistic acquisition. We hope to strengthen the sociolinguistic component in future implementations of this assessment model.

We have also described an alternative method to assess student’s communicative competence. One of the main advantages of this alternative to oral testing is that the focus lays on the student’s strengths rather than on his/her shortcomings and that it is self-managed by the students rather than strictly instructor-guided, as is the case with more traditional assessment interviews. Moreover, our creative method takes into account mixed proficiency levels, different learning styles and cultural backgrounds (Tannenbaum 1).

With regards to the peer-evaluation component, one of the aspects that struck us is the balance or consistency in terms of final marks awarded by both teachers and students, which has helped us to confirm our judgment and to keep it as objective as possible. The final oral marks of the 28 students who were assessed at the Festival are in fact extremely encouraging, as shown in the graph below, since scores ranged from 6 to 9.9, with 24 students scoring higher than 7.

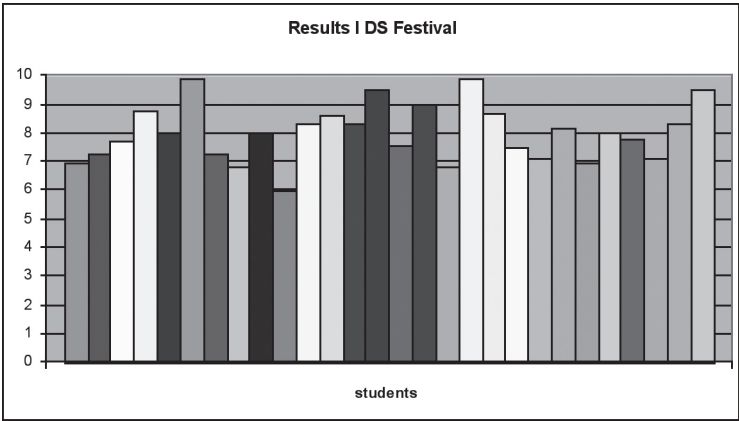


Figure 3: Results First DS Festival

We are aware that our particular pilot group was exceptionally disciplined and started the project with a solid linguistic background. We would however recommend that the percentage of the final mark allotted to individual performance be higher than the collective DS mark and that it be also closely monitored through follow up interviews in cases where a student’s linguistic ability is clearly low, or where his/her performance at the public defense is insufficient or questionable.

On the other hand, we have certainly noticed a higher acceptance of this new assessment approach by students, as reflected by the findings of our post-festival questionnaire. Student positive approval of the new methodology is probably due to the fact that this new evaluation context provides a more naturalistic and less threatening setting—with spontaneity and peer interaction encouraged by the fact that students forget they are being tested, which allows us to evaluate their communicative competence through real and motivated performance.

According to results obtained in the post-festival student survey (Figure 3), 70% students were very happy with the change to the new format (30% were indifferent, but not particularly critical of the new assessment method). 90% students stated that it had significantly reduced the anxiety linked with the testing of this component. 75% students “STRONGLY” preferred this new method to the traditional exam (the remaining 25% were rather neutral, i.e., they did not criticize/dislike the new format). Finally, 75% agreed that this type of format, i.e. being present during the evaluation of their classmates had made them more aware of their own level of communicative competence, thus enhancing reflection on their own learning progress and achievements.

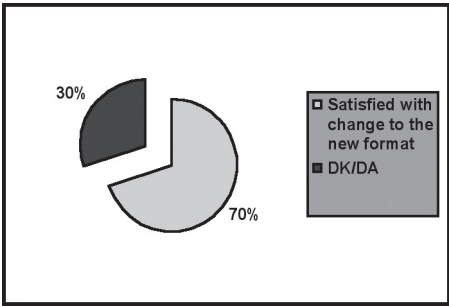


Figure 4: Students’ satisfaction

In fact, in a Festival or public defense, peer elaborated output (the Digital Story) becomes the input for attendees, who thus reinforce curricular concepts and are exposed to further strategic and pragmatic aspects —displayed by classmates with a higher degree of communicative achievement. It clearly enhances the *washback effect* of

testing (Alderson and Wall), increasing the range of features that are included and valued when assessing oral competence (peer-interaction, spontaneity, creativity). Moreover, it has a clearly positive impact on all students' learning process. It was fun and motivating.

Most importantly, we believe that this method had a clearly positive impact on all of our students' learning processes. It was innovative, it promoted self-motivation and collaboration among peers, and it increased student self-esteem according to the appreciative remarks, feedback and advice on the stories, exchanged through our online educational social network, NING.

Additionally, several skills were integrated into our assessment model: writing (scripts), pronunciation practice, research, creative critical thinking, intra and interpersonal skills through collaborative work, and listening-comprehension, among others. Digital stories have also served to promote the acquisition of conceptual content, since a key requirement in DS elaboration was the integration of grammatical (syntactic, morphological, lexico-semantic and pragmatic) items of each unit. The implementation of DS practices and assessment also integrates various ICTs, which enables teachers to develop additional technical or instrumental skills in students (Zaragoza and Clavel 2008).

To conclude, our type of assessment, which includes contextualized, real-life situations, integrated linguistic items, a task-based approach, ICT-use and creativity as complementary components, in addition to peer-evaluation, fits the more dynamic, student-centered demands of the new ECTS context.

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## **BOOK REVIEWS**



**KIRKPATRICK, ANDY (2007). *WORLD ENGLISHES.*  
*IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL*  
*COMMUNICATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE*  
*TEACHING.***

**Hong-Kong: Cambridge University Press. 257 pag.**

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The topic of *World Englishes* is a very up-to-date issue, as it deals with the importance of English varieties around the world. The development of varieties of English is the result of colonisation in a number of countries in the world, as well as an effect of globalisation and U.S. imperialism. Consequently, English has become the *lingua franca* for most world citizens.

The origins of term *World Englishes* dates back to the two conferences on English as a world language that took place in 1978, and Braj Kachru played a major role in coining this term (Bolton 248). Since then, the concept of *World Englishes* has been widely developed by a number of authors (Kachru 1992; Kachru et al. 2006; Schneider 2007; Meshtrie and Rakesh 2008), and different theories have emerged to categorise the varieties of English across the world. Nevertheless, the most widespread model involves Kachru's three concentric circles, which will be expounded on subsequently.

This work also studies the implications of *World Englishes* on language teaching. Other books (Jenkins 2002) have previously focused on this topic, leading students to be more familiar with particular features of the varieties of English. These contributions are very valuable, as they make students be in direct contact not only with standard varieties of English, but also with a great range of Englishes, which have emerged across the globe.

The book under review includes an introduction, sections A, B and C, an appendix, a list of references, author index, subject index, and an audio CD.

In the introduction, the topic of World Englishes is addressed. Part A, namely The Framework, provides the theoretical framework, and it contains three different chapters.

Chapter one, 'Key sociolinguistic concepts', comprises five sub-sections. The first one explains the differences among native varieties, nativised varieties (e.g. Nigerian English) and *lingua franca* Englishes. The second distinction is between the native vs. the non-native speaker. There is a reference to the three major functions of language: communication, identity and culture. In order to be successful, a variety of English is required to fulfill these three functions. Sub-section number four is devoted to the distinction among pidgins, creoles and varieties of Englishes. These varieties are frequently associated with prejudice of native speakers towards other native speakers of different varieties of English.

In chapter two, 'Key linguistic terms', four different linguistic aspects are dealt with: phonology and pronunciation is the first; vocabulary is the second; morphology and syntax is the third, and finally, cultural conventions and schemas.

Regarding phonology, Kirkpatrick stresses the existence of different pronunciations in the varieties of English. The author also supports the existence of such varieties in terms of vocabulary (adoption of local words to describe local phenomena) or syntax, and here the emphasis is put on diachronic and synchronic changes that have occurred in English, tending to simplify the system.

In chapter three, 'Models of World Englishes', there is a reference to Kachru's (*The Other Tongue* 356) 'Three Concentric Circles Model', mentioned above. English as a native language (ENL), which compiles those countries where English is the native language; Canada, the United Kingdom or the United States, among others. Surprisingly, Ireland is not included by the author within this circle. English as a Second Language (ESL), which encompasses those countries where English plays the role of a second language, for example: Nigeria, India, Malaysia and the Philippines. The third circle is for those countries

where English is a Foreign Language (EFL). It means that English is usually learned at school and students have little opportunity to use it outside the classroom. Some examples are China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, etc, and most European countries.

The author offers some observations about this model. The first one deals with the use of term 'colony', since depending on the kind of colony (trade, exploitation or settlement colonies) the development of English in certain countries was different from others. The second observation is related to the 'underestimation' by Kachru of the roles that English plays in Expanding Circle countries (EFL). In order to justify this statement, Kirkpatrick takes China as an example, where the increasing roles of English are remarkable.

The second subsection of this chapter deals with the 'developmental cycles' or processes that an imported variety develops to become a local variety. This process is called 'nativisation'. In the next phase, there is a co-existence of both varieties- the local and the imported-. During the third phase, the local variety is recognised as the norm and becomes socially accepted. Finally, during phase four a gradual acceptance of the local norm is produced.

The last subsection of this chapter asks the question 'English as an International Language or World Englishes?' The author stresses the benefits that the British Government obtains from the spread of English through the development of institutions such as the British Council.

Part B, composed of chapters four to eleven, is entitled *Variation and Varieties*. Chapter four, 'Variation and impurity of British English', reviews the evolution of English since its origins, in order to continue with the debate over the number of major varieties of English spoken in England and Scotland nowadays. The author insists on variation as an expectable feature of languages.

'The powerful variety: American English' is the title of chapter five. There are many different varieties of English, and they have been developed as the result of increasing migration and immigration to the cities. Consequently, the notion of a variety of General American is becoming more an idealisation than a reality.

In chapter six, 'A younger 'cousin' and indigenous identity', the Australian variety, the author describes phonological, syntactic and lexical features of varieties of Standard Australian English. In this context, the varieties of English are highly influenced by Aboriginal languages.

Chapter seven, 'Englishes of the subcontinent', tackles the varieties and functions of English in India and Sri Lanka. As speakers of Indian and Sri Lankan English are native speakers of those varieties, the author aptly states that they should determine their own linguistic rules.

The next chapter, whose title is 'Voices from Africa', focuses on two countries. In Nigeria, English is an official language within an amalgam of indigenous languages. South African English is seen as a language of liberation by many black South Africans, while Afrikaans is seen as the language of colonial oppression and apartheid. The conclusion highlights the importance for African Englishes to represent African cultures and thought when choosing one over another variety.

Chapter nine has the title 'Englishes of South-East Asia- colonial descendants?' The analysis of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei reveals that English plays a vital role in these countries. In Singapore, it has virtually become the sole medium of instruction, and in Malaysia is widely spoken by the population. In the Philippines, there is a great demand for English 'especially at the lower socio-economic levels' (Kirkpatrick 130).

Chapter ten, 'Emerging Englishes: Hong Kong and China', studies the roles of English in these countries. In Hong Kong, English derives its norms from standard varieties rather than possessing local norms and a large part of the population speaks English. In China, the desire to learn English among urban Chinese is astounding; consequently, the number of English speakers has radically increased. However, a variety of Chinese English (CE) is also developing, and it is becoming the most commonly spoken variety of English in Asia.

The next chapter is entitled 'English as a *lingua franca*', and it deals with the current issue of English as the means of communication among speakers of different nationalities. In ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations), English has become the *de facto lingua*

*franca*, and it has developed certain specific features (verbal tenses, phonology and communicative strategies). In the context of Europe, English is the most frequently used language of wider communication, and it is, along with French, one of the working languages of the European Union (EU). In Europe, there is certain controversy among scholars (see Mollin 2006; Berns 2009) with regard to the emergence of a Euro-English variety.

Part C, entitled *Implications*, contains two chapters. Chapter twelve is the 'Summary of key themes', and it stresses the form in which varieties of English in the outer circle countries have developed. These varieties are so influenced by contact with local languages that they have developed particular features (specific vocabulary, certain grammatical characteristics, and so on) that make them different from standard varieties. When used as an international *lingua franca*, English tends to become an additional language.

Last chapter, 'Implications for English language teaching', provides some interesting ideas regarding the teaching/learning English field. The author warns about the risks of hiring native speakers who are not trained as teachers of English, just because they are native speakers. It undermines the value of the local teacher's own model of English. Another extended belief is the consideration of a native teacher as better than a local one, since he/she cannot resort to the use of other languages in the classroom. The author is against this idea, as being multilingual and knowing the language of their students should be seen as an advantage, rather than a disadvantage. Bilingual students benefit from and respect bilingual teachers.

The appendices include the transcripts of samples of varieties of English which are recorded in the complementary CD with the real voices of the speakers of some English varieties. The list of references is quite rich and extensive, as it includes all the major works carried out in connection with this topic.

Finally, there is a subject index with important concepts in the book and the page numbers where they occur.

It is important to stress that the author continuously provides extracts, examples and useful quotations, which are closely connected with the topic being examined. Thus, this book provides not only an

important theoretical framework of the issues under consideration, but it also applies this theory to specific contexts.

We might consider the book a valuable contribution within the field of *World Englishes*. Written in a very accessible language, it can be of great interest to all scholars working in sociolinguistics, and to the more general audience interested in English teaching/learning processes.

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**JOSÉ RUIZ MAS (2009). *LA GUERRA CIVIL ESPAÑOLA  
VISTA POR LOS VIAJEROS Y LOS HISTORIADORES DE  
HABLA INGLESA.***

**Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada.**

**ISBN: 978-84-338-4812-3. 185 pag.**

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The topic of the Spanish Civil War (hereafter SCW) has been approached from the most varied perspectives and points of views. As stated in the title, the reader is offered an attractive new approach to the conflict as the author presents the opinions and reactions of this historic event related by English travellers and historians. It is not just any other book on a subject which has attracted the attention of so many writers and researchers in Spain and abroad. Its author, a specialist on travel literature, has chosen places and well known episodes of the conflict to put forward the opinions given by travellers; most of whom are widely known English-speaking writers, journalists and historians. The analysis carried out in the eight chapters of the book is accompanied by frequent quotations of the different episodes of the war by these foreign travellers in Spain. In order to help the most demanding readers, the author offers quotations of the original texts in English and their translations into Spanish, so that readers and specialists may have direct access to the original sources. This serves to avoid complaints, frequently heard in academic circles, about the reliability of books or essays where the quoted text is only offered in its translated version. As well as the general reader who wishes to learn more about those tragic years of Spain's recent history, this book is also attractive for researchers given its extensive number of authors quoted and its solid bibliography.

Fortunately, in the last few decades many books and studies have been published about the SCW, most of which have approached this subject from previously established viewpoints. This is something that should not surprise us, especially when considering that the different episodes described in those books and studies are about a civil war where emotions are predominantly high. Reading the chapters and episodes of this work one soon realises that the opinions maintained by most of the travellers were unequivocally influenced by their informers, their travelling experiences or by the places they were living in during, just before or after those years. Dr. Ruiz Mas, has carefully chosen a wide variety of travellers' and historians' opinions to reflect their different points of views on the same episodes. As one can imagine, it is no easy task to adopt a neutral academic approach to facts which, due to the most varied circumstances, are still relevant to us and our social environment.

This is the reason why it is praiseworthy that the author has not avoided the most controversial episodes of the SCW. He has chosen to deal with them and to present written evidence given by foreign travellers, most of which is not well known in the current literature on the topic. Some of the quoted texts disagree with the most common stance towards this issue taken by the predominant literature. This is the case of two of the chapters devoted to the episodes of the "Alcázar de Toledo" or the murder of García Lorca in Granada respectively. Needless to say, emotions still run high on both these subjects and some readers may have other well formed viewpoints. Nonetheless, from an academic perspective, it is always desirable to receive information from the most varied sources available, especially when they are accurately reproduced, as is always the case in this book. It will be the task of the intelligent reader to form his or her own opinions on these and other episodes mentioned in this text.

The quotations offered in the eight chapters it comprises belong to travellers and writers from English speaking countries who were living or travelling in Spain just before, after or during the time span of the Civil War. One is amazed to realise how many manuscripts were produced on this subject and by the number of different points of view analysing the same facts. It has to be taken into consideration that there was a high involvement in the war of some of the most relevant international writers and journalists of those years, not only concerned

with the SCW but also with the imminent start of World War II. Perhaps this is why the SCW is one of the topics that has been the subject of a countless number of books and essays during the past century and still continues to be so. It is expected that English writers and travellers view international affairs with a certain personal detachment; they give the impression of being neutral towards matters which they consider to be distant and only of concern to the native population. This hypothetical attitude, only broken when their national interests are implicated, has consistently shown to be true when considering works and opinions of English writers as neutral. In this work, however, where opinions given are about a civil war in a country which was neither politically nor economically of their own interest, it is surprising to observe how the English-speaking writers who are quoted express a somehow distant attitude which is frequently mixed with a personal implication in their views about the facts they write about; a fact which makes the texts quoted in the book particularly interesting.

The first chapter is about those writers and travellers who were in Spain just before the breakout of the war. We can see how, based on the socio-political confrontation they observed in the different places they visited they were able to predict the oncoming conflict. Among them an Irishman, Walter Starkie, and an Englishman, Laurie Lee, both visited the country as tramps; both crossed the country playing their violins as a way of meeting the local people and both wrote reliable accounts on the situation in Spain during those years. There were also many other influential writers from different English-speaking countries who described and gave their views about the pre-bellicose situation in Spain. The second chapter is dedicated to written opinions against or in favour of one of the two adversaries in the war. Then come the two aforementioned chapters on the Alcázar de Toledo and García Lorca. The quoted texts in them challenge current descriptions of these episodes. Especially recommended is the chapter on García Lorca.

One of the most controversial chapters in the book is the one dedicated to Málaga. It is well known that Málaga was and is a long-established place chosen by the British to live in the South of Spain and in Málaga the first English-Protestant cemetery in this country was created. At the time when the war started there were significant colonies of English people living around there—they had their own club in the centre of the town and early in the war, due to their

importance, the British navy sent a boat to get their nationals out of the area. There are several first-hand descriptions written by them of the initial revolutionary days in the town, the following months, the city's conquest by the Nationalists at the beginning of 1937 and the subsequent repression. The possible controversy arises because in this chapter special relevance is given to Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell's account of the episodes which occurred in Málaga. Mitchell is a Scottish author that has sometimes been quoted for his strong pro-Republican views by historians and other fellow countrymen (the Duchess of Atholl and G. Brenan). Among other eye-witnesses to everyday life in Málaga were the Hispanist Gerald Brenan and his wife Gamel Woolsey. Woolsey wrote a book describing the chaotic first days of the civil war in Málaga.

The central chapters can be read independently as there is no intercommunication or continuity in the facts described in them, which can be considered a point to criticise. On the other hand, the two first chapters and the last two can be regarded as a good introduction and recapitulation on the subject. The penultimate one deals with the post-war return to Mallorca of relevant English writers (namely R. Graves), and the last one constitutes an erudite reference to the social and political instability in Spain since the Second Republic as it was perceived by English writers. The latter are two appropriate chapters on something that is frequently forgotten when dealing with this subject. In this case, the analyses belong to foreigners that show a certain detachment describing controversial facts which have traditionally been difficult to be perceived and analysed by Spanish authors.

In spite of the great amount of information and sources, or thanks to them, one appreciates a tendency to vindicate and defend the role played in the SCW by the Spanish Civil Guard (hereafter CG). This does not mean that Dr Ruiz Mas avoids the facts where the CG was the most frequent force of repression which the English writers presented in their works. Indeed, it suffices to refer to the expansive scope of the facts presented in episodes such as the CG's repression in Arnedo, La Rioja (149-52), or to the episode of Castilblanco, Badajoz, where the victims were four members of the CG who were killed by the mob (137-49). Supporting the author's overall objectivity is the description of the repression in Asturias, one of the most sordid episodes involving the CG according to the historian Gabriel Jackson (167). Furthermore,

the author's own opinions are well sustained. Indeed the CG is a topic where Dr Ruiz Mas is an authority, as this was the subject of his PhD and, at the time of writing this review, a dense volume of his on the CG as seen by English-speaking writers is forthcoming in a recognized international publishing house. The role played by the Civil Guards in the different episodes of the SCW is one of the subjects in the book which is highly recommended.

Sometimes the language or expressions used in commentaries about certain episodes are not appropriate in the general academic or formal language used throughout the book, even if their frequency in everyday language adds freshness to certain controversial quotations and to the content in the text in general. This is the case, among others, when the anarchists are referred to at the beginning of the well known episode of Casas Viejas, Cadiz (152-61). There are different accounts of Casas Viejas and the killing of local peasants by government forces, which according to the author motivated the fall of Azaña. The account given of this episode is probably one of the best: it is well documented and offers a lively description of those tragic facts. There are descriptions of certain events which can be considered biased; this is the case of Hugh Thomas' account of Castilblanco, where the CG are the victims of the mob, something that Thomas somehow tries to explain (139-43); Dr. Ruiz Mas adds more complete and balanced information than the one offered by Thomas, with quotations and descriptions given by other writers. This is a well documented episode (137-49) as are the others in the book.

The formal general presentation of the book should be criticized. The big size of the volume contrasts with the small print of the letters in the main text and the notes. From an aesthetic point of view the double line spacing of the text and the many blanks between paragraphs, quotations and footnotes are shocking. An added criticism is the duplication of pieces of information throughout the book and, in one case, even in the same chapter. It has to be remarked that this criticism is addressed mainly to formal aspects rather than to the book's content and that it plays a secondary role in the general positive view of the work.

As regards the translations into Spanish of all the quoted texts, some readers may consider them to be redundant due to their frequency. However, its utility has already been mentioned and the author's

interest in offering the possibility to those who read English to see also the source text constitutes an act of academic honesty. Needless to say, the quality and reliability of the translations are of an excellent standard, as the author, a lecturer at the University of Granada, has University degrees in Translation and Interpreting Studies, in English and in Spanish Philology.

Before finishing, a special mention should be made to the bibliographical sources employed. At the end of every chapter we find the primary and secondary sources used in them. In my opinion, this is one of the main merits of the book: it shows the enormous amount of material used by his author to write it. The excellent bibliography offers both readers and researchers a secure path to increase their information on the different episodes of the SCW described, or to follow their own path when researching on them. The frequent quotations and references to the different sources describing the episodes and the comprehensive bibliography in its pages make the content and the information given especially reliable.

This is a book which is welcome to a market where the topic of the SCW has been mainly dealt with from other points of view expressed in many previous monographs. The vision given by different English travellers and writers and the large amount of data offered in its pages will help to obtain a wider knowledge of the SCW. Readers will naturally find some episodes more attractive than others; also, some of the episodes may provoke disagreement even if the author has endeavoured to approach them from an academic distance. Fidelity to the different sources is maintained throughout the text, which helps to guarantee the search for objectivity. The topic of the SCW has been the object of many studies and research, but this book offers a new particular approach. It is a relevant contribution that will help to open new paths of analysis.

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**Carmen María Fernández Rodríguez** obtained a PhD in English Philology (University of A Coruña) in 2007 with a dissertation on Frances Burney's and Maria Edgeworth's works. A teacher in the Official Language School in Santiago de Compostela (Spain), Dr. Fernández is currently working on the oeuvre of Sarah Harriet Burney, Frances's half-sister.

**Peter Figueroa** (†) was Professor of Education (University of Southampton, England). His academic and creative activity focussed on poetry: reading, writing and translating. Prof. Figueroa had a track record of translating, especially from French, though he also did translations from Italian, German and Spanish. He was originally from Jamaica, but lived in England for many years.

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**María Goretti Zaragoza** is a lecturer at the University of Valencia. Her research interests include the integration of ICT in the context of foreign language teaching and Gender and Translation/Language. In the past few years, as a member of the *Anglotic Project*, Dr. Zaragoza has focused on competence learning and blended learning methodologies, having explored the pedagogical benefits of the use of Digital Storytelling and is actively involved in the expansion of content learning and skills improvement through the use of educational social networks. As a member of the *GENTEXT* research group, Dr. Zaragoza is currently working on the discursive representation of Gender Violence. Dr. Zaragoza is also an active member of *IULMA*.

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**Carmelo Medina Casado** teaches English Literature at the University of Jaen, Spain. He is the author of numerous articles, book chapters and books. His current research interests are focused on James Joyce, travel literature, contemporary English poetry and English writers in the Spanish Civil War.

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several articles on African literature in *Letras de Deusto*, *Afroeuropa*, *Oráfrica*, *Cuadernos de la Fundación Sur*, *Pueblos, Africana* and *Mundo Negro*. She has also participated in the book entitled *Identity, Migration and Women's Bodies as Sites of knowledge and Transgression* (2009). She has been awarded the XII Research Prize in Genre Studies "Elisa Pérez Vera" (UNED), with a research on African Feminisms (March, 2010).

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**Christopher Rollason** (M.A., Cambridge; Ph.D., York) is a translator and independent scholar, and member of ESSE and AEDEAN. Until 1987 he was at the English Department, Coimbra University (Portugal). He has written and lectured on subjects including Edgar Allan Poe, Latin American literature, Indian Writing in English and Bob Dylan.

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**Susana Vega-González** lectures in the English Department at the University of Oviedo, Spain. She holds a Ph.D. and has published extensively on African American literature, with a special focus on Toni Morrison's fiction. Among her publications are the book *Mundos Mágicos: la otra realidad en la narrativa de autoras afroamericanas* (Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Oviedo 2000) and the article "Toward a Love Ethic: Love and Spirituality in bell hooks's

Writing,” included in *Critical Perspectives on bell hooks* (Routledge 2009).

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## **NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS**





## NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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**Contributions should be unpublished and not considered for publication elsewhere.**

## Reviewing process

The submitted papers will be considered for publication if they receive favourable reports from specialists in the author's research field. At least two anonymous referees (at least one of them from a university other than that of Jaén) will evaluate the unsigned manuscripts submitted for publication to *The Grove*.

Decisions on articles and book reviews submitted are normally made within one month and those accepted will be published within one year. If the paper has not been accepted or needs revision, the author will be provided with a report indicating the reasons for non-acceptance, or the changes required to be made for its publication.

### **Selection of contributions**

Given that *The Grove* receives more submissions (articles, reviews and fiction/poetry) than it can publish, our peer-reviewers are asked to consider the quality and originality of each paper accepted for publication. In general terms, to be acceptable a paper must: deal with one of the fields of study covered by our journal, be original, provide substantial evidence for its conclusions, and prove relevant for the specific field. Additionally, we will be looking for methodological rigour, theoretical consistency and innovation, stylistic merit and academic seriousness. Typically, an unsolicited paper will be sent to two peer-reviewers and may be approved, rejected, or approved with modifications, in which case detailed reports will be sent to the author(s) for its potential consideration; the paper will be evaluated again unless the editors consider the modification of minor importance. Modifications suggested to the author(s) may include (among others) requests to revise the style of the paper, reorganize the material, provide additional evidence or reinforce/clarify either the initial hypothesis or the conclusions. Author(s) will be requested to include all title, abstract and keywords in Spanish and English. The final publication of the papers, and the section where they will appear, will be determined by the editorial board.

### **PUBLICATION GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS**

The suggested length of articles is 3000 to 6000 words and book reviews from 1500 to 2500. All articles should be accompanied by a 100-150 word abstract and by the title of the work both in English and in Spanish. Below the abstract should appear the key words which the author/s would like to include also in the two languages. Manuscripts should be sent in Word format to grove@ujaen.es in a separate attachment to a covering letter. All details of the author –title of the text, name of author, institution, academic / professional post, telephone numbers, postal and email address, as well as a brief résumé in English of 50 words maximum– should be included in a separate attachment as a cover sheet, never on the manuscript itself. The author should never write in first person in the text or notes if these references help to identify the author. Submissions should be prepared according to the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (latest edition) throughout.

- Contributors must not write their names on the article, but on a separate cover sheet, together with their affiliation(s), mailing and email addresses and telephone number(s) as well as the title of the article. Only if the article has been accepted for publication must they write their names and institution in the final version of the article, between the title and the abstract.
- All submissions must be the author's own, original work.

- Articles and book reviews may be written in either Spanish or English.
- Articles should not normally exceed 10-20 pages (3000-6000 words)
- Articles must be accompanied by a 5 to 10 line long abstract in English followed by 5-10 key words. The abstract and key words should be translated into Spanish.
- Book reviews should be between 1500 and 2500 words in length.
- The style should conform to the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* 2005.
- Manuscripts must be submitted in digital form in Word format as a file attachment to their submission through email.
- The contributor should specify that the article submitted is not being considered for publication elsewhere.

After a positive evaluation, manuscripts not conforming to the guidelines provided will be returned to the authors for further revision.

### Citations

Double quotation marks should be used for text quotations, while single quotes should emphasise a word or phrase or highlight its figurative meaning. Only foreign words and titles of monographs may appear in italics. If exceeding four lines, block quotes should be separated from the main text and the whole quotation indented 2,54 cm (1") on its left margin.

References should include the page numbers or, if the author is not mentioned earlier in the paragraph, the surname(s) of the author(s) plus the page numbers. Examples:

References embedded within the main text (four lines maximum):

In his work, "Fiedler focused on Shakespeare only, and he included women and 'Indians' ...", while in my analysis I will include a wider corpus of early modern English texts (10) or (López-Peláez 10).\*

\*If more than one work by the same author is included in the bibliography, the citation should include the first word(s) of the title of the book/article: (*Strangers* 10) or (López-Peláez, *Strangers* 10).

Block quotes (five or more lines):

... the Spanish monarchs Isabel and Fernando were simultaneously campaigning to defeat the last Iberian stronghold of Islam, the kingdom of Granada. The year they succeeded, 1492, was also the

year in which they obliged Spain's remaining Jews to convert to Christianity or emigrate. Ten years later Muslims were given the same choice. After another century of tensions Philip III moved to expel all Moriscos in 1609. (188-89); or (Burns 188-89); or (Burns, "Unfixing Race" 188-89)

If part of the original text is omitted, three dots without brackets should be included.

### **Bibliographical References. Examples:**

Author's surname(s), Author's name(s), and 2nd Author's name(s) 2nd Author's surname(s). *Title*. Original publication date. Edition. Volumes. Place: Publisher, Year.

#### ***Monographs:***

Duiker, William J., and Jackson J. Spielvogel. *The Essential World History, Volume 2*. 2005. 6th. ed. 2 vols. Boston: Wadsworth, 2011.

Citation: (123) or (Duiker and Spielvogel 123) or (Duiker and Spielvogel, *The Essential* 123)

#### ***Multiple works:***

Follett, Ken. *Lie Down with Lions*. New York: Signet, 1986.

---. *The Pillars of the Earth*. New York: Signet, 1990.

Citations: (*Lie Down* 123) or (Follett, *Lie Down* 123); (*Pillars* 123) or (Follett, *Pillars* 123)

#### ***Edited book / Chapter:***

Kavanagh, James H. "Shakespeare in Ideology." *Alternative Shakespeares*. 1985. 2nd ed. Ed. John Drakakis. London: Routledge, 2002. 147-69.

Citation: (151) or (Kavanagh 151) or (Kavanagh, "Shakespeare" 151)

López-Peláez, Jesús. Foreword. *Strangers in Early Modern English Texts*. Ed. Jesús López-Peláez. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011.

Citation: (10) or (López-Peláez 10) or (López-Peláez, *Strangers* 10)

#### ***Translated book:***

Eco, Umberto. *The Name of the Rose*. Trans. William Weaver. New York: Harcourt, 1983.

Citation: (123) or (Eco 123) or (Eco, *The Name* 123)

#### ***Two or more authors:***

Greer, Margaret R., Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan. *Rereading the Black Legend. Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Citation: (123) or (Greer, Mignolo, and Quilligan 123)

Rivara, Frederick P., et al. "Prevention of Bicycle-Related Injuries: Helmets, Education, and Legislation." *Annual Review of Public Health* 19 (1998): 293-318.

Citation: (298) or (Rivara et al. 298)

**Article:**

Solé, Yolanda. "Valores aspectuales en español." *Hispanic Linguistics* 4.1 (1990): 57-85.

Citation: (63) or (Solé 63) or (Solé, "Valores" 63)

**Reviews:**

Camhi, Leslie. "Art of the City." Rev. of *New York Modern: The Arts and the City*, by William B. Scott, and Peter M. Rutkoff. *Village Voice* 15 June 1999: 154.

Citation: (154) or (Camhi 154) or (Camhi, "Art" 154)

**Online Journal:**

Barry, John M. "The Site of Origin of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic and Its Public Health Implications." Commentary. *Journal of Translational Medicine* 2.3 (20 Jan. 2004): 1-4. Web. 18 Nov. 2005. <<http://www.translational-medicine.com/content/2/1/3>>.

Citation: (4) or (Barry 4)

**Websites:**

*Research Project: Muslims, Spaniards and Jews in Early Modern English Texts: The Construction of the 'Other'.* Ed. Jesús López-Peláez. University of Jaén. Web. 21 Oct. 2011. <<http://www.ujaen.es/investiga/strangers/index.php>>.

**Further guidelines:**

- The font Times New Roman should be used in the whole manuscript.
- The first line (only) of each paragraph should be indented 1,27 cm (0,5").
- Footnotes should be kept to a minimum, and bibliographic references should be avoided.
- Double inverted commas should be used for: "Titles of articles" or "Quotes embedded within running text";
- simple inverted comas for 'Emphasis'; and
- italics for: *Book Titles* and *Foreign Words*.
- Bold font should be used for headings and subheadings only.
- Abbreviations such as pp., i.e., e.g., etc., should be avoided. Use instead: that is; for example; and so on.
- When page numbers are used for citation, they should be included within parenthesis and without abbreviations such as p. or pp. The format 100-08 is preferred instead of 100-108 or 100-8.

- Style should be coherent throughout the whole text: British or American English...
- Long dashes should be used for additional comments, and the spaces between dash and comment should be removed.



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