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WHITENING DOMESTIC SPACES: ENACTING FEMALE ROLES IN ANZIA YEZIERSKA'S *THE LOST BEAUTIFULNESS*

Rebeca Campos Ferreras

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Abstract

The aim of this research is to give an accurate account of how female stereotypes around the concept of hygiene and domesticity in early 20thC North American context influenced newly arrived Eastern European immigrants. Located in New York's Lower East Side ghetto and determined by their Jewish background, these immigrants' arrival caused them a cultural shock to the point that they started shaping their identities according to the new standard of beauty and cleanliness related to the Americanness they were eager to perform. For this purpose, Anzia Yezierska's short story *The Lost Beautifulness* serves as a referent because it demonstrates the failure of Americanization as the prospective means through which the American Dream could be experienced, a credo which, according to the author, would only reinforce classist policies instead of cancelling them. To this effect, Yezierska depicts the actual consequences for these Jewish female immigrants after attempting to Americanize their private household spaces and maintain, thus, the standard of cleanliness necessary to validate their accurate adaptation to the American culture from their ghettoized and marginalized context.

Keywords: Americanization, Anzia Yezierska, female stereotypes, whitening, domesticity, American Dream

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es mostrar cómo los estereotipos de feminidad en relación a la higiene y al espacio doméstico influyeron a las mujeres inmigrantes recién llegadas de Europa del Este en el contexto norteamericano de principios del siglo XX. Establecidas en el gueto del Lower East Side de Nueva York y condicionadas por su pasado judío, estas mujeres comenzaron a dar forma a una nueva identidad de acuerdo con el estándar de belleza y limpieza requeridas para una Americanización eficaz y completa. Para este propósito, el relato corto de la autora Anzia Yezierska, *The Lost Beautifulness* sirve como referente literario que demuestra el fracaso de dicha Americanización como estrategia para alcanzar el

ideal del Sueño Americano ya que, según el testimonio de la autora, solo reforzaría las políticas clasistas en vez de cancelarlas. En un intento por validar su adaptación a la cultura americana desde los márgenes de la aceptación social, Yezierska retrata las consecuencias fatales a las que se enfrentan las mujeres inmigrantes judías tras americanizar el espacio privado del hogar dentro del contexto del gueto neoyorquino.

Palabras clave: Americanización, Anzia Yezierska, estereotipos femeninos, blancura, doméstico, Sueño Americano

1. American Femininity and Jewish Newcomers: An introduction

The spread of female stereotypes in early twentieth-century North American society influenced the experiences of women immigrants up to the point that they were only able to achieve a complete adaptation by complying with the gendered norms related to their social status. The arrival of Jewish immigrants belonging to the second migratory wave, which took place between 1880s and 1910s, was thoroughly monitored by charitable institutions in charge of safeguarding the prospective inhabitants, thus their influence determined most of the immigrants' first contact with the new territory: "Institutions of Americanization such as settlement houses, charity organizations, and vocational schools were quickly set up at the beginning of the mass immigration...enforcing social, cultural, and linguistic acculturation and purging the East European Jew of perceived ethnic traits" (Konzett 25). Among other purposes, this type of private institutions encouraged immigrants, located in New York's Lower East Side ghetto, to actively participate in the American labor dynamics by teaching courses on what they labeled as "domestic science" programs (Berch 39). These courses enabled newcomers to fulfil the standardized Victorian womanhood of the period, — "Whatever new roles were made available to Jewish women in America followed the patterns of gentile society...what we have come to know as the Victorian ideal of womanhood" (Baum, Hyman, and Michel 28)—, at the same time that they could contribute to the household income by working as servants for higher class employers.

The application of domestic sciences within the urban context meant for ghettoized Jewish women to establish contact with upper classes as they had been trained to serve and accomplish household chores as a means of livelihood: "when the supply of servants shifted from native-born to immigrant, housewives began to confront domestics who had scarcely any idea of how to approach their work. Backgrounds of poverty and deprivation had provided little preparation for the

performance of domestic duties according to American standards” (Matthews 96). With the purpose of implementing behavioral stereotypes around the concepts of cleanliness, hygiene, external appearance, and nutritional habits, charitable institutions intended to Americanize Jewish immigrant mothers without this implying their social acceptance in the public realm or their recognition as American individuals. As a consequence, exclusion would increase, since they could not either escape from their poverty or enjoy the privileges the benefactresses and the American ladies held. However, despite the Lower East Side being regarded as a space of “fierce congestion, a place in which the bodily pressures of other people, their motions and smells and noises, seemed always to be assaulting one” (Howe 67), some Eastern European women found ways to achieve a quick adaptation within their tenements by applying socially accepted improvements to their kitchens through affordable whiteness and cleanliness.

Accomplishing domestic tasks, however, did not only imply the acceptance of class hierarchy in terms of social privileges, but also increased the stigmatization of poverty in terms of dirtiness (Berger 19). The longer the low-classes’ stigma of dirt remained attached to the context of the Lower East Side, the less likely the newly-arrived women’s dreams of upward mobility became. As Ronit Berger rightly explains: “These women do not identify themselves as a ‘dirty’ people but clean the actual dirt of their surroundings (the markers of their poverty) in order to gain a more respectable identity in their new American world” (27). Likewise, Yezierska’s characters struggle so as not to be identified as uncleaned by assimilating to the standards of beauty associated with household care, which was the only space where they could have the authority of manipulating. Or so it seemed so far.

Parallel to the changeable status of the identity of the early twentieth-century Jewish newcomers, open to the new environmental conditionings, the need for a role model to fulfill Americanness began to gain importance among the elitist circles that controlled the consumption market. By acquiring “whiteness by cosmetic means” (Simpson 105), Jewish women could demonstrate their successful adaptation without leaving the private space. Thanks to literary records produced at the time, such as those written by the Polish-born American writer Anzia Yezierska, it is possible to gather an exhaustive account of how female immigrants acquired their Americanization by purchasing American femininity, as it is the case of Hanneh Hayyeh in Yezierska’s short story *The Lost Beautifulness*. In the story, she transforms the white paint she purchases into a symbolic path towards Americanization. and, consequently, enters the consumption market realm as a desiring individual in search of other consumers’ validation.

At that time, the Victorian archetype started to be displayed as a way to distinguish proper American women from what was considered “greenhorn,” (Levinson, *Exiles* 53), a term coined to refer to recently-arrived immigrants from Europe. By erasing any discriminatory feature, the archetype allowed ghettoized women to pass themselves off as Americans, a privilege that at the time Yeziarska wrote her novels meant recognition and visibility in the public sphere. As Glenn points out:

While middle-class Victorians argued that woman’s moral and domestic responsibilities should take precedent over any income-producing role, eastern European Jews...thought it perfectly proper for women to help earn a living while the men pursued a life of religious scholarship. (11)

Advertised as a quick and efficient way to acquire Americanness, Victorian femininity became so appealing because it allowed immigrants to be recognized as equals to their middle- and upper-class counterparts. This female type became preferred over the work-oriented female ideal that Eastern European women had been performing until they arrived in America, the “Golden Country” (Yeziarska, *Lost* 58), strongly influenced by socialist and hard-working ethics (Antler 74).

2. *The Lost Beautifulness and the purchase of Americanness*

As earlier mentioned, Anzia Yeziarska gave an exhaustive account of how the North American standards of femininity influenced the newcomers and what the actual consequences of such influence were. Throughout her literary production, Yeziarska sets out the difficulties a Jewish woman had to face when adapting to new cultural customs, especially in terms of gender roles assigned to them: “They (women writers) are trapped between the mythical construction of an America they cannot attain as immigrants and the quotidian realities they have to cope with in the New World as females” (Zaborowska 28). Institutions such as the Social Betterment Society, portrayed in the short story “The Free Vacation House,” or the Home for the Working Girls, depicted in her novel *Arrogant Beggar*, act as a prism through which her characters reflect themselves at the same time that they look for recognition by attempting to learn from the benefactresses’ reflections. The feminine ideal was, thus, widespread throughout New York’s Lower East Side ghetto by charitable entities whose main purpose was to teach female immigrants to enlarge their experiences within the domestic space. Perceived as an apparently accurate means to achieve the recognition of their individuality, Americanization is genuinely portrayed as a process of self-erasure rather than an enriching experience: “Yeziarska experienced firsthand the severe

policies and politics of Americanization and assimilation as practiced in the late nineteenth century” (Konzett 604).

In the short story *The Lost Beautifulness*, published in the compilation *Hungry Hearts* in 1920, the author depicts Hanneh Hayyeh's desire to renovate her kitchen so as to exemplify the extent to which the standards of cleanliness affected Jewish women's tastes. As this research below demonstrates, Hanneh's yearning for being recognized as American by the elitist social circles, personified in Mrs. Preston's character, actually perpetuates classist discourses and supports assimilation as the only alternative to achieve a successful adaptation.

In addition to the imitation of Victorian femininity, which stressed the invisibility of women in the public realm due to its orientation toward domestic tasks, Eastern European women had to comply with other responsibilities. Owing to their husbands' dedication to the study of the Torah in the synagogue, these women were forced to earn a living outdoors as well: “In Eastern Europe women had, as an extension of their domestic responsibilities, two traditional functions: helping to support their families, and transmitting certain elements of Jewish culture” (Baum, Hyman and Michel 120). According to this argument, the frequency with which Jewish women occupied posts in Eastern Europe would have encouraged them, once on American soil, to continue fulfilling their duties both inside and outside of the domestic space. However, as it is thoroughly explained in Glenn's (1990) research, the majority of these women had to leave their family businesses and take part as wage earners in factories located on the outskirts so that they could accrue better salaries. This, however, was not always the case. Unable to adapt themselves to the new factorial routine and accomplish their motherly duties simultaneously, a large number of Lower East Side women confined their experiences to the privacy of the household context, which implied the reduction of family incomes. Furthermore, the financial need disrupted the family bonds because the daughters or, in the more Americanized cases, the fathers had to earn a living by working at the emerging factories. Accordingly, the charitable companies' help targeted ghettoized mothers now that they could not experience the influence of Americanization in the public sphere. As Elizabeth Ewen explains,

Social workers focused on mothers precisely because of this. They were concerned because these women were not subject to a daily infusion of American values, and feared their influence on the first generation of “real” Americans, the children. Caught in the margins between old and new, immigrant mothers posed a threat to assimilation. (94)

Entangled between what Jane Burstein describes as “two models of womanhood,”— “the ‘true woman’ who defined herself domestically in pious, submissive service to her family, and the ‘mother in Israel,’ whose strength preserved the home and whose home preserved Judaism” (Burstein 50)—, Jewish mothers underwent the process of assimilation determined by their confinement. The adoption of the Victorian type, therefore, led to a destabilization that only could be solved, firstly, by placing the ghettoized mothers inside the private space, where they could transfer their remaining Jewish values and be in charge of household chores. Secondly, by letting their children participate in the urban working dynamics, as it is the case of Hanneh Hayyeh’s son, Aby, who enrolled in the American army.

The stereotyping discourses based on Victorian femininity achieved to gain access inside the lower classes’ sphere not only through the benefactresses’ influence but also by serving inside the upper-class domestic contexts: “Another component of the reformer’s dogged commitment to domestic training for immigrant girls was the possibility of inculcating middle-class values of “proper” womanhood in the immigrant girl who worked as a domestic in a German Jewish household” (Sinkoff 583). Likewise, Yeziarska demonstrates such inculcation when depicting Hanneh’s initial longing for whitening her kitchen after receiving Mrs. Preston’s influence: “By day and by night it burned on me the picture—my kitchen shining all white like yours, till I couldn’t rest till I done it” (Yeziarska, *Lost* 35).

In this short story, the author clearly depicts the impossibility for Jewish immigrants to fulfill the American Dream through Americanizing their experiences. From the beginning, Hanneh Hayyeh, a Jewish woman who economically supports her family by cleaning an upper-class woman’s house, concentrated her efforts on adjusting her kitchen to the standard of cleanliness typical of the elitist taste. Her longing to imitate Mrs. Preston’s kitchen leads her to whiten her kitchen’s walls so as to go beyond social class borders:

Ever since she first began to wash the fine silks and linens for Mrs. Preston, years ago, it had been Hanneh Hayyeh’s ambition to have a white-painted kitchen exactly like that in the old Stuyvesant Square mansion. Now her own kitchen was a dream come true. (31)

Furthermore, her son’s imminent arrival from the front encouraged her to decisively carry out that enterprise so that he could invite prominent individuals and be proud of his family’s status: “I want him to be able to invite even the President from America to his home and not shame himself” (31). Although Hanneh’s purpose appears related to her son’s comfort, she is actually attempting to narrow the social-class distance, which eventually would validate the premises *The Grove. Working Papers on English Studies* 26 (2019): 9-26. ISSN: 2386-5431.

of the American Dream she attempts to fulfil. Melanie Levinson makes reference to this aspect when she explains how the longing to imitate American archetypes implies Yezierska's characters' gaining access to the middle and upper classes:

Her heroines keenly feel their "difference" and while each long "to become an American: to look and dress with the assurance of the native born," they equate achieving that status with breaking into the white, middle-to upper-middle class Christian sphere. (5)

The transit toward this new experience, however, would only be achieved if Hanneh were able to afford it, which subsequently explains her failure. Despite Jake Safransky's warnings, — "You know nothing from holding tight to a dollar and saving a penny to a penny like poor people should" (Yezierska, *Lost* 31)—, Hanneh decides to save the money she earns to whiten her kitchen. According to Yezierska, Jewish male characters whose adaptation has not taken place yet, as it happens with Jake Saphransky, perceived Americanization as a potential threat so they feel the need to steadily watch over their female partners to prevent their families from going bankrupt, yet again unveiling the paternalism with which ghettoized women were regarded. Her husband's distinction between the position that Hanneh occupies in the class hierarchy—the low class—, and the status she is pretending to belong to—the more Americanized one, or middle class—locates Hanneh on an undefined middle ground, which strengthens her vulnerability. If the acts of an individual, such as Hanneh's, do not fulfil the expectations placed upon their social status, then the individual's drive becomes a temporary enactment of an unreal identity. Instead of accepting her inability to change her status, Hanneh's frustrated attempt to represent the American Dream eventually favors the maintenance of class differences. Her husband's argumentation serves as a reminder to Hanneh of the limitations of her social aspirations, pointing out that their not owning the house also increases their vulnerability in comparison with Mrs. Preston or even the landlord's privileges: "Yah, but it ain't your house. It's the landlord's" (31). Hanneh's desire is shown as a perishable illusion, probably generated by the influence of the American Dream, against whose realization the assimilative discourses operated.

Furthermore, the fact that their flat belongs to an American individual increases Hanneh's helplessness to the point that she eventually understands the private space that has sheltered her experience—her kitchen—as a place which only an already-adapted and more socially respected character—the landlord—takes benefit from. In this context, poverty emphasizes these characters' lack of authority when they endeavor to manipulate private spaces they do not completely own. As well as Hanneh does not have legitimacy to manipulate a more privileged individual's property without adverse consequences, the ghettoized women's

attempt to perform Americanness without economic incomes to financially support its maintenance also leads to failure. Hanneh represents a tension between the Lower East Side inhabitants, for whom saving meant acquiring the maximum by spending the minimum, and the high-class standards of beauty only affordable by steady economic incomes.

Once Hanneh finally manages to whiten her kitchen, she culminates by announcing the renewal among her neighbors so that they can witness how she has succeeded in narrowing class boundaries. Eager to be publicly recognized for overcoming social stereotypes, she decides to turn her kitchen into a shop window whose whiteness strongly deserves to be displayed. In this way, not only does Hanneh publicize it among the neighbors but also requests Mrs. Preston's presence. Only when an already-Americanized individual—Mrs. Preston—validates the low-class characters' access to Americanness—Hanneh's—, is the adaptation perceived as accurately fulfilled: "I'll back up a shtrudel cake... They will all want to come to get a taste of the cake and then they'll give a look on Mrs. Preston" (36). Likewise the improvement of the kitchen's facilities, the lady's presence becomes an acquisition of which Hanneh takes advantage in her desire to have her new social status and identity recognized. By gathering both her neighbors and Mrs. Preston, Hanneh pretends to be acknowledged as someone who has managed to overcome class barriers by working hard to reach her goals, thus supporting the plausibility of the discourse of the American Dream. Hanneh's determination to assign Mrs. Preston as the legitimate authority that she needs to get the longed-for recognition once more confirms her actual vulnerability. Like Hanneh, early twentieth-century Jewish women relied on how they were understood socially by individuals like Mrs. Preston to get rid of their social invisibility: "You make the lowest nobody feel he's somebody" (35). In this way, when Mrs. Preston refers to Hanneh as an artist by concretely admiring her labor as laundress, the American lady actually is expressing the limitations of Hanneh's social status, even after having witnessed the kitchen's whitening: "'You are not a 'nobody', Hanneh Hayyeh. You are an artist—an artist laundress'" (35). Although her being perceived as an artist validates her access to the elitist American society, Hanneh's identity is as well determined by her domestic duties in both Mrs. Preston's and her own kitchen.

In this short story, Yeziarska merges cleanliness and beauty to show how Americanization influenced myriad lifestyles and managed to turn abstract perceptions into unaffordable consumer goods: "As the century wore on and there were increasing class differences between mistress and maid—and eventually ethnic and racial differences as well—women who worked as domestics were increasingly likely to be excluded from the benefits of domesticity they provided

for others” (Mathews 32). Hanneh’s absorption of elitist standards eventually becomes frustrated after introducing them within the context of the Lower East Side, an unsuitable space to support upper-class stereotypical comforts. Aware of the impossibility of hiding class differences, Jake warns his wife again about the inconvenience of pretending to play other social status’ roles: “It only dreams itself in you how to make yourself for an American and lay in every penny you got on fixing out the house like the rich” (Yezierska, *Lost* 31). Yet again, paternalistic discourses coming from male figures, — “male adversaries” (Zierler 88)—, arise to infantilize female characters when they undertake the journey towards social acceptance by imitating the American Ladies’ domestic layout.

Yezierska presents Mrs. Preston as the main source from whom Hanneh quenches her thirst of the codes of beauty and behavior typical of the American credo: “The hungry-eyed, ghetto woman drank in thirstily the beauty and goodness that radiated from Mrs. Preston’s person” (Yezierska, *Lost* 34). In addition, Mrs. Preston also triggers Hanneh’s desire for performing the abstract realization of the term *democracy*, which, according to the lady, reflects the American inhabitants’ willingness to eradicate social exclusion:

It is to bring together the people on top who got everything and the people on the bottom who got nothing. She’s been telling me about a new word—democracy. It got me on fire. Democracy means that everybody in America is going to be with everybody alike. (32)

By referring to this term, Mrs. Preston gives Hanneh the tools with which she has been instilled to understand how the American society works. Presuming that Mrs. Preston is right, everything that takes place in the short story can be justified in terms of equality and justice. Hanneh accepts Mrs. Preston’s *democracy* and pursues her happiness in an attempt to eradicate class differences by whitening her kitchen. However, after some time, she realizes that the *democracy* Mrs. Preston talks about is not based on intercultural exchange but rather on economic resources: “Through consumption women could appropriate different identities. Despite the prevailing racist images within advertising of the period, transformation through consumption seemed to bypass the more reified hierarchies within evolutionary theory or eugenics” (Patterson 19). The reification Patterson refers to, instead, gradually undermines Hanneh’s aspirations as it highlights her lack of agency when attempting to overcome class boundaries. In the meantime, Hanneh continually refers to the need of being recognized by Mrs. Preston so that she can see herself as a validated individual, which, on the contrary, actually denotes the low classes’ illegitimacy in naming their experience: “When I see myself around the house how I fixed it up with my own hands, I forget I’m only a nobody. It makes me feel I’m also a person like Mrs. Preston” (Yezierska,

Lost 32). As for Hanneh, achieving the status of *person* would mean the fulfillment of what the American Dream represents—the deserved outcome after struggling for her validation.

Mrs. Preston appears as a legitimate means through which the term *democracy* finds expression. However, her belonging to a more privileged social status turns her discourse on equality into an opportunistic strategy by which Hanneh's enterprise—whitening her kitchen—temporarily is granted as part of the American democratic agenda. As far as discursive legitimacy is concerned, Glenn sharply distinguishes between the terms *modernity* and *Americanization* to confirm that the latter enhances class hierarchy by discriminating against some individuals depending on the effectiveness with which they adopt the American identity. By contrast, she refers to *modernity* as an alternative credo that rather encompasses broadly strategic attitudes for ghettoized women: “opportunities denied or limited by the traditional boundaries of Jewish life in the Old World: political participation, education, freedom of movement and choice of residence, and secular as opposed to theocratic concept of authority and status” (3). In this respect, the *modernity* Glenn refers to is related to the New Woman's agenda, which precisely strives for what she enumerates, in opposition to the theocratic authority associated with Judaism. Just as the early twentieth-century discourses on female stereotypes had the purpose of creating easily recognizable archetypes,—such as the Gibson Girl, the Flapper or the emasculated New Woman type, among others (Patterson, 2008)—, the Jewish tradition also confined women's behavioral codes within a pre-fixed standard. As well as Glenn's *modernity* and *Americanization* can be regarded as strategic discourses shaped with the purpose of instructing stereotypes among the Lower East Side inhabitants, the characters' Jewish background also determined the way women have to deal with their daily routines.

In this context, however, Americanization discourses addressed to monitor recently-arrived immigrants finally resulted in discursive fallacies that facilitated their adaptation without overcoming class boundaries. Therefore, the female newcomers from Eastern Europe undertook the search for an American identity under the influence of such discourses whose only aim was to control their experiences. Either by setting Americanizing patterns or by encouraging them to actively participate in educational programs on hygiene, Americanization implied their leaving their cultural background behind: “cleanliness became something more than a way to prevent epidemics and make cities livable—it became a route to citizenship, to becoming American” (Hoy 87). Furthermore, Mrs. Preston's *democracy* seems to have also been shaped according to a class stereotyping strategy since it claims the eradication of class boundaries by precisely

reproducing those actions that help perpetuate the discrimination: "It is tempting to read the ambiguity around the "shop for the beautiful" as evidence of Yeziarska's subliminal awareness of the repressive aspects of Americanization through consumption" (Goldsmith 40). The efficacy of Mrs. Preston's *democracy* will thus remain inexistent as long as Hanneh is unable to achieve upward mobility even after having purchased whiteness.

Already-Americanized women held a privileged position and acted as role models for the ghettoized women because their successful adaptation prevented them from being pointed at for their European accent, their non-English language, or their religious customs (which, in this context, are relevant in terms of oppression). Yeziarska's characters, like Hanneh, develop an intersectional experience, which denotes the uselessness of the concept "American New Woman" to accurately represent the actual Jewish immigrant women's lives: "Yeziarska...appropriates the New Woman ideology, but ultimately redefines it as well; she empowered, working-class variant of New Jewish Womanhood" (Ungar 84). Despite both female groups understood their roles as wives as an extension of what sexual inequality represented at the time, the Lower East Side women's experience became harsher due to their geographical exclusion. In addition, they contributed, and sometimes even took charge, to the household sustenance by working as street peddlers, like Muhmenkeh in *Arrogant Beggar*, or by completing domestic tasks in high-class mansions, as is the case of Hanneh Hayeh.

3. Unattainable Americanness and Class Boundaries: A conclusion

After witnessing how the Americanized women enjoyed a more privileged status, the Eastern European Jewish immigrants prioritized their struggle for equality in terms of class, giving visibility to social exclusion by displaying a broadly inclusive discontent: "The narratives suggest that for Jews the barriers were being constructed and conceived of more in class terms" (Rottenberg 791). The culture shock that Yeziarska sets forth shows the difficulties of understanding between Americanized and ghettoized characters, even though they might have shared some structural oppression as women. The solution that the author suggests first involves the acknowledgement of a lack of recognition of the latter in the public space. Once they become aware of their invisibility in terms of social significance, ghettoized women seek a new identity status to avoid assimilating, and consequently discriminatory, policies. Excluded from the public sphere, the Jewish women in Yeziarska's work attempt to imitate the female ideal to acquire the longed-for recognized identity and gain admission into society's visual scope.

At first sight, Hanneh's investment in whitening her kitchen does not imply a cancellation of the American Dream, as long as it is the result of her efforts. However, the American individualistic credo and the consequences of carrying out Americanization without the means to support it financially provoke Hanneh's inevitable failure. Douglas J. Goldstein referred to this failure by arguing that its real purpose involved increasing class barriers:

Yeziarska depicts how something as seemingly innocuous as beauty actually reinforces hierarchies of race, class and gender, marginalizing immigrants who fervently believe in American ideals of democracy and justice but who do not have the means to look or dress like their social betters. (46)

Some days after Hanneh purposely displays her kitchen's whitening in front of Mr. Rosenblatt, the German-born American landlord, he warns her that her rent needs to be increased due to the improvements made in the flat. The new amount she has to pay becomes unaffordable for her. By arguing, "That don't concern me. If you can't pay, somebody else will. I got to look out for myself. In America everybody looks out for himself" (Yeziarska, *Lost* 37), Mr. Rosenblatt personifies the individualism supported by the discourse of Americanization, since his owning the flat directly implies legitimacy to manipulate his property according to his will. Paradoxically, he performs the American Dream as well by displaying a successfully Americanized adaptation, thus confirming that both discourses only collapse when Americanization cannot be supported financially. Therefore, Yeziarska demonstrates that any individual is able to perform the American Dream in New York as long as they can afford the cost of maintaining what social mobility and acquisition of beauty might demand.

When Hanneh compares the landlord to the Russian czar,—"The dogs! The blood-sucking landlords! They are the new czars from America!" (38)—, she points out the level of authority both of them share and how it is exercised conveniently upon more vulnerable individuals, such as tenants like herself. Mr. Rosenblatt's legal right to decide the price of the flat directly affects Hanneh's longing for class equality because that means she will remain subordinate to her landlord's whims as long as she lives there. Yeziarska's main characters usually need to witness the actual magnitude of their exclusion so as to undertake a process of disassociation from the standard Americanness they initially intended to perform. Aware of the increase in rent, Hanneh informs Mrs. Preston about the incident with the landlord in an attempt to seek for an American individual's validation and give credit to her version of justice. However, far from judging Mr. Rosenblatt's attitude, Mrs. Preston persuades Hanneh to accept a check so that she temporarily can afford the rental payments. In this way, like the landlord's

resolution, Mrs. Preston's participates in the maintenance of a society in which both individualism and paternalism act as the cornerstone of class differences. "You want to give me hush money to swallow down an unrightness that burns my flesh? I want justice" (39). The justice Hanneh claims is apparently challenged by Americanization and individualism, which also hinders her realization of the American Dream. When she discerns Mrs. Preston's actual intention, she makes reference to the discourse on democracy, which the lady previously used to encourage the kitchen's whitening: "You always made-believe to me that you're only for democracy" (40). Despite becoming aware of Mrs. Preston's unattainable discourse, Hanneh insists on pursuing justice in an effort to fulfil the American Dream she still believes in.

Mrs. Preston's act of charity, however, endorses the idea that poverty is the result of unsuitable individuals whose dreams of equality cannot be achieved as long as they continue applying inefficient methods for its accomplishment. As Stephen Pimpare explains, "If we believe that there is truly equality of opportunity in America, then any inequality of outcomes must be a problem of individual failure, and government interference is inappropriate favoritism" (Pimpare 35). Therefore, Hanneh's effort has not been enough to attain Mrs. Preston's democracy due to her lack of training on the American individualism (Tocqueville 884). According to this argument, her ineffectiveness would be the cause of her frustrated attempt to materialize equality, not the fact of an inexistent American Dream, as W. H. Auden clarifies in his introduction to Yezierska's autobiography: "here (America) the poor man was not, as such, a man, but a person in a state of poverty from which, if he were a real man, he would presently extricate himself" (Yezierska, *Red Ribbon* 13).

Yet Hanneh's pursuit of justice becomes much more insistent as she tackles the issue of democracy and how it supports liberty from an individualistic perspective. Goldstein interpreted her insistence by making reference to her need to turn equality into a broadly reachable experience for any ghettoized partner:

She associates her own ability to pursue and attain her passion for beauty as synonymous with the spread of democracy. Central to Hanneh's...conception of democracy is the notion that all people will be able to afford beauty, that tasteful accoutrements will no longer be the province solely of the wealthy. (47)

Her carrying on the enterprise for justice has to do with the steady belief that encouraged thousands of immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century to depart from their homelands in search of a place in which differences did not imply exclusion or poverty: "You was always telling me that the lowest nobody got

something to give to America. And that's what I got to give to America—the last breath in my body for justice” (Yezierska, *Lost* 39).

The inexistent justice Hanneh envisions, which she finds unreachable, is a consequence of legitimizing the apparently inclusive discourse of the Americanization. According to this discourse, Hanneh is authorized to enforce her right to freely reform her flat without that implying the landlord's amending the price any time she makes an improvement. However, the public administration that processes the case resolves that Mr. Rosenblatt is legally authorized to freely manipulate his property as well: “The judge said the same as Mrs. Preston said: the landlord has the right to raise our rent or put us out” (40). The resolution, then, emphasizes the lack of relevance that Hanneh's formerly cultural solidarity has when dealing with individualistic American institutions. The network of power she encounters is woven continuously not just by the official institutions in charge of guaranteeing liberty and justice but also by individuals, such as Mr. Rosenblatt, whose arrival dates back from decades before the Eastern European wave took place.

The disappointment which Yezierska's characters suffer, especially after attempting ineffectively to pass themselves off as Americans, usually make them realize the potential of their Jewish background at the same time that it encourages them to go back to the Lower East Side to live by their cultural difference. Ellen Gollub defines Hanneh's role as that of a spokesperson whose incidence in the New York experience is an example of how assimilation affects Jewish immigrants' lives negatively: “Hanneh Hayyeh might well be speaking for all these women to whom this home is not home. She destroys her kitchen rather than leave it, sadly to learn that it was her own soul she had killed” (59).

Nevertheless, Hanneh Hayyeh's story does not end like that. In addition to what Gollub states, the last scene turns itself into a more complex ironic display. By showing how Hanneh's family vacates their flat and waits for their son's arrival at the doorstep, Yezierska dismantles the discourse of the American Dream from the symbolic paradox the scene represents: While there are low-class individuals fighting in the First World War to protect the ideal America purportedly stands for, there are other ones who are being excluded by the same ideal for which their children risk their lives, as is the case of Hanneh and her son, Aby:

Is this already America? What for was my Aby fighting? Was it then only a dream—all these millions people from all lands and from all times, wishing and hoping and praying that America is? Did I wake myself from my dreaming to see myself back in the black times of Russia under the czar? (Yezierska, *Lost* 41)

The generational gap between both relatives highlights the difficulties that Eastern European immigrants underwent to successfully adapt to the new territory. Unlike her son's more effective adaptation, Hanneh's intention of gathering both her routine in Delancey Street and the American high-class archetype of cleanliness results in an eventual eviction. Since the Americanization of her kitchen comes from an elitist stereotype that she cannot afford permanently, it consequently involves the compliance with exclusionary and classist principles that have been the cause of her frustration.

By appealing to an aspiration whose realization cannot be fulfilled inside a ghettoized context, Yezierska displays characters like Hanneh as representatives of those Jewish women whose adaptation revealed the incoherencies of the American Dream. Americanization, then, became a double-edged strategy inherently useless for lower classes whose economic income prevented them from maintaining the desired American status.

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JANE AUSTEN'S CONCERNS WITH HEALTH AND MORAL THOUGHTS: THE DASHWOOD SISTERS AND THE SUCCESSFUL REGULATION OF SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

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Abstract

According to Cartesian principles, in the seventeenth century the body was thought to be subordinated to the mind. Later in the eighteenth-century male authors of medical treatises supported the idea that the interaction of body and mind produced passion and could dangerously turn into mental breakdown. In all her novels Jane Austen showed an enormous interest in all matters concerning medical treatment. In *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Austen emphasized illness and suffering by mixing physical health and mental disease with moral and philosophical doctrines. My contention in this article is that moralists, philosophers and thinkers such as Dr Johnson, William Blake, William Godwin, and Adam Smith collaborated with Austen to shape the idea that sensibility was no disease and sense no virtue; instead they propose that human beings, especially women, can obtain individual and collective profit and promote changes not only in the past but also in the present if they regulate their reason and feeling with a practical mindset.

Key words: physical health, mental breakdown, medicine, moral thoughts, regulation of feelings.

Resumen

Según los principios del cartesianismo, en el siglo diecisiete se pensaba que el cuerpo estaba subordinado a la mente. Más tarde, en el siglo dieciocho autores masculinos de tratados médicos apoyaban la idea de que la interacción de cuerpo y mente producía pasiones y éstas podían transformarse peligrosamente en enfermedades mentales. En todas sus novelas Jane Austen siempre muestra un enorme interés por todo lo relacionado con los tratamientos médicos. En *Sentido y Sensibilidad* (1811) la autora se concentra mayormente en la enfermedad y el sufrimiento mezclando la salud física y mental con doctrinas morales y filosóficas. La finalidad de este artículo es demostrar como moralistas, filósofos y pensadores como el Dr Johnson, William Blake, William Godwin y Adam Smith

colaboraron con Austen para forjar la idea de que la sensibilidad no era una enfermedad y el sentido una virtud sino que, los seres humanos, especialmente las mujeres, pueden obtener provecho individual y colectivo y promover cambios no solo en el pasado sino también en el presente, si regulan razón y sentimientos desde un punto de vista práctico.

Palabras clave: salud física, crisis nerviosa, medicina, pensamiento moral, regulación de los sentimientos.

Contrary to the hierarchical Cartesian subordination of the body to the mind, in the eighteenth-century medical theorists posited that the interaction of body and mind produces passion. But what happens when passion is excessive and so physically painful that it turns into mental breakdown? In the nineteenth century, when sensibility or sentimentalism was almost a virtue, male authors of medical treatises connected sensibility to over-taxed nerves and female hysteria.¹ Male writers of the time said that the incontrollable fusion between feeling and reason could be bad for women's health and had to be restrained through much mental effort. Jane Austen, who was always interested in medicine, then believed that sensibility and a kind of mental breakdown—what we know as depression—were not the product of an unstable femininity but rather an idealistic person's refined response to the world, and a way of being critical, and a revealing symptom of women's "own feelings of entrapment and oppression" (Goodman 116).²

Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* is her most doctrinaire novel and one of the most famous examples of women's writing. Laurie and Richard Kaplan say that it is a novel about illness and suffering (2).³ On one hand, an anti-romantic Austen thought that "sensibility would founder if it were not directed by sense, because its course would take no account of what she thought were the actual [...] configurations of society" (Watt 55). That is the reason why she depicts thoughtful, "silent and strong" Elinor Dashwood as an example to follow, as the

¹ In every one of her novels Jane Austen depicted illness and invalids—Mr Woodhouse's dyspepsia in *Emma*, Jane Bennet's bad cold and Mrs Bennet's nerves in *Pride and Prejudice*, Lady Bertram's self-indulgence and Fanny Price's anemia in *Mansfield Park*. *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*, which Austen began writing when she herself was already ill, demonstrate her familiarity with the illnesses that were prevalent during her lifetime. *Sandition* is about a group of hypochondriacs.

² Austen died, aged 42, slowly and painfully of Addison's disease. Today the disease is treated successfully with hydrocortisone, a steroid hormone.

³ In 1811, the year of its publication, the madness of King George had deemed so severe that the Prince of Wales had formally become the Prince Regent.

epitome of heroic mental suffering and rewards her at the end of the novel (*Sense* 215). But, on the other, unconsciously, or perhaps cunningly, she singles out Marianne Dashwood, along with her hysterical outbursts of desperation, and innate sense of ethics, as the life and centre of the book with her idea of an innate and ethical sense.⁴ No doubt, the anti-revolutionary Austen was the poster child of the eighteenth century—the age of prose and reason—and inescapably belonged to the field of anti-sensibility. However, she assimilated knowledge from the pre-Romantic period and unavoidably took Marianne, “with her impetuous feelings and varying opinions,” as seriously as Elinor (*Sense* 134). A Tory reactionary, as Marilyn Butler defines her in *Jane Austen: The War of Ideas*, Austen grapples how the new age questions the human beings’ perception of themselves and of their personal and social relationships. In this article, I demonstrate that Austen, influenced by moralists and philosophers such as Dr Johnson, William Blake and Adam Smith, neither stigmatizes sensibility as a disease nor highlights sense as a virtue. Instead, by saving Marianne from excessive emotions and Elinor from extreme rationality, she dignifies them as a double-faced mechanism that demonstrates that rational passion is not a contradiction but a way to improve human beings and their view of the world, obtaining profit in almost every sense in an era of drastic innovation that affected every aspect of daily life. In order to do that, I discuss the ethical, moral, and philosophical background of the novel and its multifaceted characters—sisters, lovers, relatives. In doing so, I illustrate—to show the tactics Austen uses to regulate sense and sensibility and obtain profit for women in a male world.

Sensibility was an eighteenth-century movement that stressed the importance of emotions and feelings in human relationships. According to Graham Barker-Benfield, it “signified revolution, promised freedom, threatened subversion and become convention” (xvii). Sensibility referred to the nervous system and to consciousness. Heroes and heroines of sensibility “could be further sensitized in order to be more accurately responsive to signals from the outside environment and from inside the body” (Barker-Benfield xvii). They possessed an extreme ability to feel, to the point in which passions are the source of decision making—a task usually delegated to sense. Sense is a realistic attitude to situations and problems and a reasonable and comprehensive belief. From the 1740s onward, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau and others argued that humans possessed an innate moral sensibility which manifested itself through the emotions in feelings of sympathy and benevolence for others. They generated the trait as female property because women were claimed to possess of a more delicate constitution and therefore to be more susceptible to emotion. In Peter Kitson’s words, “Too

⁴ John Willoughby describes Marianne’s mind as “infinitely superior” (*Sense* 220).

much sensibility might lead to hysteria and disorder; it might lead to men behaving like women.” Even more perniciously, “Following one’s feeling might lead to sexual impropriety and ruin” (330, 332). The culture of sensibility was connected to the rise of the middle classes in the eighteenth century and their concern with the reformation of manners. By the 1770s the “emotional volatility of sensibility” (Byrne 66) had become politicized by its association with radical and reformist politics, especially with the violence of the French revolution, and thus identified with a potentially dangerous way of life. Austen’s satiric treatment of the trend in the aftermath of the Revolution has been connected to Anti-Jacobin satirists and who, according to Janet Todd, bound sensibility to radicalism (130).

Viewed by Butler as a reactionary and “an Anglican Erasmian” (93-99), Austen resembles William Godwin because she, like the philosopher, assumes that sensibility and subjectivity are synonyms of radicalism. However, Adam Smith is a more persistent background in *Sense and Sensibility*. During Austen’s lifetime both Hume’s *History* and *Essays* were widely recommended for educational purposes, and the same holds true for Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, echoes of which are also found in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Austen takes up and develops Smith’s understanding of sympathetic imagination and twists it in the “altered” and rambunctious seventeen-year-old Marianne (*Sense* 134). Smith stresses the idea of different kinds of social order and insists on the need for periods of radical innovation. For Butler, Smith symbolizes the spirit of intellectual independence which a young Austen is completely determined to oppose (33); for Alistair Duckworth, he is the source of the sensibility she refutes (in Byrne 107). For most of Austen’s heroines moral progress and modernization consist of submitting to the demands of society around them. No doubt, Rousseau’s ideals will influence Elinor—the eldest of the Misses Dashwood—when she protests to her younger sister that she is guided not by the judgment of society but by her understanding and remarks that her attitude should be regulated “by religion, by reason, by constant employment” (*Sense* 238). Dr Johnson— “the supplier of maxims to the Elinors of this world” (Neill 41)—provides her with the idea that anything vulgar must be supplied or repressed with the sublimely metaphysical.

Even early in her career, Austen writes about sisters who are often friends before they are siblings. In *Sense and Sensibility*, she depicts three pairs of sisters—the Dashwoods, the Steeles, and the Jenningses. The Dashwoods “are fond of each other” (*Sense* 253), both fool for love. Abandoned by two men who loved them and with whom they were compatible, the sisters suffer from broken hearts—Marianne’s fixation on John Willoughby thus parallels Elinor’s on Edward Ferrars. Even their inefficient mother Mrs Dashwood notices that “she

might have a daughter suffering almost as much, certainly with less self-provocation and greater fortitude” referring to Elinor (*Sense* 243). Paula Byrne points out that “the wiser, calmer, exquisitely well-mannered and more cautious elder sisters have been compared to Cassandra, Austen’s elder sister” (103). When she revised the manuscript of her novel, Jane was bold and practical; she gave good advice to her sister, who was devastated after the loss of her fiancé, by telling her that she could fall in love again.

As Edward Neill notes, it seems that “the Marianne role looks more likely for [the writer] than the Elinor one” (38). In reality, Marianne has lots of sense and Elinor is everything but cold-hearted. The difference is that the first inflicts her suffering on the people around her. She is a hypersensitive, passionate, secluded, young woman whose hysteria might be “the fruit of a sexual awakening emotionally overwhelming” (Neill 43). Marianne assumes that first impressions are generally true, second attachments in love are impossible, and the individual prevails over the communal, and therefore suffers tragic consequences that many critics say were brought on by Freudian repression. However, a subversive, reactionary Austen finds strong hints of rationality in her ethic, “the violence of her passions” and “the weakness of her understanding” to eventually save the young girl from a sensibility that bordered lunacy.

This article was intended to focus on Marianne. But, reviewing notes and reading new material, one might ask if the young girl could be mad all by herself; if it were not, at some point in the novel, Elinor’s moment to be crazy; if her head was not stuck onto a more aching heart than her sister’s; if these young women all by themselves were totally responsible for their madness; if the Willoughbys and the Ferrarses of this world were not the real *agent provocateurs*. After the exhibitions in London about the Brontës at Sir John Soane’s Museum and the National Portrait Gallery and reflecting on Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre, one begins to wonder if Elinor and Marianne are not exactly the same woman, if they might be what Peter Knox-Shaw calls “an agent and a spectator of the other, and for each of them, the special endowment is complemented by its contrary” (146). Although *Sense and Sensibility* explores the relationship of two sisters in distress, I think it also delves beyond the emotional lives of two ladies. Austen deeply valued the loyalty and companionship between younger and older women. At the same time, she grappled with the ways in which women behaved badly toward other women and collapse emotionally. Marianne’s hysteria is a reflection of the problem of the impoverished female Dashwoods,⁵ as it is Lucy Steele’s—Elinor’s

⁵ Kaplan and Kaplan note that *Sense and Sensibility* is a novel about illness and suffering shaped by financial, material, emotional, and moral responses to illness and death (4).

rival—materialistic behaviour. Her sham sensibility is the mirror of her looking for an eligible bachelor to improve her status. Watching how Fanny Dashwood—their half-brother John’s ambitious wife—defrauds her sisters-in-law of houses that should by inheritance be theirs, we realize that the book is also concerned with evil social and economic matters that make, as Neill notes, “sensibility ... an indispensable weapon against what the novel defines as really ‘evil’” (32). Austen does not ridicule sensibility or stigmatize it as a disease. Instead she criticizes it when it causes suffering to others. “Had I died, in what peculiar misery should I have left you, my nurse, my friend, my sister!,” exclaims Marianne when she is aware of her irresponsible behavior towards those who care for her (*Sense* 237). In that vein, she also shows that sense can be misapplied and is more destructive than sensibility in its social effects—Elinor’s submission and need for approbation as well as the endemic idle life style of the landed classes emerge as unfair social instruments in the novel.

Elinor and Marianne are well-educated sisters whose feelings are equally deep and authentic. They are elegant, refined and witty, and skillful in conversation. However, they employ these qualities in different ways. While Marianne uses them as a means of discriminating against those who are not like her, Elinor is very severe with her own sex but—unlike her sister—without drawing a line of demarcation between herself and other classes of people. While Marianne is crazed with her feelings, Elinor knows how to behave even if overwhelmed with grief. Although her conversation sometimes sounds like a lecture or even a homily, Elinor also trembles with desire, with suffering, with indignation. She shares her sister’s tastes but with a lesser intensity because she is the result of the judicious control of sensibility. *Sense and Sensibility* was drafted contemporaneously with *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Its author, William Blake, affirmed that without foils there is no progression and that a contrary is not a negation. In my view, if Austen were asked if head and heart are antagonists, she would adopt a politically correct attitude and reply affirmatively. But, when it comes to Elinor, the answer would be certainly no. It is the tactics the Dashwood women use and the different degrees of sensibility they apply to everyday events that disconcert readers who perceive these characters as diametrically opposed. Thus, when Edward Ferrars is disinherited by her mother, only Elinor and Marianne understand his conduct,

They only knew how little he had to tempt him to be disobedient, and how small was the consolation, beyond the consciousness of doing right, that could remain to him in the loss of friends and fortune. Elinor gloried in his integrity; and Marianne forgave all his offences in compassion for his punishment (*Sense* 184).

Austen qualifies Elinor as an intellectual and a moralist but her wit is, no doubt, “scarcely social” (Perkins 13). Marianne believes nothing except that Elinor’s feelings are weak and often classifies her sister as defective in sensibility. In her view, Elinor can only feel when she bursts into tears like her younger sister. To some extent, although the eldest of the Dashwoods shares Marianne’s “adolescent sensibility,” “she seems to show a deficient [one] because she is forced to take over the unpleasant tasks of practical life and because [her sister’s] selfish indulgence of her own feelings makes her insensitive to Elinor’s” (Watt 52). Elinor tackles sensibility directly and worries about preserving her family’s status by smoothing away every possible offence they commit. So pragmatic and prudent is her approach that her mother’s “romantic impracticality” cannot cope (Neill 33).

By contrast, although Marianne is aware that a family cannot survive on less than two thousand pounds a year, she attacks her sister for saying that wealth has a lot to do with happiness.⁶ Neill states that “it is impossible to conceive of Marianne as one person” by the time Austen has finished the novel (47). To “individualistic, emotional, impatient, rude, indiscreet, passionate, indulgent and enthusiastic” (Kitson 379), I would add the adjective “inconsiderate” as, “with her usual inattention to the forms of general civility,” she says shocking things to her elders, especially to Fanny and the extravagant, herself impolite Mrs. Jennings (*Sense* 97).⁷ Marianne does this simply because she believes she is above everyone in that “metamorphic context” in which she and her sister have “a variable function” (Neill 47). The younger Dashwood stands out among the people around her because Austen matches her qualities against deficiencies of it. As Gilbert Ryle points out “her ecstatic emotionality” contrasts “the sham, the shallow, the inarticulate and the controlled feelings of Lucy Steele, Willoughby, Edward and Elinor” (108).

The unstable, changing world of sense and sensibility favoured competitiveness between women. Austen is brilliant when she describes women attacking other women. She sends men to London on mysterious missions and makes female characters appear, disappear, reappear—first in the confined space of the country, then in London, and finally, again in the country. On the other hand, Austen depicts women’s private sphere as dominated by concern about male

⁶ Fanny Dashwood is cold-hearted but also capable of terrible fits of hysterics when she feels her own economic interests threatened. The disclosure of the destitute Lucy’s engagement to her brother Edward is an example of such fits.

⁷ Marianne regrets her behaviour when she recovers from her illness and then adds, “the kindness, the unceasing kindness of Mrs Jennings, I had repaid with ungrateful contempt” (*Sense* 237).

speech, as the women hysterically puzzle for weeks over what was said or was not said. While Elinor assists Brandon to enable Edward to marry her fair rival Lucy Steele, Marianne renders her allure to men around her. As I see it, the least interesting thing about Marianne is her beauty; what matters is her intelligence, her generosity, and the intensity with which she projects her public humiliation and her frightening mental and physical breakdown. After Willoughby's violent desertion, Marianne's heart and mind find themselves paralyzed in a social context which has been deprived of all meaning despite the large and lively number of family interconnections in Devon. It is true that Marianne and Willoughby's special compatibility and his haunting presence keep resonating till the end of the book.

That said, from the very moment Willoughby rescues her when she sprains her ankle, the supposed villain contributes to her increasingly dangerous condition, hysteria and physical deterioration. The dashing young man—handsome, egocentric and cynical⁸— is one of the sharks the Dashwood sisters must confront in their fight with other women to win men and money in that oppressive social code that forced them to matrimonial arrangements and to produce babies before the biological clock struck midnight. Marianne stands in the marriage market with only five or six hundred pounds a year and—although Willoughby lets economic sense dominate the dictates of sensibility—one might suspect that he dumps Marianne because she overtly shows that she loves him. He just wished “to make himself pleasing to her, without any design of returning her affection” (*Sense* 219). In my view, Willoughby's taste for the natural world coincides with Marianne's, who compares him to the shy and dutiful Edward Ferrars—her sister's secret choice—so unfavourably that the reader feels that Elinor is also in danger of succumbing to Willoughby's charms. Ferrars is a self-deprecating decent man who, like Elinor, is deficient in sensibility but “quiet and unobtrusive and she like[s] him for that” (*Sense* 10). Perhaps Edward's defective sensibility has been “exhaustively diagnosed by Marianne” (Watt 51), who only sees how “spiritless” and “tame” Edward's manner is when reading to them (*Sense* 11). In truth he has an “open affectionate heart” and “greatness of soul” (*Sense* 15, 61) that make him adorable. Unhesitatingly, he endures being dispossessed of everything by her mother so that he can marry for love.

⁸ In Knox-Shaw's words, Willoughby is viewed by Colonel Brandon as “the typically demonized rake of the eighteenth-century novel” (135). However, Daragh Downes highlights that “Willoughby and Marianne have indeed been prey to a vicious campaign of sabotage and misinformation by his rival, Colonel Brandon” and that the stories and the claims made by him “are exposed as a nefarious confection of truths, half-truths, and lies” (7 web).

Dr Johnson regarded idleness as a major sin against God which could only lead to melancholy and madness. Willoughby's and Ferrars' particular sensibilities were surely provoked by the idleness of the upper classes and the affluent gentry. These two disintegrators of women's feelings have nothing to pass their time. "I returned home to be completely idle," remarks Edward (*Sense* 248). Although Edward is morally superior to Willoughby because he does not break his engagement with Lucy Steele, both are "punished for their idleness" (Pellérdi 3). Incurable Willoughby never marries the woman he loves and Edward, who eventually does, must suffer first. In this respect, Austen has been sometimes regarded as weaving the normative claims of the Protestant work ethic into her characters' lives.⁹ Elinor struggles "to control the anguish of disappointed love so that she can fulfill her obligations [...] as a member of society" (Watt 54) and avoids melancholy by being constantly busy "so that her sorrow remains undetected by others around her" (Pellérdi 5). At the end of the novel, her industrious behaviour is finally rewarded as she fulfills her duties as a member of society.

Marianne's sensibility is particularly self-indulgent, menacing, and problematic to others. That is why Austen never romanticizes it and its hazardous effects. As I see it, she criticizes the excess of sensibility of the time at its most elevated level through Marianne's suicide attempt. It is here "genuine and false sensibility become blurred" (Owaga 1). In turn, Austen prioritizes Elinor because she insists on the fact that reason cannot be left aside. In the enlightened and rational age in which Austen lived, suicide was clearly a salient issue. By the late eighteenth century Britain had become as the centre of suicide in the civilized world; in fact, the suicide rate was so high that the Methodist preacher John Wesley recommended the Prime Minister William Pitt take measures to curb the trend. In the literature of the time, suicide was sometimes seen as the final expression of extreme sensibility. Austen had, no doubt, heard about suicides for love in her favourite novels, the day's newspapers, and Mary Wollstonecraft's own attempt in the Thames. Most of Marianne's sensibility comes from books, and one might erroneously think that Austen just follows the models of sentimental literature in the belief that Marianne's near suicidal behaviour is the only appropriate response for a young woman jilted by her lover. In general, characters in sentimental novels are often fragile, hyper-sensitive individuals in distress who kill themselves because of unrequited love.¹⁰ Through Elinor's

⁹ In the eighteenth century Christians—especially Protestants—considered useful employment a duty that would prevent the terrible effects of idleness.

¹⁰ Paula Byrne states that "it was said that every teenager in the country identified with the hero and shed tears when reading Goethe's [*The Sorrows of Young Werther*], some even going so far to commit copycat suicide" (66).

realistic views and strength of understanding, the author proves how alarmed Austen was a nervous irritability that brought about suicidal inclinations. Through Elinor, we see how ridiculous Austen thought sentimental novels were. According to the law, suicide was a crime against the king and God. I would thus contend that, apart from unconditional love for her sister, that is the reason why Marianne was always shielded from too much public notice by her sister's care who "wished to avoid any survey of the past that might weaken her ... spirits" (*Sense* 241). Unfortunately, though, nothing she could say brought peace to her. In avoiding her death, Austen attacks the pernicious effects that those sentimental novels could have on the mind of a sensitive and impractical romantic woman.

Balancing different degrees of sensibility, perhaps Austen's centrist view is exemplified in the uncultivated Mrs Jennings. Watt says that "she has the essence of what really matters as regards both sense and sensibility" (53). Mixing her own judgments and feelings, she acts disinterestedly and actively, backing Elinor and Marianne up against the wealth and the want of well-off family connections of the Ferrarses. Individual experience plus a code of values remove the difference between sense and sensibility to assist people in need.

Rereading a pretty unbelievable book entitled *Pride and Promiscuity*, I realized that Elinor experienced dramatic inner turmoil even more than her sister. The cause is simple: the man she loves was bound to another, that deceitful Lucy Steele. This might be the reason why she is so tolerant of Willoughby's weaknesses. To love a man engaged to another woman, after all, was only one step away from loving a married man and adultery. Elinor tries to repress her desire for him by combating "her own affection for [him] and [seeing] him as little as possible" (*Sense* 95). But does Elinor not allow room for sensibility? In fact, she does. But she does so while going through self-control, striving to be better than those who cannot control themselves.

There are a couple of key scenes that I would define as Elinor's *time to be mad*. Her emotions are shown in that room where she breaks down and her family knows about her secret torment. When their servant says that Mr Ferrars is married, "Marianne gave a violent start, fixed her eyes upon Elinor, sees her turning pale, and falls back in her chair in hysterics" (*Sense* 242). Elinor is distinctive in that she is not explosive; the reader just feels those emotions when poor Marianne is horrified and desperately cries. Thanks to Marianne's "remedial" function (Neill 40), Mrs Dashwood "was shocked to perceive by Elinor's countenance how much she really suffered" (*Sense* 242). It was then when Elinor showed physical evidence of her disease by losing her appetite till the day Edward materialized at Barton Cottage and disclosed the truth. The elder Dashwood turned

into “a state of such agitation” that could sit no longer. Instead “she almost ran out of the room”—although she knew well that ladies did not run (*Sense* 246). Then, “as soon as the door was closed, [she] burst into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease” (*Sense* 46). Amazingly, “it required several hours to give sedateness to her spirits, or any degree of tranquility to her heart” (*Sense* 248). Finally, she pulled herself together and behaved sensibly again.

Austen practically has to whip a rabbit out of a hat to make Marianne and Colonel Brandon get married.¹¹ The heroine of sensibility has now become an escape goat who has been betrayed not only by Willoughby but by Austen herself. In my opinion, her suicide attempt portrays her attitude as unchristian; her unconvincing wedding to Brandon then shows a spiritual transformation.¹² That self-indulgent egocentric Marianne is not very different from the other women in the book. All of them epitomize a sick fashion that is not simply the silly affectation of a seventeen-year-old girl but a philosophy that challenged the very basis of British government and society in a new world full of mistakes. As Karen Gevirtz remarks, the innovative mercantile society excluded women from economy and public activities, thereby increasing their anxiety (141).

Taking into account Tony Tanner's introduction to the Penguin edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, it is true that Elinor noticeably pathologizes Marianne's relationship with Willoughby, describing passions in terms of their physical effects (13). Maybe that is a way for Elinor to show her longing for romance but, in the novel, real sickness is brought about by real causes and hysterical sickness by sensibility. Marianne, for example, develops psychosomatic symptoms of illness when she reacts hysterically to Willoughby's departure to London and when he publically rejects her. Like many people today, Marianne has a stomachache, a fever, and lack of sleep.¹³ Even while structural development of the book is too static to charm many modern readers, the relationship between sensibility and depression has endured. It parallels contemporary physical and mental illness, particularly among teenage girls and with respect to disorders such as bulimia or anorexia. Indeed, as Kaplan and Kaplan point out, many of the symptoms of her illness fit the description of a popular illness of the 1980s: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Chronic Mononucleosis, Chronic Epstein-Barr Disease, or “Yuppie Flu” (8).

¹¹ “Time, a very little time, [...], will do everything,” Mrs Dashwood answered Colonel Brandon when he asked for her daughter's hand (*Sense* 231).

¹² The characters seem to be always punished by their good qualities (Neill 38).

¹³ The official explanation was that “Marianne Dashwood was dying of a putrid fever at Cleveland” (*Sense* 226).

Anthony Burgess describes Dickens' characters as "humours"—exaggerations of one human quality to the point of caricature (183). By contrast, real people are neither exactly good nor evil; we are most often something in between. In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen asks us readers if deep feeling is compatible with being reasonable; if tenderness of heart equals strong understanding; if women's financial, social and emotional insecurity can undermine their health. It is obvious that the writer warns us about sensibility but, when Elinor runs out of that room, she is positively sensible. When Marianne recognizes the importance of community and collectivity, she personifies sense. When both sisters love and respect Mrs Jennings, they expel the "humours" from their minds and bodies. These terms express two different ways of perceiving the world around us but they are not incompatible. If there is something the Dashwood sisters learn from their half-brother John's family, it is practicality. In the last chapters of the novel, a woman of honour and a woman of passion learn how to regulate their feelings by adopting a multidimensional, flexible, adaptable and practical attitude. They successfully acquire what Gilbert Ryle calls a "prevailing correlation between sense of duty, sense of propriety and aesthetic taste" (117). I strongly believe that Austen supports the theory that controlled sensibility could be the basis of a more generous, humanitarian and helpful person. She also knew that coming up against obstacles with cunning tactics was effective and claimed that irony and self-control were not only restricted to men. Thanks to knowledge, women in the novel demonstrate that they are not hysterical and unreliable types but rather the trigger for the awakening of a new social order, which disrupted their subordination to men, that still has remarkable parallels with our contemporary world.

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**EL QUIASMO COMO DESVELO DE LA OTREDAD: PROYECCIONES
ESPECULARES Y DISTORSIÓN DE LA MONSTRUOSIDAD EN *LOS
OTROS* (2001), DE ALEJANDRO AMENÁBAR**

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Abstract

Pivoting around the epicentric character of Grace Stewart, our approach intends to cast a light on the imagery of phantasmagoria, violence and manipulation emerging from the univocal point of view in *The Others* so as to underline the keys of a necessary deconstruction of the dark mother's central voice in the discourse. Several resisting and peripheral readings as well as figurative marks —the chiasmus being a constant— evince the mother's role as a fallible and schizoid antagonist.

Keywords: chiasmus, ghosts, the others, dark mother, Alejandro Amenábar, point of view

Resumen

Pivotando en torno al personaje epicéntrico de Grace Stewart, nuestra aproximación pretende sumergirse en el imaginario de fantasmagoría, violentación y monopolización del punto de vista unívoco en *Los otros* a fin de subrayar las claves de una necesaria deconstrucción de la voz y el discurso de la madre oscura. Las múltiples lecturas periféricas y resistentes, además de ciertos indicios figurativos —con el quiasmo como constante— refrendan el papel de aquella como antagonista falible y esquizoide.

Palabras clave: quiasmo, fantasmas, los otros, madre oscura, Alejandro Amenábar, punto de vista

1. Umbral, laberinto y llaves: sobre paraísos e infiernos

Heredera de *Otra vuelta de tuerca* (1898), de Henry James, epítome y sublimación literaria de la ambigüedad¹ como recurso creativo y garante multiplicador del potencial significativo del texto, *Los otros* (2001) se erige en discurso que problematiza la interpretación unívoca de los hechos, sustancia la relativa y movediza esencia de categorías tales como lo real, lo irreal, lo familiar y lo extraño, e impele a la deconstrucción del único punto de vista, no fiable, dentro de la historia. La polifonía y la progresiva legitimación de las lecturas resistentes a la monopolización ejercida por la figura omnipresente y aparentemente omnipotente de la madre, Grace Stewart, plantean una gradual democratización de la verdad, cuestionando el discurso del matriarcado y redefiniendo los referentes de la certidumbre en un texto enclaustrado y confinado física y psicológicamente a unos horizontes de expectativa tan relativos como represivos.

Aparentemente bella, con luz propia, si bien oscura y manipuladora en esencia, Grace representa en el metraje de Amenábar esa dualidad que suele caracterizar a los personajes femeninos dentro de su producción fílmica. Proyectada sobre un imaginario de consunción, abandono, ausencia patriarcal, desementización y cuestionamiento constante de la realidad a través de la disolución de las fronteras entre lo tangible y lo metafísico, el personaje se vincula a la imagen de una progenitora abnegada y valiente en su anhelo de proteger a sus hijos. Así, investida de las trazas propias del ángel de la casa victoriano y la heroína gótica, Grace se afana en preservar la seguridad de estos a toda costa, delimitando la frontera entre la intimidad y domesticidad asociadas a la unidad familiar frente a la contaminación externa e invasiva de lo siniestro.² Al tiempo, y en el extremo opuesto, se plasma, amenazadoramente, como dama oscura de rectitud déspota, enlutada,³ símbolo de la tragedia, mensajera y ejecutora implacable de la muerte. Su caracterización en el film subraya esa efigie, a la vez, autoritaria —casi siempre estilizada y seria, como madrastra de cuento, con atavíos de hombros marcados y pronunciados— y discreta, elegante,

¹ Nicole Burkholder-Mosco y Wendy Carse hablan de liminalidad (201).

² En el género gótico, la amenaza exterior como acecho en el perímetro asegurado de la domesticidad suele representar el conflicto entre el individuo y la sociedad. Extrapolando esta idea al gótico femenino, Ellen Moers sostiene que la casa es correlato del cuerpo desposeído y enajenado de la feminidad.

³ Como los sirvientes, esos otros símbolos de la desventura, Grace suele vestir de oscuro —la gama de colores de sus atavíos va del negro al púrpura, incluyendo la melancolía del azul—, lo cual multiplica el contraste con la ígnea palidez de su rostro y hace que, difuminada su silueta en la oscuridad reinante, focalicemos aun más las inflexiones de su expresividad —ayudados por la claridad del quinqué—, esa mutabilidad drástica entre ternura, mueca doliente y soslayo empavorecido.

comedida, con trajes abotonados hasta el cuello, salvo el camión —aun sobrio— que viste en la secuencia del reencuentro con Charles, su esposo, en el dormitorio conyugal, sin obviar su bata color púrpura con camisa blanca, que apenas si le permite lucir escote.

El personaje de Grace, como la historia, resulta tan complejo como enigmático y desconcertante, tan resuelto como desorientado o desposeído de la razón, tan estático como dinámico. Provoca la identificación y empatía del espectador ya desde la génesis del relato, impeliéndonos a interpretar los hechos a partir de su categorización de la realidad, solipsista⁴ y ciega, refrendada en el enclaustramiento y la ausencia de luz⁵, además de en la multiplicación de textos y niveles narrativos o ecos que espejean y justifican su visión. Con todo, Grace queda desplazada, súbitamente, al papel de antagonista, cercana la conclusión, ya en el último suspiro de la diégesis, justo cuando recupera de nuevo un cetro maternal de dominio y poder ciertamente iluso, más distópico que utópico. De hecho, no es sino hasta esa parte final del film cuando, a través de un giro narrativo que rompe nuestras expectativas,⁶ somos conscientes de que toda realidad tangible e inmediata, toda asunción e interpretación aparentemente sólida y construida previamente a través de los ojos de Grace, es necesariamente cuestionable, como falacia impuesta, y oculta —en un proceso sistemático de negación (Hock 149) — una verdad a modo de reflejo simétrico invertido,⁷ un quiasmo revelador⁸ que invita a repensar en retrospectiva cada hecho, cada aseveración y comportamiento normalizados a partir del enjuiciamiento de la

⁴ Su interpretación de los hechos difiere de las lecturas resistentes a las que nos referiremos en nuestra aproximación, manifestándose una tendencia a la soledad y alienación progresiva. Afirma Grace, ante su confidente, la señora Mills: “Empiezo a sentirme totalmente aislada del mundo. Y esta niebla no ayuda” (Amenábar 66).

⁵ La atmósfera enrarecida, macabra, gélida y fantasmática, además de la impecable puesta en escena, junto con la cartesiana composición de planos, con evidente influencia expresionista, son pilares esenciales en el film.

⁶ Ese “twist” narrativo final es lo que Seth Friedman denomina “changeover”, una constante en la corriente que el crítico denomina “misdirection films”. Véase el estudio “Narrative Structure in *The Sixth Sense*: A New Twist in ‘Twist Movies’?”, de Erlend Lavik, para una aproximación al punto de inflexión como estrategia narrativa.

⁷ Considérese el encuadre de contextualización —“establishing shot” (imagen 1)— de los exteriores de la mansión que representa la proyección especular de la casa en el estanque, sugiriendo otros planos alternativos y latentes al universo plasmado en superficie. Resultan igualmente significativos a la hora de insinuar la presencia de lo velado aquellos enmarques que focalizan con nitidez la figura de Grace y revelan formas indistintas desenfocadas en un segundo plano.

⁸ En consonancia con esta figura retórica, la construcción del film consiste en una repetición especular —trasuntos y reduplicaciones constantes—, además de la significativa inversión final de los elementales que se presentan como foco real y legitimado durante la génesis y el desarrollo con respecto a los supuestos simulacros o representaciones de otredad. Estos ocupan el papel de aquellos —en el epicentro del discurso— y aquellos, el de estos —desplazados a la dimensión de lo fantasmático.

madre durante el transcurso de la historia. Es evidente que los indicios que definen a Grace como punto de vista no fiable son gradual y crecientemente más constatables en el discurso, empezando ya por el grito y desequilibrio del primer plano de su rostro —focalización diagonal— con los que se nos presenta al personaje tras el prólogo (imagen 2).

Así, el enclaustramiento y la insularidad multiplicados —casona aislada dentro del entorno de una isla, a su vez, apartada del mundo—⁹ a los que se ve abocada la unidad familiar de Grace —resquebrajada e incompleta en ausencia del esposo, que marchó al frente y no ha regresado aún— son resultado, según refiere ella misma, del asedio del ejército alemán durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Sin presencia explícita del enemigo nazi —el film está ambientado justamente tras el final del citado conflicto—, la otredad invasiva se resitúa en “los otros”, las presencias que, supuestamente, se han instalado en la casona con propósitos hostiles. La realidad, sin embargo, resulta ser otra muy diferente, como conocerá el espectador —y los propios personajes— justo en el punto climático de la narración, ya que el afán de sobreprotección de Grace con respecto a sus hijos, su obsesiva inclinación a hacerles cumplir escrupulosamente cada mandamiento religioso y a entender la realidad sólo y exclusivamente a partir de sus normas y opiniones la llevan a aislarlos del exterior, a oprimirlos y a arrebatarles, más allá de la libertad y su capacidad crítica, incluso la vida.¹⁰ De este modo, aquella que podría considerarse trasunto de la “final girl” (Clover 201) que logra sobrevivir a las contrafiguras en la historia, se convierte en la verdadera antagonista del relato.¹¹

Más específicamente, y a diferencia del gótico tradicional, en el que la ausencia del referente femenino —maternal, para ser más precisos— subraya la inutilidad del patriarcado y el sistema falocéntrico —recuérdese esa ausencia de la madre en *Frankenstein, el moderno Prometeo* o en *Jane Eyre*, que deviene

⁹ Se reproduce el arquetipo de la mansión victoriana habitada por fantasmas —propia de la “ghost story”—, heredera del “locus” de lo ominoso tematizado en los albores del género gótico.

¹⁰ Hock (144) asocia la espectralidad en el film a la psicopatía y al concepto freudiano de melancolía. Es este un estado que, a diferencia del luto, no permite al sujeto liberarse del objeto perdido —que, en este caso, no es la persona anhelada sino el sujeto que la anhela— para reconstruirse o regenerarse. La melancolía enajena y despersonaliza a Grace, la sume en un estado depresivo, llevándola a proyectar todo un imaginario y arquitectura siniestra y doliente a su alrededor, además de hacerla sentir inquina por sí misma y, en su caso extremo, al suicidio.

¹¹ Según Tony Williams el monstruo en el género de terror filmico se origina habitualmente dentro del seno familiar (15) y es, por ende, referente ligado al ámbito doméstico (Becker 4). Más específicamente, Sarah Arnold señala una corriente —lo que ella denomina “maternal horror cinema”— en la que, desmitificando el concepto de madre idealizada, destaca el arquetipo de “bad mother”, aquella que obvia sus obligaciones como progenitora o, por el contrario, se excede patológicamente en las mismas (4), como es el caso que nos ocupa.

desorientación e inestabilidad emocional y social—, es el vaciado del significativo paternal el que provoca el desmoronamiento de toda la unidad familiar en *Los otros*.¹² Privada de tal referente, incapaz de gestionar la situación y asumir el control, la madre desata la tragedia, aunque, en su descargo, acusa a su esposo, de abandonar el hogar y descuidar sus obligaciones para marchar a combatir en una guerra ajena.¹³ A pesar de perseguir un propósito plausible, proteger a los suyos y delimitar un perímetro de seguridad en el espacio doméstico, Grace plantea una lid perpetua contra las circunstancias cuando, en realidad, ya ha perdido el principal combate, aquel que la enfrenta consigo misma. La responsabilidad asumida a solas, el apartamiento y la gradual enajenación —introspección nociva al no ser capaz de poner límites a su cegazón religiosa— la llevan a cometer el terrible infanticidio.¹⁴

Tres son, en concreto, los referentes simbólicos que representan y delatan la acción victimizadora de Grace en el film: el primero, el silencio que ella impone —Biblia en mano— como máxima mandataria en la casa y ostentadora de la única verdad que ha de imperar. Son su palabra y su interpretación de los hechos¹⁵ las que los niños y sirvientes han de asumir y repetir como propias y

¹² John Lewis estudia la película de Amenábar, además de *El sexto sentido* y *The Ring* como epítomes de la representación en el cine de terror contemporáneo hollywoodiense del empoderamiento fallido de aquella maternidad que no cuenta con el referente masculino, insistiendo en las graves consecuencias derivadas de una educación monoparental.

¹³ Los referentes patriarcales o masculinos están minimizados, a la sombra de los personajes femeninos, entre los que se produce una pugna evidente por hacerse con el control de la situación. Además de la testimonial figura de Charles, en el trasunto de unidad familiar constituida por los sirvientes, el señor Tuttle apenas si interviene, dejando el protagonismo a la señora Mills. En la comitiva de “los otros”, es la anciana la que dinamiza la acción, mientras que la familia de Victor permanece a la expectativa. Finalmente, también es simple actante referido y ausente en escena el sacerdote del pueblo.

¹⁴ Para una aproximación al detalle al tema del infanticidio en el film de Amenábar, véase el estudio de Isabelle Torrance, “Retrospectively Medea: The Infanticidal Mother in Alejandro Amenábar's Film *The Others*”.

¹⁵ Esta imposición del silencio —según Grace, no se da ruido alguno en la casa, es decir, interferencias de otras voces que generen un significativo o significado alternativo, una polifonía desposeedora— se ve respaldada por una incomunicación absoluta con el exterior. No hay teléfono ni radio, aunque, como constataremos, el hermetismo del régimen autoritario representado por Grace se verá minado y resquebrajado por la invasión que llamará a su puerta —los sirvientes— y la que ya mora en el interior, el despecho de su propia hija y la invocación de la verdad durante la sesión de ouija. Son modos de actualización de un discurso aislado, anacrónico y no legitimado.

Al hilo del silencio, también la banda sonora de la película se caracteriza por la ausencia tensional de música. Amenábar crea expectación y suspense, además de sensación de vulnerabilidad y soledad, precisamente, a través del vacío melódico y la emersión puntual de instrumentación de cuerda. De esta forma, proyectados sobre un fondo sonoro neutro, los sollozos o resuellos de Grace y los niños resultan aún más dramáticos. Para un análisis exhaustivo de la apoyatura musical en *Los otros*, véase el estudio de Lloyd Whitesell, “Quieting the Ghosts in *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others*”.

objetivas. Valiéndose del ejercicio de la autoridad, el despotismo y la sobreprotección, Grace pretende instaurar, así, un automatismo servil, fundamentado también obsesivamente en el aleccionamiento religioso,¹⁶ más que probablemente, debido a su necesidad de redimirse del pecado original que reprime y la lleva a nacer permanentemente del grito, tras cada ciclo de día en su ideación o ficcionalización de existencia. Así, Grace anula la asertividad, el posicionamiento crítico y la individuación de aquellos que están bajo su tutela amenazándoles con el castigo eterno, allá en el limbo, si no cumplen con lo dictado. Asevera la madre:¹⁷

En el centro de la Tierra. Donde hace mucho, mucho calor. Allá van los niños que dicen mentiras. Pero fijaos que no van por unos días, no. Se condenan para siempre, hasta la eternidad. Pensad en ello. Intentad imaginar la eternidad. Vamos, cerrad los ojos e imagináoslo ... Eso es la eternidad... para siempre... Dolor para siempre (Amenábar 38).

La lectura y repetición de textos ya constreñidos en su significado, sin margen de recreación, supone una evangelización y monopolización del comportamiento — la parábola religiosa como referente que va calando en la memoria y se torna en parámetro ejemplar a partir de su interiorización—, además de garantizar la obediencia ciega, una recepción pasiva y, por ende, la subyugación a un credo supuestamente modélico (imagen 3).¹⁸ Así reza uno de los pasajes que el pequeño Nicholas ha de memorizar:

Todos vivimos en una casa en compañía de nuestra familia. Las principales habitaciones de la casa son: la cocina, el comedor, los dormitorios, el cuarto de aseo ... Las casas buenas tienen ventanas

¹⁶ Casi inadvertido para el espectador, escrito sobre una pizarra que se ve fugazmente en una de las estancias de la casona, podemos leer: “Thank God for their growth in faith and love”.

¹⁷ Grace alecciona a sus hijos en los conceptos de “la mentira, el infierno o la culpa” (López 244). En aras de preservar un comportamiento acorde con los edictos religiosos —obediencia, en puridad, a sus mandamientos casi divinos dentro del microcosmos de la mansión—, la madre proyecta, dentro de su cosmogonía acomodaticia e impositiva, ese espacio metafísico amenazador. Es un infierno en el que ha de sufrir castigo y condena eterna todo niño que no se atenga al credo religioso. Curiosamente, como el espectador advertirá, Grace está describiendo la falta de luz y el averno a los que la madre condena a sus hijos. De hecho, la muerte por asfixia de los niños es ilustración metafórica de su opresión y victimización, hasta el punto de no dejarles espacio o libertad, ni siquiera para respirar. Esto se revela explícitamente en una de las reprimendas de Grace a Anne, en la que le ordena: “Deja de respirar así ... Deja... de respirar” (Amenábar 111), justamente la misma orden que traslada la hija a Nicholas, próxima la conclusión del film, cuando ambos se esconden en un armario: “Nicholas, deja de respirar así ¡Deja de respirar!” (Amenábar 155), demanda la niña a su hermano.

¹⁸ Entre otros, destacan los pasajes relativos a la expulsión del hombre del Edén —resulta especialmente significativo al ser el film una parábola sobre el fin de la inocencia y la consagración del pecado— y el sacrificio de Adán a manos de Abraham, indirectamente asociado al infanticidio.

grandes y están muy limpias. La familia está formada por los padres, los hijos y los abuelos. Debemos ser obedientes y no debemos discutir (Amenábar 41-45).

Además, en relación con la sistemática imposición del silencio, subrayamos otro de los símbolos angulares en el film: la luz exterior, como metáfora de esa verdad que Grace pretende ocultar —sólo legitima la claridad artificial que ella porta, ese quinqué (imagen 4) que le permite ir abriendo puertas a su antojo (y de manera compulsiva casi) a través de la oscuridad acomodaticia—¹⁹ y de la que excluye a sus hijos —representación de la inocencia. Así, Grace identifica la luz de fuera como contrafigura que se ha de combatir, excusándose en la supuesta ftofobia —*Xeroderma Pigmentosum*— de los niños para confinarlos a los espacios indistintos de la ignorancia y la subyugación (imagen 5).²⁰ Advierte Grace a la señora Mills:

Son fotosensibles y jamás deben ser expuestos a una claridad superior a esta. Les produciría erupciones, llagas y falta de aire en cuestión de minutos. A largo plazo podría ser fatal (Amenábar 26)

Hasta la conclusión, momento en el que los niños palpan la luz, una vez se revela toda la verdad, la única claridad que los ilumina es la del credo opresor que lleva al silencio, a la repetición mecánica de las oraciones y al confinamiento en la oscuridad que no les permite recordar ni crecer y, en consecuencia, tampoco liberarse. De hecho, la primera aparición de Anne y Nicholas —encerrados en su habitación celda—, los muestra pálidos y enunciando automatismos, ensalzando

¹⁹ La luz es un elemental tematizado en el film, un personaje más. También el quinqué preside la mesa de la sala de estudio en torno a la cual Grace y los niños leen pasajes de la Biblia. La madre imparte catequesis, habilitándolos en el camino de la purificación, aunque, en esencia, los esclaviza al credo del sometimiento. No es casualidad que la casa permanezca sin luz eléctrica desde el asedio de los nazis, lo cual permite a Grace recrear un escenario de claroscuros —zonas iluminadas y reprimidas— a su antojo. Es loable en este sentido, el trabajo del director de fotografía Javier Aguirresarobe, quien logra una pátina de tenebrismo fundamentado, con contrastes de dramatismo límite, además de la fusión sutil entre la luz y las sombras en los espacios de incertidumbre (aura liminal en la que se difuminan los límites). Erigiéndose en referente de luz, Grace magnetiza a los niños, los liga a su seno, como faro guía, haciéndoles creer que, lejos de ella y su tutela, se perderán en la oscuridad circundante, sufrirán esa desorientación que ella subraya:

Aquí, la mayor parte del tiempo uno no sabe dónde está. No se puede apreciar si ahí hay una mesa, una silla, una puerta, un aparador... o uno de mis hijos jugando al escondite. (Amenábar 22).

²⁰ Considérese la siguiente conversación entre Grace y la señora Mills:

SEÑORA MILLS: ¿Nunca salen fuera a jugar?

GRACE: No durante el día. Por eso compramos este caserón y lo vaciamos de muebles. Para que jueguen y corran en las habitaciones sin tropiezos, para que no sientan que viven encerrados en una especie de cárcel.... aunque es inevitable; pobrecitos míos. (Amenábar 48)

la única luminosidad —metafórica— a la que aspiran —“Bendigo, en la luz del día,/a Jesús que me la envía” (Amenábar 24)— junto con el haz de luna que baña su dormitorio cuando el supuesto fantasma del niño —trasunto de ambos en la realidad del quiasmo— descorre las cortinas para liberar el inmenso ventanal, reclamando también el lecho y demostrando, así, la incompatibilidad en un mismo espacio entre las presencias del pasado y el presente, actantes ya finados y nuevos propietarios de la mansión (dialéctica de desterritorialización y apropiación).

Otro de los elementales figurativos asociados a la antagonista son las llaves (quince, en concreto), que ella porta y de las que entrega copia a la señora Mills con claras indicaciones y restricciones sobre cómo proceder. Grace coarta, de este modo, el libre movimiento dentro de la casa, condicionando qué puertas —de entre un total de cincuenta— pueden abrirse, cuáles han de cerrarse y, en puridad, a qué estancias se puede acceder, dependiendo, nuevamente, de la incidencia de la luz, que condiciona el comportamiento y el movimiento en el interior de la mansión. Como podrá inferirse, las puertas y los cortinajes que cubren las ventanas operan como armas de opacitación y enclaustramiento que mantienen a los inquilinos fuera del alcance de toda claridad o entendimiento más allá del que la máxima autoridad en la casa exige.²¹ De hecho, es norma inquebrantable que una puerta se abra sólo cuando la inmediatamente anterior se ha cerrado, logrando, de este modo, aislar la luz y evitar su propagación, como si de un elemental infecto o contagioso se tratase. Grace afirma:

Aquí lo único que se mueve es la luz. De un lado a otro... todo cambia ... [E]s bastante incómodo, por no decir insoportable. Y la única manera de sobrellevarlo es manteniendo la cabeza fría (Amenábar 32).

Así, la feminidad “empoderada” huye de la luz, del ayer, del horrible suceso que trata de reprimir y negar en todo momento —la niebla que se cierne sobre la casa representa lo ominoso que sólo se disipará cuando la progenitora y sus vástagos asuman la verdad— para seguir abriendo puertas, guiándose por una claridad falaz. Su premisa es no hundirse en ese abismo que permanece latente y se revela en sueños —la sublimación del trauma que la lleva al grito—, hacer que su

²¹ Las transiciones entre planos funcionan también como puertas metafóricas en el discurso. Es habitual el fundido encadenado junto con un “tempo” pausado, lo cual traslada una sensación de fluidez dentro de la normalidad, linealidad armónica en consonancia con la asertividad y seguridad que pretende transmitir la madre. Con todo, significativos son, de igual modo, los fundidos en negro, puntuales y reveladores, que impactan al espectador tras el eco de alguna sugerencia o anunciación velada, puntos de incertidumbre y anticipo del quiasmo. Esta interrupción drástica de la secuencia se da, por ejemplo, cuando la señora Mills regresa a la cocina y Anne repite: “Sí pasó” (Amenábar 29), en alusión a sus sospechas en torno al infanticidio.

realidad y supuesta autosuficiencia, su embarcación y su tripulación, se mantengan a flote adoptando sus normas de contención. Es la propia Grace la que parece sugerir esta asociación alegórica al referirse a su entrega y sacrificio:

La casa es igual que un barco. Se debe contener la luz como si fuera el agua, abriendo y cerrando las puertas. ¡Está en juego la vida de mis hijos! (Amenábar 54).

Al timón de dicha realidad creada en el apartamento, a partir de su prisma coaccionador —insistimos que, en un principio, alineado e identificado empáticamente con la progenitora, el espectador no llega a recelar de sus consignas—, Grace cree estar formando a sus hijos en un camino de perfección, cuando, en realidad, el único movimiento posible para ellos es el tránsito en bucle y el retraimiento, toda vez se encuentran atrapados en la dimensión de la mentira y en el más allá, en la invisibilidad desde el prisma objetivo, por más que tangible y real parezca el microuniverso que habitan. No en vano, cuando Anne planeta sus dudas —indaga y trata de interpretar sin mediatización— acerca de lo que espera tras la muerte, con lucidez sorprendente, a pesar de la subyugación de sus pensamientos y la minimización de su capacidad de enjuiciamiento, Nicholas afirma: “Nunca iremos a ningún sitio” (Amenábar 110).

Ante esta situación de asfixia y parálisis, la proyección del quiasmo, la posibilidad de otras realidades alternativas y simétricamente invertidas, va cobrando peso gradualmente en pantalla, como si su luz disidente se fuese filtrando sin remedio en la dimensión unívoca y quebradiza de Grace.

2. Interpelando al fantasma: la disidencia textual como deconstrucción

Al hilo de lo apuntado, resulta imperativo delimitar las tres dimensiones que conviven en el film para entender como lógica la paulatina adscripción de nuestra lectura a las interpretaciones emergentes y, con ello, valorar en su medida el juego de equívocos que plantea Amenábar a la hora de definir la otredad. Aclaremos, como idea fundamental, que la película hace uso del “mise en abyme” como estructura de jerarquía narrativa asumida ya desde los créditos del film²², con la voz de Grace abocada a referir una historia sobre la creación

²² La fórmula “Muy bien, niños, ¿estáis cómodos? Entonces, empezaré” (Amenábar 13) remite directamente a los seriales radiofónicos de la BBC, *Listen with Mother*, de la década de los 50 y 60. A modo de nana o cuento de tradición oral —apoyada por una melodía intimista compuesta por el propio director y una serie de dibujos que sólo el espectador ve y que suponen otro de los reflejos o reduplicaciones de lo que ocurre en la diégesis principal, especialmente el último, un boceto de la casa que, en sutil transición, se transforma de trazo a realidad para dar paso a la narración—, la voz femenina cuenta la creación del mundo en siete días. Son varias las claves que anticipa esta secuencia de créditos: por una parte, se fija en la feminidad madre el agente

del mundo a partir de la nada y, análogamente, impeliéndonos a considerarla entidad motriz enunciativa a partir de la cual se genera el resto de textos, reduplicaciones ilustrativas y refrendadoras de esa realidad que ella concibe e impone a los demás.

Como ya se ha apuntado, durante gran parte del metraje, interpretamos los acontecimientos a través del punto de vista de la madre y, en dicho nivel de percepción sesgado —primario y de textualidad más cuantitativa—, los otros, el antagonismo invasivo, está representado por presencias invisibles, manifestaciones incorpóreas, acusmáticas, a partir de ruidos y voces que ocupan la segunda dimensión (imagen 6)²³ y cuya plasmación más tangible es los dibujos de Anne, en los que identificamos a un niño —Víctor—, a sus progenitores y a la que se supone entidad maléfica epicéntrica, una anciana de aspecto siniestro y amenazador.²⁴ La sorpresa del film se produce, precisamente, cuando Grace y sus dos hijos se volatilizan en escena y cobran fisicidad las presencias previamente invisibles, los participantes en la sesión de ouija (imagen 7), urgiéndonos a la perplejidad ante la confirmación del quiasmo más crucial dentro del film. Así, en la conclusión de la historia, la realidad de los personajes con los que nos hemos identificado pasa a un segundo plano, suplantada por la, hasta ese momento, dimensión latente. Se revela, de este modo, la terrible verdad, haciéndose manifiesto que Grace, sus hijos y los sirvientes están muertos,²⁵ son los espectros en la morada, los verdaderos otros, entidades residuales que pertenecen al pasado —los sirvientes murieron de tuberculosis en

narrador y poseedor de la palabra; por otra, se habla de la creación —fundamental en un discurso en el que la progenitora pretenderá preservar y proteger los límites de su propia creación—, con la consagración, empero, de su contrario —la destrucción a la que se aboca debido al abuso de poder; finalmente, ni la narradora ni los narratarios —niños, según revela la propia voz— aparecen en escena, por lo que este podría ser un guiño prospectivo a la esencia incorpórea de los protagonistas del film.

²³ No en vano, el film presenta la lucha y reivindicación de Grace por conservar su papel de madre y máxima autoridad en la casa frente a aquellos que, supuestamente, la han invadido. No en vano, como afirma Huggan: “Ghost stories are to do with the insurrection, not the resurrection of the dead” (353-54).

²⁴ En las constantes reduplicaciones y reflejos entre dimensiones, resulta recurrente el número tres, posible trasunto de la Santísima Trinidad, no accidental en un film impregnado de referencias bíblicas. En la supuesta dimensión real, contamos con dos unidades de tres actantes, por una parte, Grace y sus dos hijos, además de la señora Mills, Edmund Tuttle y Lydia, quedando Charles perdido en la zona intersticial, como ratificación de la ausencia. En la dimensión de “los otros”, tenemos a Víctor, además de sus padres (el señor y la señora Marlish), siendo la médium otro personaje a medio camino entre la realidad y su simulacro.

²⁵ La espectralidad de los sirvientes se manifiesta en un momento especialmente dramático del film, sirviéndose Amenábar del montaje alternado: por una parte, el descubrimiento de las tres tumbas en el jardín, junto al árbol disecado, una vez el señor Tuttle ha retirado la hojarasca para iniciar el proceso de desvelo, y, por otra, la imagen “post-mortem” de los sirvientes que Grace halla en su particular despertar progresivo a la realidad.

el siglo XIX; Grace y sus hijos, tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial.²⁶ Así, el espacio de lo doméstico y la máxima autoridad legitimada en él se manifiestan como proyección de la monstrosidad.

La tercera dimensión es la intersticial o liminal, aquella en la que las dos anteriores confluyen, la que evidencia la coexistencia entre vivos y muertos, anunciando el sorprendente giro de los acontecimientos a la postre. En este sentido, la mansión es, lógicamente, el ámbito fundamental dentro del discurso y existe como realidad tangible, objetiva e inalterable,²⁷ siendo, al mismo tiempo, vórtice de confluencia entre el ayer y el presente, perímetro de interacción, pues, entre las tres dimensiones. Se trata de un espacio escénico, una interioridad sobre la que se proyecta la visibilidad o invisibilidad de unos y los otros, dependiendo del momento de la narración.²⁸ Más específicamente, esta tercera dimensión liminal se explicita a través de revelaciones fundamentales en la historia,

²⁶ La premisa argumental que articula el punto de vista eje de la historia a través de la lente de un personaje que no es consciente de estar muerto es deudora del film de M. Night Shyamalan *El sexto sentido* (*The Sixth Sense*, 1999). De hecho, son varias las películas que, de un tiempo a esta parte, han optado por una visión más inclusiva y normalizada del espectro, no como el referente antagonista de otredad sino como el yo confesional que nos refiere sus cuitas. Tómense en consideración, en este sentido, dos películas fundacionales y de corte independiente que subvierten y actualizan innovadoramente el concepto de fantasma: *I am a Ghost* (H.P. Mendoza, 2012) y *A Ghost Story* (David Lowery, 2017).

Aviva Briefel se refiere a esta tipología de films como narraciones de “spectral incognizance”, ritos de iniciación que sirven a los espectros protagonistas para tomar conciencia de su estado y aceptar su muerte física —proceso de adaptación empírica (Juan-Navarro 24)— también a partir de la asunción psicológica:

Narratives of spectral incognizance are predicated on the idea that dying is not only a corporeal failure, but also a cognitive act: those who overlook their deaths are not really dead. Instead, they lead a liminal existence scattered with clues signaling their passing; they can only transition into real death once they have interpreted these clues properly. (97)

²⁷ En su discurso de visibilidad cuestionada y a pesar de la recurrente sensación de desorientación, Amenábar optó por una representación detallada de la casa —fundamentada en una impoluta puesta en escena, una planificación detallada de la composición y la alternancia de encuadres generales o “establishing shots” con planos profundidad y detalle—, lejos de una visión impresionista o evanescente del espacio. El director hace de la mansión un perímetro necesariamente habitable, valiéndose especialmente de la perspectivación con puntos de fuga y los “travellings” que impelen a la inmersión espectacular en el escenario. De hecho, en la génesis del film, acompañamos a Grace y a los singulares sirvientes en una ronda de reconocimiento por la casa. A lo largo de la película, se visibilizarán manifiestamente el vestíbulo, la sala de música, la sala de juegos, la cocina, la sala de estar, las escaleras, los descansillos de estas, el dormitorio de los niños, el dormitorio de Grace o la sala de estudio.

Otra cuestión es el exterior, de delimitación menos precisa, en un ambiente más lúgubre y amenazador, espacio alegórico de la muerte —hojarasca y tumbas—, la tragedia —el árbol de ramas retorcidas— y la vida en suspensión —niebla. De hecho, la Isla de Jersey se erige en espacio suspendido en la nada, entre Inglaterra y Francia (Bruce 34 y Juan-Navarro 16).

²⁸ Apoyándose en los fundamentos teóricos de Julia Kristeva, David Sibley sostiene que esta anulación de las fronteras, confusión entre estados y categorías dentro de la casa, incertidumbre esencial, la definen como un espacio de incertidumbre esencial y abyección.

momentos casi epifánicos. Consideremos, por ejemplo, la escena en la que el espectador acompaña a Grace —de riguroso luto, dejando a entrever la pérdida que, por equívoco, podría remitir a la ausencia del esposo, pero la desementiza, más bien, como madre, por el infanticidio— en su búsqueda de los otros en el piso superior de la mansión, llave en mano y ejerciendo su autoridad al moverse libremente y abrir puertas a su antojo, tratando de confinar y combatir a los extraños para expulsarlos de los límites del ámbito doméstico y proteger, así, a los suyos. Una vez accede a la estancia del piso superior —bañándose su faz de luz, significativamente—, aparece en encuadre alegórico todo aquello que permanece reprimido en su memoria —formas indistintas cubiertas con guardapolvos—²⁹ y, entre susurros y sonidos que delatan la presencia de intrusos en la casa,³⁰ Grace va destapando el mobiliario y las estatuas con la intención de identificar a los referentes de lo siniestro. La etapa de disociación con respecto a la otredad en el espejo —Lacan— tiene, sin embargo, consecuencias escalofrantes para la madre, pues lo único que halla en la habitación es el reflejo de sí misma (imagen 8), efecto premonitorio de lo que sobrevendrá en la conclusión del film.³¹

También es liminal la dimensión evanescente y dominada por la niebla que rodea la casa, el allende, lo contextual, más allá del jardín y la verja exterior, la frontera que trasciende Grace al encuentro de respuestas y la ayuda del sacerdote, un espacio sin orientación posible tras el trazado de la senda entre árboles con punto de fuga “ad infinitum” en el que la viuda se topa con el espectro de su esposo Charles. Además, el descubrimiento del libro de fotografías “post-mortem” abre otra falla más en la realidad insostenible que

²⁹ Se trata de una galería de iconos fantasmagóricos que adoptan la imagen tradicional del espectro cubierto con sábana.

³⁰ Frases como “Ella está aquí, ella está aquí” (Amenábar 72) o “¡Nos está mirando!” (72) son claramente inteligibles, tanto para Grace como para el espectador —por ende, objetivables—, en planos con punto de vista omnisciente.

³¹ Afirman Altemir e Ibáñez:

Grace is caught between the desire to discover her new self and the fear of facing the monstrous other, which would mean death and consequently eternal damnation. (280)

La imagen compensatoria de la nueva realidad e identidad que Grace trata de fijar para disociarse de la otredad termina por liberar, precisamente, el monstruo interior, su propio reflejo. Reconocemos en esta deriva la articulación del segundo término del quiasmo a partir de una afirmación del primero. La enunciación de Grace es, como indicaría Rosalba Campra (23-24) sustantiva, pues delimita el yo y sus circunstancias, pero, a la vez, define sus contrarios. Se trata de esa imposibilidad de erradicar y huir de nuestros miedos reprimidos a la que alude David B. Morris en su conocido ensayo “Gothic Sublimity”:

The terror of the uncanny is released as we encounter the disguised and distorted but inalienable images of our repressed desire not from something external, alien or unknown but —on the contrary— from something strangely familiar which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it. (309)

proclama Grace, desvelando prospectivamente a partir de esos enmarques de extrañamiento grotesco, la aparente vida en muerte —confusión de ambos estados—, justamente la que define a la madre, a sus hijos y a los sirvientes, la existencia en pena, la de los espectros encadenados al limbo de los otros. De hecho, ese libro de instantáneas siniestras presenta una laguna de incertidumbre —una fotografía ausente en sus páginas— que parece invitar al espectador a rellenarla con sus suposiciones, más allá de la asunción impuesta por Grace. No en vano, frente a los enmarques macabros, la señora Mills explica todo cuanto permanece reprimido en la mente de la madre:³²

GRACE: ¿Sabe usted qué puede ser esto?

SEÑORA MILLS: Es un libro de fotografías, señora.

GRACE: Sí, pero todos están como dormidos. Mire.

SEÑORA MILLS: No están dormidos, señora... Están muertos. Es un libro de difuntos.

GRACE: Jamás vi algo parecido.

SEÑORA MILLS: En el siglo pasado era algo muy común. Se retrataba a los muertos con la esperanza de que su alma perviviera en la fotografía.

GRACE: Hay incluso retratos de grupo. ¡Y niños! Es macabro. ¿Cómo podía aquella gente ser tan supersticiosa? Yo lo habría prohibido.

SEÑORA MILLS: El dolor por la pérdida de un ser querido puede empujar a hacer cualquier cosa.

GRACE: Aquí falta una foto... en la última página.

SEÑORA MILLS: Quizá el álbum nunca fuera acabado, señora. (Amenábar 83-84)

³² En la onda de Barthes, quien considera que la instantánea es una suerte de emanación actualizada del referente (80), y Sontag, para quien toda instantánea es un acto de “memento mori” (15), Susan Bruce sostiene:

Photographs, like ghosts, possess the qualities of a revenant: they return from the past, ushering their content into our presence with an imperious insistence that we recognize and acknowledge them. (26)

En el caso de la fotografía “postmortem”, la reviniencia se produce ya dentro del marco, antes de la recepción de la instantánea, con el simulacro que nos presenta al referente muerto —deceso, por ende, ya consumado— como vivo. La fotografía inmortaliza esta falacia de modo que el visionado de la misma apenas permite una actualización vitalista del referente, por cuanto es la imagen de un muerto. Para la evocación revitalizadora tendríamos que tener esa imagen constatada del vivo —ausente en la instantánea—, si bien intuita a partir de la pretendida “domesticación” del deceso.

Es evidente, asimismo, que la médium se desmarca como otro referente liminal en la historia pues representa —a través de su interpelación al más allá como aquella que, a pesar de su ceguera, ve lo que remanece oculto— el diálogo e interacción, la convergencia entre vivos y muertos, el ayer y el hoy, en la estancia en la que se desarrolla la sesión de ouija y desvela el quiasmo o inversión angular de la lógica asumida durante el desarrollo del film.³³ De hecho, la sucesión de acontecimientos en el metraje representa el despertar paulatino —inercia no reversible— de Grace y sus hijos a la espantosa realidad, llevándoles a la anagnórisis última.³⁴ El discurso y los parámetros acomodaticios de aquella, sus reglas, sus prejuicios, la coacción de pensamiento o movimiento y, en definitiva, el enclaustramiento e ideación ejercidos a través del uso de las llaves y la luz del quinqué se ven minados por las voces resistentes de aquellos que, conviviendo en su misma dimensión, conocen o intuyen el terrible suceso del ayer y, por ende, interpelan acusadoramente a la progenitora como personaje enajenado. A diferencia del pequeño Nicholas, amedrentado y dependiente, Anne —quien también sufre cierta amnesia o trance post-traumático—³⁵ establece distancia con su madre, recela de ella, subraya la mutabilidad de su carácter y el nerviosismo extremo que en ocasiones la ciega, lo cual le hace intuir —casi recordar— ese momento oscuro de sus vidas que no consigue precisar. Es Anne también la que, ejerciendo de narradora hipodiegética, alarma acerca de la existencia de los otros en la casa, nominando referentes de poder alternativo:

GRACE: ¿Por dónde han ido?

ANNE: Por ahí, y por aquí... y también por allí ... Están en todas partes. Dicen que la casa es suya. (Amenábar 73)

Enfrentándose a las consecuencias —encierro y castigo—, la pequeña se muestra más pragmática, cuestiona visceralmente los planteamientos de su madre y la imposición de todo credo heredado. Así, entre otros síntomas de disensión, Anne muestra sus reservas con respecto a dogmas bíblicos tales como que Dios crease el mundo en siete días o que en el Arca de Noé se pudiese cobijar a esa inmensa

³³ Es en esa disfunción súbita donde radica el potencial del género. Afirma Marcia England: “horror occurs when boundaries are transgressed, when what is seen as normal suddenly becomes inverted” (354).

³⁴ Recurso narrativo que consiste en la reformulación o replanteamiento —por parte de un personaje— de las bases de identidad y relaciones con el entorno. Por circunstancias, tal actante descubre una serie de datos que, hasta ese momento, le eran desconocidos y le permiten construir una imagen más depurada, razonada y sólida de sí mismo.

³⁵ Lydia, la sirvienta muda, es epítome metafórico de las consecuencias de su tragedia particular. Incapaz de expresarse e interactuar, representa la imposibilidad de adaptarse a las nuevas circunstancias, justamente aquello por lo que lucha Grace, sin lograrlo a la postre.

cantidad de animales.³⁶ Dos escenas resultan hartamente ilustrativas al respecto; en una de ellas, Anne se queja a su madre, afirmando: “No puedes obligarme a pedirle perdón a la Virgen ... El otro día leí que el limbo es sólo para los niños que no han sido bautizados. Yo sí” (Amenábar 61-62). Como respuesta, Grace reprime, de inmediato, el brote subversivo para fortalecer el statu quo que ella ha creado:

O sea que la chica lista ha aprendido a leer por su cuenta, ¿no es así? Muy bien. Puesto que lo encuentras interesante e instructivo, seguirás leyendo la Biblia, de pie, tres horas diarias hasta que le pidas perdón a la Virgen. (Amenábar 62)

Tras estas palabras, la madre abandona la sala, dando un portazo —el umbral impedido, nuevamente, como herramienta ejecutora del bloqueo—, jerarquizando y disponiendo autoritariamente para preservar el control. La otra escena se corresponde con la lectura de uno de los pasajes bíblicos en la sala de estudio. El texto vuelve a ejercer de reflejo del infierno que viven los niños en la mansión, así como de la necesidad de imponerse y destronar a la voz falaz. Reza la parábola:

En cierta ocasión, dos niños, llamados Justo y Pastor, se negaron a adorar a los dioses falsos de los romanos. Dijeron: somos cristianos y sólo adoraremos al Dios verdadero. El pretor romano trató de convencerles ... Después, mandó que los azotaran. Pero Justo y Pastor, en vez de tener miedo, estaban alegres y dispuestos a morir por Cristo. (Amenábar 36)

Otra voz resistente, ya se habrá inferido, es la que corresponde a la sirvienta Bertha Mills, cuya misión es hacer que Grace se reconcilie con su pasado y llegue a entender y asumir lo que sucedió. Su acción es tan sutil como gradual y constante; sometiéndose a los dictados de la déspota aunque, teniendo conocimiento pleno de lo acaecido, Mills deconstruye la visión distorsionada de Grace a partir de un lenguaje cargado de vagas referencias y ambigüedades que crean lagunas de incertidumbre en el discurso, activan la lectura activa por parte del espectador e ilustran cuán relativa y cuestionable es la realidad suspendida en

³⁶ En otro de los habituales juegos de espejos en el film, Anne, con velo de tul y vela, manipula una marioneta —cuyo mango tiene forma de cruz— ante el reflejo. Grace confunde a su hija con la imagen de la anciana siniestra y “ataca” violentamente a la pequeña. Tratando de combatir la otredad y en una nueva revelación sobre el espejo, Grace descubre su propia imagen, quedando retratada a los ojos de su hija y el espectador como referente antagonista, por su comportamiento desproporcionado y por las similitudes que guarda con la silueta del velo que manipula a su antojo a aquellos a quienes interpela, como si se tratase de marionetas en una casa de muñecas.

la que habitan Grace y los suyos.³⁷ Destaquemos la conversación que mantienen la señora Mills y Anne, actantes resistentes destacados hasta ahora, ejerciendo aquella de madre y hallando un punto en común con la pequeña. Ambas constatan la existencia de esa otra esfera de lo reprimido —podríamos hablar de una cuarta dimensión, pues— que representa el infanticidio y el suicidio, el recuerdo que Grace niega. Se trata también de una advertencia para el espectador, que, momentáneamente y ya como necesaria proclividad, se libera del punto de vista limitador de la madre, ausente durante la escena:

SEÑORA MILLS: Yo también los he visto.

ANNE: ¿Y por qué no se lo dice a mamá...? Así me tomará en serio.

SEÑORA MILLS: Hay cosas que tu madre prefiere no escuchar. Ella sólo cree en lo que le enseñaron. Pero no te preocupes. Antes o después, los verá. Y entonces, todo será distinto.

ANNE: ¿Por qué?

SEÑORA MILLS: Ya lo verás. Habrá grandes sorpresas. Habrá... cambios. (Amenábar 112)³⁸

Además de las voces contestatarias desde el seno de su ideación, también desde el exterior constatamos manifestaciones resistentes a la taxonomía de Grace, en un principio en forma de plasmación acusmática —ruidos que sobresaltan, llantos infantiles, sintomáticos de presencias espectrales en la casa—, al final, con la inversión de los planos, presencias tangibles que suplantán su autoridad —a quienes tanto Anne como la señora Mills, no sometidas, no mediatizadas por

³⁷ Según Altemir e Ibáñez (278), además de una evidente pugna por el cetro maternal, la fricción entre la señora Mills y Grace es un claro ejemplo de subversión y transgresión de clases.

³⁸ Nótese, en el guión original en inglés, la recurrencia del verbo “see”, incidiendo en el sentido de comprender e interpretar, llegar a entender el verdadero sentido de la situación, asignatura pendiente y urgente de Grace:

MRS. MILLS: Look, what an awful face you've got when you cry

ANNE: (crying) I don't care!

MRS. MILLS: There, there.

[Anne finally calms down]

MRS. MILLS: You listen to me. I've seen them too,

ANNE: You have?

[Mrs. Mills nods]

ANNE: Why don't you tell my mother? Then maybe she'll believe me.

MRS. MILLS: There are things your mother doesn't want to hear. She only believes in what she was taught. But don't worry. Sooner or later... she'll see them. And everything will be different.

ANNE: How?

MRS. MILLS: You'll see. There are going to be some big surprises. There are going to be... changes.

aquella, han visto y ubicado en los espacios de la morada previamente— y completan el proceso de anulación y desterritorialización de sus presupuestos. Y entre los dos mundos, entre la dimensión de los vivos y los muertos, emergiendo de la niebla del ayer, la ya referida acción contestataria del esposo, quien también cuestiona la labor de Grace como madre y resitúa la alteridad, sugiriendo que ella es la contrafigura de la historia:³⁹ “No hablo de fantasmas. Hablo de lo que ocurrió aquel día” (Amenábar 126), afirma Charles.

Será justamente a partir del desvelo de las presencias no tangibles en su relato, cuando Grace se aboque desesperadamente —coincide con una acentuación del tempo narrativo del film— a abrir todas las puertas y a descorrer todas las cortinas de la casona, ayudada por la libertad de movimientos que le permiten las llaves, el quinqué, la Biblia y la escopeta, arma que, en principio, parece representarla como icono arquetípico de la feminidad asertiva, pero que, en esencia, desvela su alienación y muestra la herramienta ejecutora del infanticidio velado (imagen 9). Al pretender exorcizar los demonios de su realidad mediante el periplo iniciático a través de los corredores y las estancias de la mansión —itinerario de descubrimiento que el espectador asume como propio a partir de la identificación con el punto de vista de la madre—, Grace mira al abismo, en busca de la monstruosidad, y —como en la habitación de los enseres cubiertos con sábanas— termina por descubrir un reflejo de sí misma, como monstruo, en el epicentro de la oscuridad.

En esa progresiva desemantización y desposesión de la autoridad y los atributos positivos del referente maternal, en la anulación de su interpretación impositiva de los hechos y lo circundante, resultan sumamente esenciales dos momentos clave de fragmentación de su macronarrativa pretendidamente omnisciente: primero —ya constatado—, cuando Grace desaparece de la escena y el punto de vista recae en aquellos que cuestionan su interpretación y dogmas; considérese, al hilo, el instante en el que la señora Mills, en conversación con Edmund Tuttle, anuncia que están a punto de acaecer cambios significativos, o aquel otro en el que Anne impele a Nicholas a escapar de la casa —“Ya estoy

³⁹ Es otra de esas puertas que, contestatarias, no se abren a su voluntad. De hecho, durante el breve paréntesis con tintes oníricos —proyección de los deseos reprimidos de Grace— que supone el regreso del marido al hogar, asistimos a un momento más que ilustrativo. Grace llama a su esposo desde el piso de abajo y recibe un portazo —sonido acusmático y sombra de la puerta en movimiento— como respuesta. En la siguiente imagen, reforzando la esencia evanescente y caduca del pasado y la dimensión falaz de Grace, un plano cenital muestra al marido absorto, desorientado, perdido en el recuerdo. Previamente, durante la conversación en el dormitorio, la imagen de Charles no se refleja en el espejo del armario y deducimos que Grace habla consigo misma, proyectando su sentimiento de culpa. En este sentido, el postrero despertar de la esposa en un lecho a solas, sin la imagen de su marido, nos remite al inicio del film, los fantasmas de la soledad y el vaciado progresivo de dicha realidad.

harta. Voy al bosque a buscar a papá” (Amenábar 139)— y ambos descubren la espantosa verdad en el jardín.⁴⁰ Algo parecido ocurre cuando las puertas y los elementales dentro de la mansión comienzan a operar por sí solos, cuando no es Grace la que dicta los hechos, cuando no son sus llaves o su luz las que legitiman el siguiente paso y, consecuentemente, se multiplica la casuística —las puertas y la tapa del piano se abren solas,⁴¹ las cortinas desaparecen—, quedando cuestionada la omnipotencia de la madre en el ámbito doméstico y constatándose la inseguridad del actante en sí misma a partir de los constantes soslayos, la multiplicación del acecho desde fuera de plano y el recurrente encuadre cenital o esa cámara que circunda la pose de Grace e ilustra su imagen monolítica acechada desde cualquier punto. La casa corporeiza lo reprimido, convirtiéndose en un lugar amenazador y hostil (Hock 147) que sume a Grace en recurrentes estados de pánico e histeria (Hock 153). Así se lamenta la figura autoritaria a medida que va sintiéndose gradualmente desposeída de autoridad:

¡Durante cinco años de ocupación, me las arreglé para que ni un solo nazi cruzara el umbral de esta casa! ¡Y ahora hay alguien aquí mismo, delante de mis narices, abriendo y cerrando puertas! (Amenábar 73)

Previo al desvelo de la incómoda verdad, cuando se descubren las tres tumbas de los sirvientes en el jardín —parodia del Jardín del Edén, con la fantasmática silueta de un árbol de la vida que, irónicamente, representa la muerte—, se

⁴⁰ Perdidos en el bosque, en el espacio de lo insólito y lo ignoto, pretendiendo alejarse de esa madre que, también a ojos de sus hijos, parece haber perdido el juicio, Anne trata de consolar a su hermano:

NICHOLAS: Anne, creo que nos hemos perdido.
 ANNE: Todavía no hemos salido del jardín, tonto.
 NICHOLAS: Tengo miedo.
 ANNE: Pues no haber venido.
 NICHOLAS: Dí algo.
 ANNE: ¿Qué quieres que diga?
 NICHOLAS: No sé, cualquier cosa.
 ANNE: A ver... me llamo Anne y estoy andando. Estoy andando y me llamo Anne... (Amenábar 144)

Por más que la última afirmación de Anne parezca mera y absurda enunciación espontánea que evita el silencio y mantiene la mente entretenida, no dejando que el miedo la domine, estas dos frases se articulan en inversión, precisamente, a partir del principio del quiasmo y, a la vez, constatan la capacidad de la niña a la hora de interpretar y describir al detalle y literalmente, sin manipulación matriarcal, la realidad.

⁴¹ En la gradual disociación entre Grace y la verdad o fiabilidad, el punto de vista juega un papel fundamental. Así, a pesar de que, antes de acceder a la sala del piano, el espectador se sitúa con ella ante el umbral, acompañándola como testigo empático en su trayecto de apertura legítima de puertas y abocándose a la interpelación de la otredad, una vez Grace entra en la sala, el contraplano desliga al espectador de su visión y lo sitúa en el seno de la estancia, a la espera de su irrupción, focalizando a la madre en el punto de fuga, resituándola como ajena a nosotros, como esa otra que accede al interior.

produce otra proyección especular más que significativa: Grace y los niños permanecen en el interior de la casa mientras la señora Mills y sus dos acompañantes acechan desde más allá del umbral. Nuevamente la puerta —la de acceso principal a la mansión— guarda un simbolismo connotado por cuanto no es, en esta ocasión, una superficie de madera que opaca lo que hay a un lado y a otro sino que se trata de una cristallera a través de la cual son claramente visibles las siluetas a contraluz y sumidas en la niebla de esos a los que vemos como entes invasores del ámbito doméstico (imagen 10). De hecho, interior y exterior, supuestos vivos y supuestos muertos, interactúan estableciendo un diálogo de simbiosis. Grace abraza protectoramente a sus hijos y, una vez más, trata de situar la otredad fuera de sí misma:

SEÑORA MILLS: íbamos a decírselo tarde o temprano. Sólo queríamos encontrar el momento oportuno para hablar con usted.

GRACE: ¿Sobre qué?

SEÑORA MILLS: Sobre la casa... sobre... la nueva situación.

GRACE: ¿Qué situación?

SEÑORA MILLS: Debemos aprender a convivir... los vivos con los muertos. (Amenábar 153)

En esencia, la puerta sirve como espejo y delineación simétrica entre los tres actantes que permanecen fuera y esa triada que recela en el interior, ocupando todos la misma dimensión y compartiendo estado redivivo. Es justamente en este momento de desorientación para el espectador, abocados a la conclusión, cuando se da otra escena fundacional que ejemplifica la lectura activa y alerta de los acontecimientos por parte del espectador. La filmación sigue a Anne y Nicholas, que huyen a su dormitorio y cierran la puerta a la cámara testigo, con la que nos identificamos. Después, los niños abren otra puerta —la del armario— y la vuelven a cerrar ante nuestros ojos, quedando el espectador, en este caso, ante un espejo, ante un reflejo, uno de tantos en el laberinto de proyecciones de desidentidad en el que quedamos atrapados durante el visionado del film.⁴² Es manifiesta la intención del realizador con este discurso necesariamente limítrofe —se aboca al fuera de plano, a la deconstrucción de la certidumbre, al cuestionamiento de la realidad, al solapamiento entre dimensiones— de plantearnos el reto constante de la reescritura y redefinición de nuestra identidad, la necesidad de mirarnos a nosotros mismos y repensarnos para tratar de fijar

⁴² Abundando en la importancia de las puertas, su apertura o cierre, esta que corresponde al escondite de los niños aterrados es abierta simbólicamente por la anciana, que ha iniciado la sesión de ouija y establece contacto definitivo con los fantasmas para precipitar el inesperado final de la historia.

nuestra existencia en una realidad movediza en la que se borran los límites entre lo factible y lo irreal, donde se confunden y confluyen los vivos y los muertos, siendo estos de fisicidad tan tangible y veraz como aquellos.

3. El quiasmo y la relectura inversa: conclusión

Cuando Grace cambia la escopeta por un rosario y sube al piso superior, abre la última puerta a la verdad, la “espectralización” de los supuestamente vivos y la humanización de los que han permanecido excluidos en el espacio de lo siniestro.⁴³ La médium desvela y fija el quiasmo e inversión fundacional del film, a pesar de la lectura resistente y desesperada de Grace y sus hijos —“¡No estamos muertos! ¡No estamos muertos! ¡No estamos muertos!” (Amenábar 158)—, como enunciación subyugada que necesita de la mediadora —la escritura automática— para manifestarse. Una vez los vivos abandonan la casa, el tempo del film decae notablemente en su anticlímax, sumiéndose en un trance confesional, estremecido, en el que la madre —en una imagen de “pietà” impactante, un enmarque hagiográfico casi (imagen 11)— asume su culpa:

Al principio no entendía qué hacía con la almohada en mis manos. Ni por qué no os movíais. Entonces lo supe. Había sucedido. Había matado a mis hijos. Cogí el rifle, me lo puse en la frente... y apreté el gatillo. (Amenábar 160)

Y al asumir que es consciente de la verdad epicéntrica del film, Grace deja de ser la progenitora empoderada que todo lo sabe para mostrar su incapacidad y limitaciones a la hora de dar respuesta a las dudas planteadas por los niños cuando estos preguntan si volverán a ver a su padre o dónde está el tan renombrado limbo.⁴⁴

Ni siquiera sé si existe el Limbo. Sé lo mismo que vosotros. Pero sí sé que os quiero. Siempre os he querido. (Amenábar 164)

⁴³ Susan Bruce se refiere a esta inversión concluyente como “misrecognition of the ghostly” (22). Grace y los niños son evidente manifestación del “grotesque body” sobre el que teorizan Mikhail Bakhtin (310) y Mary Russo (325): se trata de cuerpos sin identidad fijada, sometidos a un proceso y cambio en pos de la definición en el que, sin embargo, se descomponen, se corrompen y difuminan.

⁴⁴ Además de las evidentes concomitancias que se pueden establecer entre los modos de filmación estilizada o la cuidada composición de planos por parte de Amenábar en este film y la caligrafía filmica de Hitchcock, *Los otros* también es deudora de la maestría del director inglés en su gradual y sistemática construcción del suspense, sin obviar —estableciendo una comparación específica con *Psycho* (1960)— la sensación de orfandad que sufre el espectador una vez descubre que el personaje con el que se ha identificado a lo largo del metraje, ha trasladado, en realidad, una visión falaz, psicópata y manipuladora de la realidad.

Desacreditada, su discurso ha dejado de ser convincente. El infanticidio y suicidio la presentan como ogresa y monstruo —“the monstrous feminine”—⁴⁵ más que como madre, además de pecadora, contraria a los dogmas religiosos que profesa y en los que ha tratado de instruir a sus hijos. Con todo, ella persiste en su cegazón, se redime y se rearma de fe, asumiendo estar a la altura ante lo que considera una segunda oportunidad que Dios le concede.⁴⁶ Por su parte, liberados ya simbólicamente del yugo de la oscuridad, Anne y Nicholas buscan la luz, la palpan y se muestran inermes a la fotofobia. La familia parece unida de nuevo, refrendándose a partir de una cantinela de asertividad y legitimidad pretendida que sugiere la madre: “Y esta casa es nuestra... Repetid conmigo, niños; la casa es nuestra, la casa es nuestra...”. Esta duplicación de la frase tematizada no es sino fórmula de confirmación de una realidad para la que —de nuevo a través de la lente de Grace— no debe haber ya posible inversión de términos o quiasmo enajenador. En la medida en la que la enunciación se repita —con sinergia de voces, nuevamente homogeneizándolas y canalizándolas unívocamente—, no habrá lugar u opción para el eco invertido de un segundo término —el opuesto— ya que sólo persiste en secuencia, multiplicándose y reforzándose, el significado del primero.

Con todo, esta no es sino otra verdad relativa más que cuestionable, otro simulacro de autoconvencimiento por parte de Grace que, a estas alturas, el espectador sabe interpretar entre líneas. De hecho, los últimos fotogramas presentan el interior de la casa a través del encadenado de planos vacíos con la voz acusmática de Grace y sus hijos, lo cual ratifica la desterritorialización física del espacio doméstico y la presencia incorpórea de los espectros. Además, el plano en retroceso final se aleja de la fachada de la casona, distanciándose con él también el espectador, que permanece en la dimensión de los vivos mientras los fantasmas quedan desplazados al punto de fuga, en el encuadre del ventanal, como una fotografía “post-mortem”, ligados a la mansión, al espacio de la

⁴⁵ A partir del concepto de Creed (68), Altemir e Ibáñez especifican:

The mother-child relationship is central to the figure of the monstrous feminine, as the child at once seeks to separate from the mother and remain in the maternal relationship. The mother plays her role by preventing the child from extricating by refusing to abdicate control. (355)

⁴⁶ Como Lucifer, como Adán y Eva, Grace se ve privada de inocencia y gracia, de ahí que su nombre resulte un guiño irónico manifiesto. En puridad, el film representa la lucha del personaje principal por reconstruir su identidad a partir de los dogmas católicos (Altemir e Ibáñez 276), volver a una situación originaria en el Jardín del Edén, obviando que está muerta y compensando la tragedia a través de la redención o catarsis (Bruce 29):

El Señor en su infinita me estaba dando otra oportunidad. Diciéndome: “No te rindas, sé fuerte. Sé una buena madre. Por ellos. Pero ahora... ahora... ¿Qué significa todo esto? ¿Dónde estamos? (Amenábar 160)

tragedia, condenados y atrapados en su limbo particular como entes residuales, desposeídos de todo (imagen 12).⁴⁷

Más allá de las consideraciones de quienes habitan en el aislamiento, en el reducto cíclico del ayer, el plano general de la casa, la actualización del presente, muestra ahora que la propiedad no tiene dueño. De hecho, el cartel “En venta” impide la visibilidad de la fachada y, por ende, la representa finalmente como otro significante evanescente, fantasmático, suspendido en la nada, a la espera de un nuevo inicio de ciclo, constatándose, de este modo, la circularidad del film.⁴⁸ Es así como, a través del fundido en negro de la conclusión, Amenábar cierra la última puerta, aunque en nuestra imaginación, a través del mecanismo del quiasmo, todo regresa al principio, a la génesis del relato, a cada escena dentro de su desarrollo a fin de actualizarlas e interpretarlas desde las lecturas periféricas y a partir de su reflejo invertido.⁴⁹

Los otros es una historia sobre la demolición de la unidad familiar como trasunto de toda realidad acomodaticia, sobre la necesaria problematización de las verdades absolutas y la taxonomía unívoca como simulacros, sobre nuestra realidad, identidad y existencia movedizas, planteando la forzosa definición de nuestra esencia a través de la alteridad. Amenábar multiplica el potencial de la ambigüedad, la dualidad y la incertidumbre del género gótico para, merced a una reescritura posmoderna, elevarlo a una dimensión metafísica (Juan-Navarro 28). El film se visiona como una parábola sobre la disolución de las lindes entre lo legitimado y la otredad, una advertencia sobre la imposibilidad de fijar y categorizar sin cuestionamiento lo que ha de estar en el centro y aquello que debería permanecer excluido; es una distopía que ilustra la inversión —e invasión— de lo doméstico, la cordura, lo familiar y la ambigüación de conceptos que gozan de predicamento positivo en nuestra taxonomía automatizada. Así, el amor se revela como auténtica arma letal de nocivas consecuencias cuando la enajenación lo torna en posesión, tal y como corporeiza el referente deconstruido de esa madre que, lejos de ser ejemplar, representa,

⁴⁷ Hock (147) sostiene que Grace —como el resto de fantasmas en el film, añadimos nosotros— no pueden abandonar la casa pues son contingencia validada y posible sólo en el espacio específico vinculado a la tragedia.

⁴⁸ Así lo refrenda también la señora Mills en la versión original a través de esa curiosa afirmación postrera “The intruders are leaving, but others will come”. El espectador no puede evitar pensar en la posible ironía que, una vez clausurada la ambigüedad entre vivos y muertos, genera el par mínimo “leaving” vs. “living”.

⁴⁹ Redmon (256) se refiere al rédito y potencial significativo que garantiza un segundo visionado de películas en las que la sorpresa postergada hasta el final cambia por completo el sentido de los acontecimientos relatados: “one does not watch them the same way twice, but neither do these films become unwatchable after the reveal”.

justamente, el quiasmo oscuro de la virtud y la corporeización —aun inconsciente— de la maldad.

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Imagen 1: Simetrías y asimetrías del quiasmo visual. Tematización de lo latente y lo invertido



Imagen 2: Verticalidad por horizontalidad. Desautomatización de la mirada. Desequilibrio y psicopatía sugeridos



Imagen 3: Aleccionamiento en el credo unívoco



Imagen 4: Grace Stewart, guía y portadora de la luz legitimada

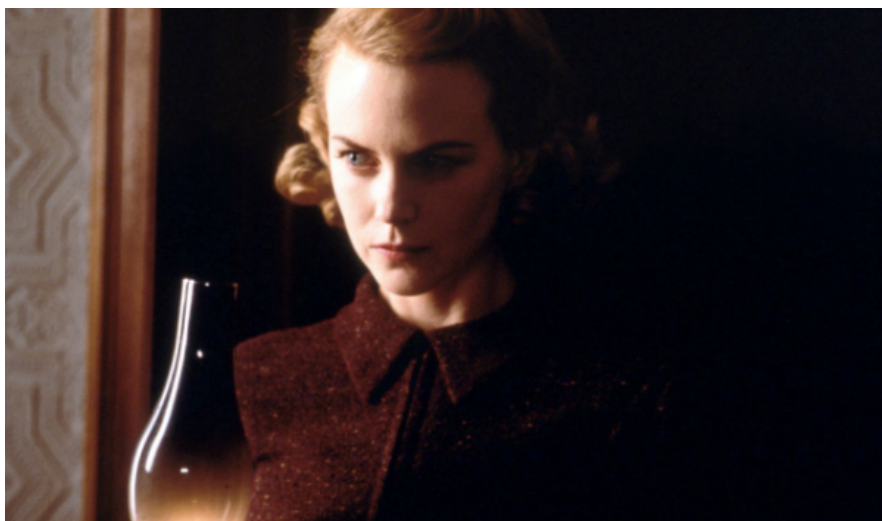


Imagen 5: La cárcel doméstica. Pavor y subyugación de Anne y Nicholas



Imagen 6: Sonidos acusmáticos de la amenaza. Picado e interpelación fuera de plano —externalizada— de la otredad por parte de Grace



Imagen 7: Súbita invisibilidad y espectralización del referente de identificación y punto de vista en escena. La sesión de “ouiija”



Imagen 8: Búsqueda, descubrimiento e interpelación de la antagonista



Imagen 9: Agresión frontal a la embocadura de plano. El espectador en el punto de mira



Imagen 10: Simetrías y quiasmo. Reflejos y revelación de muerte a uno y a otro lado del eje especular



Imagen 11: Asunción de la culpa y la fantasmagoría



Imagen 12: Espectros residentes y residuales en la hipodiégesis del más allá



THE *TRAGIC MULATTA* AND STORYTELLING IN ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

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Abstract

The figure of the *tragic mulatta* placed its origin in antebellum literature and was extensively used in the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Much has been written about this literary character in a time when the problem of miscegenation was at its highest point, and when studies established that races were inherently different, meaning that the black race was inferior to the white one. Many authors have made use of this trope for different purposes, and Zora Neale Hurston was one of them. In her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston creates Janie, a mulatta that a priori follows all the characteristics of this type of female character who, however, breaks away from most of them. She overcomes all stereotypes and prejudices, those imposed on her because of her condition of interracial offspring, and is able to take charge of her own life and challenge all these impositions feeling closer to her blackness and celebrating and empowering her female identity. In this vein, storytelling becomes the liberating force that helps her do so. It will become the tool that will enable her to ignore the need of passing as a white person and provide her with the opportunity to connect with her real identity and so feel free and happy, breaking with the tragic destiny of mulatta characters.

Keywords: storytelling, tragic mulatta, blackness, Hurston.

Resumen

La figura de la mulata trágica tiene su origen en la literatura anterior a la guerra y se usó de manera extensa en la literatura de los siglos diecinueve y veinte. Se ha escrito mucho sobre este personaje literario, sobretodo en una época en la que el problema del mestizaje estaba en su punto más álgido, y en la que los estudios establecían que las razas eran inherentemente diferentes, entendiéndose que la raza negra era inferior a la blanca. Muchos autores han hecho uso de este tropo con diferentes propósitos, y Zora Neale Hurston fue una de ellos. En su novela *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston crea a Janie, una mulata que a priori tiene todas las características de este tipo de personaje femenino pero que, sin embargo, rompe con todas ellas. Supera todos los estereotipos y prejuicios

impuestos sobre ella por su condición de descendiente de una relación interracial, y además es capaz de tomar las riendas de su vida y retar a todas estas imposiciones, sintiéndose cada vez más cerca de su raza y celebrando y empoderando su identidad femenina. En este sentido, la narración oral se convierte en la fuerza liberadora que la ayuda a conseguirlo. Se convertirá en el instrumento que la capacite para ignorar la necesidad de hacerse pasar por una persona blanca y le dará la oportunidad de conectar con su verdadera identidad y de sentirse libre y feliz, rompiendo con el destino trágico que espera a los personajes mulatos.

Palabras clave: narración oral, mulata trágica, negrura, Hurston.

The figure of the *tragic mulatta* placed its origin in antebellum literature and was extensively used in the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Much has been written about this literary character in a time when the problem of miscegenation was at its highest point, and when studies established that races were inherently different, meaning that the black race was inferior to the white one. This meant that the offspring of interracial mixing would contaminate the purity of the white race and consequently should be considered as a weak product that would not be able to produce – the term *mulatta* or *mulatto* originates from “mula,” which is also the result of two incompatible species that cannot reproduce. Many authors have made use of this trope for different purposes, and Zora Neale Hurston was one of them. In her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston creates Janie, a mulatta that a priori follows all the characteristics of this type of female character, but who actually breaks with most of them.

The *tragic mulatta* often referred to a light-skinned woman of mixed race who represented a middle point between white and black societies, never being completely accepted by any of them. Consequently, she is destined to suffer for different and varied reasons. This could be a general definition of this literary trope, although it is true that it was used differently by white and black writers, depending on the times and the point of view they wanted to deal with. The trope was firstly used by Lydia Maria Child, a white abolitionist who published her novels in 1840's and who created Rosalie, the protagonist of “The Quadroons.”¹ From that moment on, multiple versions are given of this character and the mulatta

¹ Rosalie is a near-white woman who falls in love and marries a white upper class man, despite being aware of her race. They have a daughter but Edward ultimately abandons them to marry a white woman. Edward repents but is unable to overcome political and social barriers and although he tries to protect his family, their daughter Xarifa is finally separated from her family and sold into the slave trade. She kills herself in desperation.

is typically depicted as one of these three ways: the first being a woman who looked white but was actually passing for it, who has suffered little in life but loses her social status once her real identity is discovered. The second being a black woman who passed for white and falls in love with a white man but is ultimately dismissed by society when she is discovered to be the product of an interracial relationship; and the third could be a black woman who enjoys all the pleasures and benefits of white people but who is subjected to slavery once her protector dies or decides to stop helping her.² As Eva Raimon says, "When the educated, light-skinned and sexually vulnerable female character is exposed to sexual threat due to being revealed as the offspring of a black slave and then a slave herself, she awakens the sympathies of the reader as well as functioning as a necessary plot mechanism" (5). The truth is that Hurston did not seem to be ready to conform to the standards this character implied. She stated "I am not tragically colored" ("How it Feels" 95) in her essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," and considered that "the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less" (96), considering herself "cosmic Zora" (96). That is, she purposely rejected the idea of feeling inferior because of her race and transcended the trope of *tragic mulatta*. Hurston also did it when she wrote, particularly in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and for this reason, she created a powerful female character that used her own African American culture to find her own identity and fight against the destiny she was given due to her mixed-race condition.

Taking this into account, my contentions in this work are twofold: First to demonstrate that Hurston breaks with the traditional imagery connected to the tragic mulatta creating Janie, who overcomes all stereotypes and prejudices imposed on her due to her condition of interracial offspring and who is able to take charge of her own life and challenge all these impositions, feeling closer to her blackness and celebrating and empowering her female identity. Second, that storytelling becomes the liberating force that helps her do so. It will become the

² Many of the novels published after Child's included these characters. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853), Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859) or Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted* (1892) all presented female protagonists that follow the patron of the *tragic mulatta*. Beautiful mulattas who marry, fall in love or have children with white masters but who are denied a happy ending, like in *Clotel* and *Our Nig* or a mulatta as Iola Leroy, who was brought up as a white woman. She is pressed to marry a white man on the condition that she never reveals her true identity but she refuses to do it in order to marry a black man. Of course, she is never fully accepted by the black community because she is an educated woman. In the twentieth century the trope continued to be used in works by authors such as Pauline Hopkins and her novel *Hagar's Daughter: Or a Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901-2). Here the writer uses the trope of the *tragic mulatta* to consider the multiple contradictions related to black women at the end of the century, as well as to deal with the idea of passing for a white person.

tool that will enable her to ignore the need of passing for white and provide her with the opportunity to connect with her real identity and in this vein, feel free and happy, breaking with the tragic destiny of mulatta characters.

Janie's life can be divided into four main stages that correspond not only to the men she was related associated with but also with her growing awareness about her identity as a black woman and her decision to break with what was expected of her. Her childhood, her marriage with Logan Killicks, her relationship with Joe Starks and her love affair with Tea Cake all help her develop her personality. Her connection with storytelling will be essential to understand her evolution and to distance herself from the tragic destiny she was expected to suffer.

Janie grows up under the protection of her grandmother, Nanny. She never met her mother or father and the old woman's influence on her life will be a determining factor for her future. For the first years of her life she is completely unaware of her condition of mixed blood that she did not even know she was a "colored" girl. Living in a house on the property of Mrs. Washburn, she really believed she was like the white children she used to play with. It is not until she is six years old that she discovers that she is not white. She was happy at that time, until she got to school and children used to tease her because she used to wear better clothes than they did and because of her ribbons. At this stage of her life Janie is disconnected from her black culture, at least until white children at school started to tell her stories about her mother and her father, stories that reminded her of her origin and tried to disturb and annoy Janie. As Hurston said "I do not always feel colored... I feel more colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" ("How it Feels" 96). Like Hurston, Janie only feels she is different when others remind her.

Nanny is presented here as a slavery sufferer who wants for her granddaughter all she could not achieve for herself and for her daughter. This implies being completely independent and unrelated to what being a black person implied at that time, enjoying the pleasures of a free life and trying to get protection from someone who can provide you with life quality, that is, trying to pass for white. This is why they moved from Mrs Washburn's backyard and why she used to remind Janie of the condition of black men and especially women.

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he habe to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been

prayin' fuh it to be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd! (Hurston, *Eyes* 14).

Nanny is resentful and conscious of racial and social inequalities, but above all, she is completely aware of sexual oppression. Most African American authors, especially African American women writers dealt with topics related to women and their strength while preserving culture and traditions. Traditionally they were categorized as mammies, concubines, conjure women and mulattas, broadly speaking. In works written by men, mammies appear idealized maternal characters and resembled the figure of the earth-mother, who had to nurture children and are always ready to help others, especially white people and their children. This is the case of works such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. However, here Nanny is presented completely different. She is so aware of the differences between white and black people that she wants something better for her granddaughter. For her, black women were not only oppressed by white masters but also by their own men. Indeed, one of the reasons why the trope of the *tragic mulatta* became so popular in antebellum literature was that she resembled the protagonists of sentimental stories which were a popular entertainment for white women at that time. The Cult of True Womanhood was the determining ideology for middle-class women at that time and produced a true woman who was a chaste and pure heroine whose characteristics differed from those of black women and their sexuality (Carby 21). In this vein, black women were considered impure and only useful for reproduction, being excluded from womanhood and represented as sexual immoral beings.³ This is what Nanny experienced as a slave and was not ready to forget. However, unlike other mammies, Nanny had dreams. She did not want her child and her granddaughter to suffer what she suffered and never conformed to the way women were treated, she "wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but they wasn't no pulpit for me" (Hurston, *Eyes* 16). Her daughter was a mulatta and therefore a reminder of the master's infidelity for the white woman and of their oppression of black women. From the moment she was born, Nanny was conscious of her need to protect her from her destiny, but she could not do it. The tragic destiny of mulatta girls overtook her and she got lost, despite her mother's effort to prevent it and despite almost being born into freedom. Nanny felt Janie was another opportunity for her to develop her dreams

³ According to Barbara Welter, between the 1820's and 1860's, The Cult of True Womanhood was the stable ideology that held the Anglo-Saxon value system in place (152). The ideal of femininity was based on piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity and circulated in magazines read by women at that time. The model continued to the nineteenth century and changed the way women perceived themselves and depicted themselves in literature (Welter 174).

of seeing a really free black woman, as she would have liked to be. She said “So whilst Ah was tendin’ you of nights Ah said Ah’d save de text for you Ah been waitin’ a long time, Janie, but nothin’ Ah been through ain’t too much if you just take a stand on high ground lak Ah dreamed” (Hurston, *Eyes* 16). Nanny is aware that both black and white men devalue the black woman but the black woman “must nevertheless realize her potential as a woman and as a human being while avoiding victimization” (Ferguson 186). That is, Hurston concentrates on survival and search of freedom and presents a woman who struggles to achieve dignity for herself and for her offspring. As Claudia Tate states, a dominant theme was “the quest-theme – a character’s personal search for a meaningful identity and for self-sustaining dignity in the world of growing isolation, meaningless and moral decay” (3). That is why she forces Janie to marry Logan Killicks when she sees her kissing a boy in the garden. For her, Janie’s marriage to Killicks is her opportunity to take a step up on the social ladder. He is financially acceptable and with him Janie could have possessions. This means she will be closer to white people’s position in society and that she could pass for being white, at least economically speaking.

This second stage in Janie’s life turns her into a woman. From a teenager who dreams of finding a romantic love, she becomes a married woman who feels unhappy and angry because of her grandmother’s pressure on getting a husband. Despite Nanny’s efforts to distance Janie from the tragic destiny of mulattas, she unintentionally throws her towards it once she starts to live with Killick. Physically, Janie embodies the features that characterize mulatta. Hurston creates a character that follows this aesthetic to emphasize their resemblance, with her “coffee and cream complexion” and her long and straight black hair. However, instead of being sold to slave owners, or of being socially isolated, she becomes a slave to her husband, who treats her as a mule and who is unable to offer her the type of love she dreamed of. Initially, Killick’s attentive attitude towards Janie with his rhyming words turns into that of a master who commands her to plow his fields, who buys her a mule and who treats her as a mule. He constantly reminds Janie that the appropriate place for a black woman is beyond the threshold, where she can be protected, but also where she can be treated as a slave. Killick also considers that Janie feels she was more than that because she was raised in a white kitchen surrounded by white people. He accuses her of feeling superior and of being spoiled and that is why he stops pampering her. For Janie, he is “accusing her of her mamma, her gradmama and her feelings” (Hurston, *Eyes* 32). Killick does not let her interact with her community, as she spends her time working on the fields. In this marriage, Janie feels miserable and captive, unable to escape from him and destined to live a life without love and passion, until she decides to run away and take control of her destiny. This happens when he meets Joe Starks

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and ultimately when she discovers the real African American culture. As Sally Ann Ferguson states, when Killick buys a second-plow and reveals his plan to make Janie the dreaded mule Nanny so much hated, Janie runs off with another man, and:

Her rebellious behavior signals her early determination to defend herself against assaults on her giving and loving nature. Her rebellion is analogous to that of an actual mule later in the novel – a dumb animal that stubbornly refuses until death to submit to an even dumber man. In escaping from Logan Janie foreshadows her ability to triumph over patriarchal oppression throughout her life. (187)

When Joe Starks appears in Janie's life she uses him as an escape route that will change her routinely mundane life into something exciting and unexpected. He is presented as a way to save Janie from her *tragic mulatta* destiny, but again she goes straight towards it. Instead of her savior, Joe becomes Janie's captor, and storytelling became the only force that will free her. It is at this stage of her life that she finds out the importance of African American storytelling culture and her need to participate in it. As Joe becomes more and more important in Eatonville, Janie becomes more and more isolated. She starts to lose her own identity to be the Mayor's wife, a beautiful and supportive wife who did not think on her own, a status that she never fully accepted and that Joe promoted. The lovely suitor that told her about money and love became cruel and uninterested in Janie except for her role as his wife. He considered himself able to rule over anyone and anything in Eatonville and thought he was God-like, calling himself "I god" (Hurston, *Eyes* 35). Among the many things he thought he could control (people, money, or even the city itself) Janie was no exception. When she was asked to say a few words after Joe was appointed Mayor, he interjects and prevents her from expressing herself by saying: "Thank yuh fuh yo' compliments, but mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin.' Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (Hurston, *Eyes* 43). Joe makes his position on women and his wife's place in society clear to the town; she was a trophy doll. Indeed, it is at this point in Janie's life that Hurston emphasizes her beauty too, because for many mulattas, beauty is not a positive attribute. As Malin Pereira stated, the mulatta enters literary representation as a figure of negotiation, of "both defined female beauty and white defined literary conventions" (12). For her, "the mulatta literally embodies white aesthetics, as both artistic conventions of representation and a system of judgment of artistic value" (12). Janie's beauty attracts Joe because he views her as an object that will be useful to achieve his goals. She is young, beautiful and represents what the wife of an important man should be. This implies that she should be static and unable to think for herself.

His obsession with getting power includes his fear of losing her and his extreme jealousy. He was jealous of anybody getting around her, so much so that he obliged Janie to tie up her hair. Indeed, this is one of Janie's most characterizing features. Her straight hair was envied by black women while black men felt attracted towards it, probably because it symbolized a white beauty model. When Joe realizes that, he decides "She was there in the store for him to look at, not those others" (Hurston, *Eyes* 55). By having her tie up her hair, Joe was taking control of Janie's sexuality and her interactions with other people.

Joe is often compared to Joe the Grinder as his relationship with Janie resembles that of Jody's legend. In black folklore, Jody becomes a metaphor for stagnant and fleeting adulterous relationships. Traditionally he possesses the verbal abilities and sexual prowess to seduce lonely and vulnerable women but lacks however, the money and much of everything else to keep these women after their husbands come back. Joe, like his namesake is able to seduce Janie with his words too but does it promising to turn her into his wife and that she would be envied and admired by everybody else. That is, instead of making promises of sexual good times, "he dangles before her the far horizons and newness and change that lead to the self-discovery and spiritual growth she seeks" (Ferguson 188). Because she now understands the role of money better in people's lives, she becomes more vulnerable to his offers, always thinking of her grandmother's advices, who "had always insisted that Janie could never become a lady of quality until she had a husband who treated her the same way white Washburn treated his wife" (Ferguson 188-9). However, although he gets to seduce her, he is unable to subjugate Janie completely. At this time she discovers that black people have a culture, and that she likes it. Joe had forbidden her to speak with other common people, but she finds out that she wants to be part of these people and that she enjoys their stories. On the contrary, Joe's actions within the town were all directed to the achievement of power and recognition, as well as to the control of natural processes. However, the townspeople compare his achievements to those of white owners. When he orders a ditch to be dug in front of his house to drain water, the people "murmur hotly about slavery being over" (Hurston, *Eyes* 75) and that they looked like servants of the big house. As Donald Marks states, "Hurston clearly considers the kind of social system Starks establishes to be as oppressive and economically unbalanced as that imposed by white society" (153). Unlike Joe, Janie does not pretend to be white or behave as such, and felt miserable when people did not fully accept her because of her social status:

Janie soon began to feel the impact of awe and envy against her sensibilities. The wife of the Mayor was not just another woman as she had supposed. She slept with authority and so she was part of it in the

town mind. She couldn't get but so close to most of them in spirit.
(Hurston, *Eyes* 46)

Unlike other mulatta characters and unlike Joe, who is obsessed with his power and the image that mirrors white society, she feels proud of her origins and wants to participate in them. She does not want to meet white standards or integrate into white society. As Jane Caputi stated, "the typical tragic mulatto formula centers upon a beautiful woman, whose touch of racial 'impurity' proves catastrophic, usually due to her desire for a white lover" (707). Indeed, historically the ability to pass for white was not only the condition to get citizenship but even to be considered a complete human being. At an individual level, passing for white meant that the person became white by forgetting, ignoring or denying his or her African identity. What is more, the position of the person who passed was problematic from both African American and white perspectives and for the mulatta, passing meant being considered a traitor to her race. However, for Janie the process is completely the opposite. She feels happy once she discovers the truth of her culture, and the more she participates in it, the more comfortable she is. Janie is a mulatta "who sees herself to as part of the folk" (Christian 59).

Social life in Eatonville centered around the porch, where people sat and talked about their day, as well as sharing stories and singing to have fun. "In between times, they told stories, laughed and told more stories and sung songs" (Hurston, *Eyes* 45). Indeed, the porch is essential to African American storytelling and Hurston provides it with an important role in the novel. It is the place where Janie feels free and close to her culture, to the people she liked to spend time with and where she did not feel like a prisoner. According to Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon, William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, these demonstrate how the house porch was historically set in Southern culture as an escape from the stultifying heat of summer and it became synonymous with summer socializing. It is a place where individuals can sit to watch the community go by, to welcome people and tell stories. Apart from this, according to Donlon, the porch is a transitional space between public and private where individuals can negotiate an identity within a community of shared customs, "largely through the stories they tell" (95). She says "Facilitating yet limiting access to others, the porch inextricably links community storytellers to each other, while restricting the degree of intimacy and power they can realize" (95). According to her, the novels confirm that the power of storytelling porches can be double-edged. If the individuals are able to resist the authority of the dominant community, "the overpowering constraints of the porch can virtually quash an individual's identity" (95). If it is used productively, the storytelling porches can create a space where individuals tell stories to display power in the face of an

established social order. Janie feels empowered too. As she participates more in storytelling, she finds her voice and Joe begins to feel more threatened. She was supposed to be mute and not to make her own decisions or have an opinion, but she was not ready to accept these standards and she defended herself. Joe starts to humiliate her in public, but once again, Hurston makes her heroine win the battle of tragic destiny and Janie is able to turn the situation, responding to her husband's offenses using words and storytelling. She had been silent for too long, and had realized that her marriage had finished long ago, but one day: "Janie did what she had never done before, that is, thrust herself into the conversation" (Hurston, *Eyes* 75). She wanted to be heard and years after Joe mocked her about her age, for the first and last time in her life she told her husband off in front of everyone, and won:

Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo' but den Ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n you kin say. You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brah, but' tain't nothin' to it but you' big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout me looking' old! When you pull down you' britches you look lak de change uh life. (Hurston, *Eyes* 79)

Hurston provides Janie with the skill in the "dozen," a "black folk game of verbal agility in which participants attempt comically but seriously to out-insult each other. ... This folkloric device permits Janie to outperform Jody at his best skill, talking" (Ferguson 190). He is unable to control her and this makes him furious. She undercuts his link to the "Grinder" part of the myth – which is a metaphor in black folklore for a type of coital movement – implying that unlike his namesake, Jody cannot "grind" (Ferguson 190). That moment he knew he had lost:

Then Joe Starks realized all the meanings and his vanity bled like a flood. Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible. The thing that Saul's daughter had done to David. But Janie had done worse, she had cast down his empty armor before men and they had laughed. They would keep on laughing. ... there was nothing to do in life anymore. Ambition was useless. And the cruel deceit of Janie! (Hurston, *Eyes* 79-80)

Although Joe felt miserable, Janie was free to say what she thought for the first time and this would mean a new beginning in her life. When Joe became ill, she was also able to tell him about her feelings:

You done lived wid me for twenty years and you don't know half atall. And you could have but you was so busy whorsippin' de works of you' own hands, and cuffin' folks around in their mind till you didn't see uh whole heap uh things yuh could have. (Hurston, *Eyes* 86)

But above all, Janie thought about herself and realized she still had a long time to live, alone and free after Joe's death. Although she was not young anymore, a "handsome woman had taken her place" (Hurston, *Eyes* 87). The symbol of her beauty, which had been hidden, appeared again and she "tore off the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there. She took careful stock of herself, then combed her hair and tied it back up again" (Hurston, *Eyes* 87). She continued with her life, untied her hair after the funeral and did what she wanted the most, to participate in porch talks: "That was the only change people saw in her. She kept the story in the same way except of evenings she sat on the porch and listened and sent Hezekiah in to wait on late custom" (Hurston, *Eyes* 89). Unlike other mulatta characters, Janie did not look for another suitor that would help her fit into the white world or to provide her with a wealthy lifestyle, and above all she does not want to pass for white any longer. She had been looking for love all her life and she had not found it yet, but being part of black culture gave her the chance to feel happy. However, until then, she had not had the opportunity to participate actively in storytelling, she was a mere spectator, until she met Tea Cake. This would be the beginning of a new stage in her life, maturity.

After rejecting some suitors, Janie meets Tea Cake, a completely different man from what she was accustomed to. He is not related to social order or economic profit, but unlike Killicks or Starks he is related to more mundane actions, such as gambling, fighting or storytelling. He embodies the black spirit, not the materialistic one so he does not promise Janie social status or money, rather he praises her beauty. He does not want to treat her like a mule, but teaches her to develop her abilities. His freedom allows Janie to participate more in her community than she had ever done before. However, once again Hurston creates a male character which is closely connected to an African American mythological figure. Tea Cake is often compared to the African mythological figure of Stagolee. Stagolee is categorized as a "badman," a violent man who usually breaks the law and causes trouble to those around him. There are multiple versions of his story and most of them are usually exaggerated and tragic. The most famous ballad in which he appears is the one in which he kills Billy Lyons because he had stolen his Stetson hat that "gives him trickster or shape-shifting capabilities" (Leeming and Page 172). However, his crimes do not always go unpunished, although there are multiple versions of it:

But Stagolee does not kill with impunity. Sometimes the deputies the sheriff attempts to form into a posse are so intimidated by the famous badman they refuse to help with arrest. But almost universally the sheriff kills Stagolee or apprehends him. He is taken to court and sentenced to death. At this point the variants show the greatest difference in their treatment of Stagolee.⁴ (Bryant 14)

Just after getting married he steals two hundred dollars from her and wastes them on a night of drinking and getting into trouble. He tells Janie that he just wanted to feel what it meant to be rich and promises that he will pay her back all the money he had spent gambling with the twelve dollars he still had left. Like Stagolee, he refuses to be secondary in society and “imbued with a heroic nature resistant to societal conventions, Tea Cake exhibits a freedom of spirit so assured of its own self-worth that he consequently cannot deny a similar feeling to the woman he loves” (Ferguson 192-3). However, he also behaves “bad” as Stagolee does. Indeed, he usually hits his wife in order to feel superior to her. He explains “Janie is wherever Ah wants tuh be. Dat’s de kind uh wife she is and Ah love her for it. ... Ah didn’t whup Janie’ cause she done nothin’ Ah beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss” (Hurston, *Eyes* 148). With this behavior, he again resembles Stagolee who, “when compared with the traditional epic hero, does not always act in regard for his people and his woman. His exploits are often performed to exhibit his virility” (quoted in Ferguson 194).

Nevertheless, Tea Cake provides Janie with the opportunity to live a different life, closer to African American culture. She will start to live meaningfully in a community which is far from social constraints and which does not worry about emulating the structures and mechanisms of white communities. Setting the novel in Eatonville, Hurston was making a political statement. It was the first of all black towns in the country and with this the author seemed to be asking for more. It could be seen as a paradise for Afro-American people as they lived and developed in a place which was far from the racism of the white world, where they could be majors, doctors or simply themselves. However, there were some limitations too, as although they did not have to struggle against racism coming from white people, they did face gossip, sexism and jealousy, as in any other town. Eatonville was also a town opposed to the rural areas where Janie had grown up and spent the

⁴ The mythological figure has evolved. In antebellum literature Stagolee was the prototype of the “bad nigger,” because he was the only black man to fight the slavery system and to be unafraid of white masters. In postbellum literature, he became the hero of the black community because he faced racial discrimination with courage and strength, but was equally feared because of his inability to show constraint. In more modern tales, Stagolee turned into a lover who is able to use his gun anytime.

first years of her life. It was the place where she lost her innocence and discovered her ability to deceive and where she learned to be herself. Since it was a town, it implied walls and buildings that seemed to imprison her. In fact, she felt both physically and metaphorically confined by Joe in that place and needed to leave it behind in order to feel free again. Indeed, Eatonville was totally the opposite of the rural areas where she was happy as a child. Later on, by moving the story to the Everglades, Hurston is able to offer a different version of African American people, working on fields as slaves had done previously. Hurston offers readers an insight into the life of workers and describes the way they danced, sang or played blues, told stories and met after work. This was denied to slaves, but they always found ways to socialize. Janie describes it: "All night now the jooks changed and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour" (Hurston, *Eyes* 131). When Janie is there and recalls her life in Eatonville, she thinks of the Everglades as the place where she could find herself and be free to tell and listen to stories:

Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself is she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories herself from listening to the rest. Because she loved to hear it, and the men loved to hear themselves, they would 'woof' and 'booger-boo.'" (Hurston, *Eyes* 134)

People in the Everglades did not worry about making money, owning a property or getting higher in the social scale. As Marks stated:

This is the life 'on the muck' and it is this life which Janie's passionate relationship with Tea Cake affirms. Hurston romanticizes the community on the Everglades as a kind of brotherhood that is free of the constraints and class divisions imposed by a mechanistic, capitalistic society like that of Eatonville. (155)

Her participation in the life of the community in Everglades is totally the opposite of her isolation in Eatonville, as her relationship with Joe is just the opposite of her relationship with Tea Cake. Janie does not only listen to people speak as she did in the city, but she starts to create stories and tell them, becoming a good storyteller. As Missy Dehn Kubitschek stated, "these storytelling sessions are crucial to the community unity and self-definition, since they generate and develop communal tradition. Participation in this process is also crucial for the individual's self-definition, since communal traditions define available roles" (112). Janie had a passive role in Eatonville, avoiding conflicts with her husband, but in the Everglades she is ready to participate actively in storytelling, exemplifying Hurston's "vision of the relationship between communal and

individual definition” (Kubitschek 112). This new identification of her soul and this new understanding of her life as a participant of black society and communities separate Janie from her tragic mulatta destiny.

It is at this stage of the novel that Hurston emphasizes Janie’s need to express herself and get close to African American culture, and she also does it opposing her female protagonist to others in the novel, such as Mrs. Turner, whose “disfavourite subject was Negroes” (Hurston, *Eyes* 208). She loves and worships all things which are white and disdains Tea Cake because he is too black, to which Janie replies “we’re uh mingled people and all of us got black kinfolks as well as yaller kinfolks” (Hurston, *Eyes* 210). Unlike this mulatta, Janie is proud of her race and does not want to pretend to be another thing, and above all she is happy to be close to her origins. As Caputi established, the novel is

...an assertion of racial and sexual pride, and freedom and self – love for women, regardless of oppressive attitudes, regarding race, sex and age ... The characterization of Janie demolishes the stereotype of *the tragic mulatta* yearning to be white, while that of Mrs. Turner teaches that same type of any and all sympathy. (709)

Despite Janie’s attempts to escape from the tragic destiny of mulatta characters, and despite being happier at Everglades than at any other places in the world, Hurston does not let Janie completely enjoy herself. Her relationship with Tea Cake is also related to violence and jealousy and the end had to be tragic. After being bitten by the dog and contracting rabies, Tea Cake’s jealousy is exacerbated and Janie saves her life by shooting him, facing the stereotypical mulatta destiny. However, Hurston chooses for her to survive and not Tea Cake, because as Ferguson said, Hurston knows that “despite her victimization in America, the black woman is no sick machonist ... Hurston suggests that black female should stand ready to love yet defend themselves even against their own men, who occasionally place their fragile manhood above the woman’s personal safety” (194). Janie is able to overcome tragedy again despite killing the love of her life. She becomes free after being helped by white women, because at the end Hurston is creating a realistic story about a black woman that may look similar to white ones. Hurston does not want her protagonist to become a simple mulatta who suffers as others do, instead she portrays a woman who was looking for love and passion all her life, who had to endure quite difficult situations on the way. When all her suitors turned difficult to deal with, she found a way to survive, because she did not want to be a victim of her destiny.

When she returns to Eatonville after Tea Cake's death, she is again able to get over the situation, despite her loneliness as well as the gossip and the rejection of her neighbors, and she does it by becoming a storyteller. She decides to tell her own story, from the very beginning, letting people participate in it, and turning into one of the most important figures of African American literature, that of a griot or storyteller. Her tale becomes a demonstration to the town and to herself that she was victorious at the end and that, despite suffering, she could avoid the destiny of mixed-race women. As Missy Dehn Kubitschek defined, "Janie, always sufficiently knowledgeable of white culture to ensure her survival, discovers her soul only through the art of storytelling, thus intimating the artist's responsibility to, and dependence on, a larger community" (109). She could have stayed at Everglades but decides to go back to Eatonville and let people know all about her life outside that place, and she does it as a self-revelation, because after that she has to go on. She prefers to remember only good moments with Tea Cake and despite loving and losing him she has understood that their relationship has also helped her discover things about her own soul that she did not know before, and now she is able to compare: "Now, dat's how everything wus, Pheoby, jus'lak Ah told yuh. So Ah'm back home agin and Ah'm satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons" (Hurston, *Eyes* 191).

Janie exemplifies Hurston's desire to break with traditional stereotypes placed on African American female characters and also on mulatta characters. She does not pretend to be white but on the contrary feels proud of her race and her culture. She overcomes multiple difficulties, mostly related to the men she lived with, and finishes her life in peace and happiness. In the process she discovers her identity as a black woman and the importance of storytelling and community in the life of African American people. Hurston places Janie in difficult situations but she solves all of them. Each time she becomes freer and closer to her roots and to her own independence, celebrating her condition of African American and woman. When at the end of the novel she becomes the storyteller of her own life and experiences, the reader understands that Hurston has achieved her main purpose: creating a black protagonist who is different from other mulatta characters, providing her with a happy ending and using one of the most important elements of African American culture to get it, storytelling.

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GENDER AND VICTIMIZATION IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *SURFACING*

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Abstract

Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), a contemporary classic nowadays, has raised the interest of all kinds of critics. Some of the most remarkable elements in the novel concern feminism, a movement with which the Canadian author has been highly committed. This paper deals with two specific aspects in Atwood's work in relation to the aforementioned critical approach: gender and victimization. A thorough reading of the novel is thus done in order to detect and subsequently dissect the main instances of both aspects. Special attention is paid to female characters (Anna and the unnamed protagonist), hypersexualized and victimized in the patriarchal microcosms rendered in the story.

Keywords: Atwood, feminism, gender, victimization, hypersexualization, patriarchy

Resumen

Surfacing (1972), de Margaret Atwood, un clásico contemporáneo hoy en día, ha despertado el interés de todo tipo de críticos. Algunos de los elementos más destacables de la novela atañen al feminismo, un movimiento con el que la autora canadiense ha tenido un gran compromiso. Este trabajo aborda dos aspectos específicos en la obra de Atwood en relación con el mencionado enfoque crítico: género y victimización. Se hace así una lectura exhaustiva de la novela a fin de detectar y analizar minuciosamente los principales ejemplos de uno y otro aspecto. Se presta especial atención a los personajes femeninos (Anna y la protagonista sin nombre), hipersexualizadas y victimizadas en el microcosmos patriarcal que se representa en la historia.

Palabras clave: Atwood, feminismo, género, victimización, hipersexualización, patriarcado

1. Introduction

Surfacing (1972) is the second novel by the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood. It narrates the story of an unnamed woman who goes, with her boyfriend Joe and another couple (David and Anna), to her homeland in Canada (Northern Quebec) to investigate the mysterious disappearance of her father, of which she has been informed through a letter sent by Paul, a friend from the place. What follows is a journey of self-discovery: the unnamed protagonist (UP hereafter, for mere communicative pragmatism) immerses herself in a process of remembrance through which her past and present intertwine.

Whereas in the book Atwood reflects upon a variety of topics (identity, language, memory, imagination and hallucination or human and animal life, to mention but a few of them), this paper will be exclusively focused on gender issues, certainly one of the fundamental aspects in the construction of the novel. In particular, special attention will be paid to the sense of victimization on the part of the two female characters of the story: UP and Anna, different women that are somehow connected in the plot because of their female condition.

Since a close reading of the novel has been done to write this essay, passages from the book will be frequently quoted in order to illustrate the ideas covered; this will be the main point of reference for the elaboration of the work. In a complementary way, we will also occasionally include some specific academic references that may corroborate our thesis or, simply, add relevant information to the topic of the paper. Specifically, the main bibliographical sources used belong to the gender studies field and offer a feminist approach to Atwood's novel, with special emphasis on the notion of victimization and on its relation with nature – that is, ecofeminism– through the characters and elements shaping the work.

In this way, the current article intends to revise such aspects and expand on them by doing, as stated by New Criticism, a *close reading* of the text. This is precisely where the originality of our paper may mostly lie. When the fragments quoted correspond to Atwood's book, we will simply specify between brackets the number of the page(s) from which each quotation has been extracted.

2. Preliminary notes on gender issues in the novel

The course of events in *Surfacing* is intelligently unfolded by Margaret Atwood in such a way that the sense of female subalternity (adapting Antonio Gramsci's [2005] wider term) is gradually perceived in a more conspicuous manner. Already at the beginning of chapter 1, UP is in David's car ("a lumbering monster," [4] as she labels it) on her way to Quebec and remarks: "David says

they can't afford a newer one, which probably isn't true. He's a good driver, I realize that, I keep my outside hand on the door in spite of it" (4). At this early point of the story, readers may wonder if they are reading the words of an overly dubious narrator or those of a victimized woman in a precarious position; throughout the novel we notice it is the latter.

Needless to say, to reach such conclusion we have to rely on the perception of an unnamed narrator who seems to suffer from hallucination. Although we consider that her voice is perfectly reliable regarding the description of factual events (past and present) and we will develop our thesis accordingly, we anyway believe that mentioning it is not pointless: the novel is written in first-person, which inevitably entails a series of specificities and narrative limitations. *Reductio ad absurdum* or not, the reader is never told explicitly that UP is a woman; synopsis in the back cover of the book aside, we must infer it from the way she interacts with the other characters and from some particularly clarifying reflections on marriage, school life or men's tastes, such as: "My status is a problem, they obviously think I'm married. But I'm safe, I'm wearing my ring, I never threw it out, it's useful for landladies" (24); "it was worse for a girl to ask questions than for a boy" (124); "men's magazines were about pleasure, cars and women" (143). By extension, it also seems quite congruent that the book is the work of a female writer; would a man have been able to convey the same feelings of the protagonist in the way Margaret Atwood does?¹

Evidently enough, the fact that the protagonist is a woman is paramount in shaping the narrative mood of the novel and its subsequent feminist interpretations: the whole story is filtered through her perception of reality as a woman. To give but one example, if the story were narrated by David, the scene in which Anna is forced to take off her clothes would obviously still be an abuse, but it would, however, be probably approached as 'mere fun' –or similar– on the part of the narrator. In other words, whereas facts in the story remain the same regardless of the narrating voice, the process of filtering and analyzing them for a feminist study such as this is different and, probably, shorter when we are told the

¹ Most likely, cross gender writing requires a higher degree of reason and objectivity on the part of writers, who cannot transfigure their own experiences in their fictional *alter ego* in the way they would do with a character of their same sex. As psychologist Dr. Vivian Diller (quoted in Willens) explains, "Authors who write about their own gender use their internal experience and speak from the inside out. When they write about the opposite sex, their perspective has to shift—from the outside in. Neither is necessarily better but rather they try different points of view." This obviously does not necessarily mean that a female author cannot shape a complex male character or vice versa (Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* [1857] or León Tolstói's *Anna Karénina* [1877] are two eloquent instances of it); it simply is, in any case, a worth considering tendency.

story by a female character. The voices of both the first-person narrator and of Margaret Atwood herself strengthen and facilitate dealing with the book from a female perspective.

Notwithstanding that a biographical reading of the novel is not our main aim, we consider it pertinent to mention here that the thoughts and insight of the author and the protagonist may intertwine in more than one occasion.² One year after the publication of *Surfacing*, in 1973, Margaret Atwood divorced from her first husband; the novel –maybe as a correlative fiction– is brimming with reflections on marriage and divorce, two of the elements from the past of the protagonist that linger on her present and that more clearly configure her distress and victim status (which we will explore more deeply in the next section). In chapter 3, UP brings to mind her marriage and divorce for the first time, when thinking of her parents: “they never forgave me, they didn’t understand the divorce; I don’t think they even understood the marriage, which wasn’t surprising since I didn’t understand it myself” (32). Later on, she remembers her ex-husband from the point of view of failure: “It was good at first but he changed after I married him, he married me, we committed that paper act” (46). Concurrently, a sentiment of forced pregnancy is noticeable in her words: “It was my husband’s [child], he imposed it on me, all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator” (38-39); or “He wanted a child, that’s normal, he wanted us to be married” (56). In other cases, the wedding ring is even depicted as a symbol of oppression: “I wore his ring, too big for any of my fingers, around my neck on a chain, like a crucifix or a military decoration” (62). All these somehow repressed feelings will derive in the character’s reluctance to become engaged again, which will trigger the arguments between her and Joe in the second part of the novel. The following passage illustrates how her former marriage still haunts her in a powerful way:

‘Look’, I said, ‘I’ve been married before and it didn’t work out. I had a baby too’. My ace, voice patient. ‘I don’t want to go through that again.’ It was true, but the words were coming out of me like the mechanical words from a talking doll, the kind with the pull tape at the back; the whole speech was unwinding, everything in order, a spool. I would always be able to say what I’d just finished saying: I’ve tried and failed, I’m inoculated, exempt, classified as wounded. It wasn’t that I didn’t

² Although any literary work is somehow autobiographical, it is no less true that in some cases the sense of autobiography is much more conspicuous or significant than in others. In *Surfacing*, we mean that some of Atwood’s ideas and logical processes can be particularly relevant to understand those of UP and, perhaps to a lesser extent, of Anna and even of the rest of the characters. The author dilutes her consciousness among the different actants –following Greimas’ terminology–, but only one or two of them are imbued with the greatest part of it.

suffer, I was conscientious about that, that's what qualified me. But marriage was like playing Monopoly or doing crossword puzzles, either your mind worked that way, like Anna's, or it didn't; and I'd proved mine didn't. A small neutral country. (110-11)

The ideas about marriage and giving birth appear throughout the whole novel and, especially, in the first part, where we find one of Atwood's most famous quotations: "A divorce is like an amputation, you survive but there's less of you" (49). Judging by the author's own sentimental situation when writing the book, it should thus be no surprise that, albeit not exactly an *alter ego*, UP is used by Atwood to channel some of her own thoughts, perhaps particularly intense at that time. Critics have indeed celebrated *Surfacing*, as Fiona Tolan (35) notes, "as the work that most closely associates Atwood's novel writing to her poetry." The writer being a woman is definitely an important aspect to be taken into consideration when analyzing the feminist framework of the novel.

3. Victimization in female characters

As it has been already remarked, there is more than one element conveying a sense of victimization in *Surfacing*; namely, the American pervasive politics and way of life (specifically, affecting nature and Canadian identity) and the dominance of an overly patriarchal culture. In this regard, Emily Denommé (2) alludes to a double sense of victimization: "The journey of Atwood's narrator highlights the problematic groupings that her society demands in terms of nationality and gender. Under these categories, the narrator is doubly victimized as a Canadian and as a woman". While it is convenient to have the former in mind too, we will henceforth refer almost exclusively to the latter: victimization of women as the result of masculine dominance.

The sense of gender victimization in the novel is, in turn, split between the two main female characters of the story, Anna and UP (the two other women characters being Madame –Paul's wife– and a random clerk from a store, both of whom appear only in the first chapters). Interestingly enough, although both of them are arguably victims of patriarchal society in general and of their respective relationships with males in particular, their attitudes towards the situation differ significantly: whereas Anna seems to accept her position willingly and gives a rather submissive image of herself in certain moments, UP is distraught by gender problems since her childhood (at school and even with family) and is unable to engage with Joe because of it. This being the case, we have opted for analyzing the role of each of them by separate for the sake of clarity.

3.1. Anna

In the same way the story unfolds gradually, the actual victim role of Anna in relation to her husband, David, is discovered throughout the chapters. Margaret Atwood is, again, very skillful in revealing it in a gradual manner. At the beginning, the reader may easily get the impression that they make a happy and healthy couple, but, nothing further from the truth, Anna undoubtedly suffers abuse at the hands of her husband. One of the first instances is found in chapter 4, when David asks someone to bring him a beer and “Anna brings him one and he pats her on the rear and says ‘That’s what I like, service’” (41). At this point, it is already surprising that she does it automatically, as though she were a robot at his beck and call; all the same, the abuse goes *in crescendo*.

In the next chapter, UP sees Anna putting on makeup and realizes that she has never seen her without it. When asked about the reason by the narrator, “Anna says in a low voice, ‘He doesn’t like to see me without it’”, and then, contradicting herself, “He doesn’t know I wear it” (52). Later on, there is a scene in which Anna has forgotten to make herself up, and converse with the protagonist as follows:

“God,” she said, “what’m I going to do? I forgot my makeup, he’ll kill me.”

I studied her: in the twilight her face was grey. “Maybe he won’t notice,” I said.

“He’ll notice, don’t you worry. Not now maybe, it hasn’t all rubbed off, but in the morning. He wants me to look like a young chick all the time, if I don’t he gets mad.”

... “He watches me all the time, he waits for excuses. Then either he won’t screw at all or he slams it in so hard it hurts. I guess it’s awful of me to say that” ... “But if you said any of this to him he’d just make funny cracks about it, he says I have a mind like a soap opera, he says I invent it. But I really don’t you know” (156)

So deep-rooted is her fear towards David that, after these words, Anna does not want to tell UP anything else, afraid that she “would talk to him about it behind her back” (157). David’s blatant disregard for her wife is continuous and evinces his sexist ideology; he makes several commentaries that leaves no room for doubts in this respect, such as “‘It turns me on when she bends over,’ ... ‘She’s got a neat ass. I’m really into the whole ass thing. Joe, don’t you think she’s got a neat ass?’” (114). As might be expected, this behavior evolves into aggression in one of the most shocking passages of the entire novel, in which David asks Anna to take off her clothes in order to record a video –Joe and him are on the trip to record a video

with their camera— of her completely naked. She logically refuses, but, even despite Joe's dissuasive attitude (“‘I won't take her if she doesn't want to', Joe said” [172]), David perseveres and the tense situation explodes:

“It's token resistance,” David said, “she wants to, she's an exhibitionist at heart. She likes her lush bod, don't you? Even if she is getting too fat”

“Don't think I don't know what you're trying to do,” Anna said, as though she'd guessed a riddle. “You're trying to humiliate me.”

“What's humiliating about your body, darling?” David said caressingly. “We all love it, you ashamed of it? That's pretty stingy of you, you should share the wealth; not that you don't.”

Anna was furious now, goaded, her voice rose. “Fuck off, you want bloody everything don't you, you can't use that stuff on me.”

“Why not,” David said evenly “it works. Now just take it off like a good girl or I'll have to take it off for you.” (172-73)

When Joe tries to stop the quarrel, David yells “Shut up, she's my wife” (173) and goes on. The situation ends with Anna naked, being recorded on the sand while crying. It is the natural consequence of her lenient and submissive attitude, which has not but strengthened David's chauvinist mentality. Denommé (2016: 6-7) has accurately explained the reason behind Anna's overtolerance by quoting Atwood's most well-known work of literary criticism, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*:

Anna herself, though clearly a victim of sexist ideology, willingly chooses to back her abuser when she must choose where to position herself. This follows Atwood's logic of the first victim position of denied victimhood, where the victim is “afraid to recognize they are victims for fear of losing the privileges that they possess” and often direct their anger “against one's fellow-victims, particularly those who try to talk about their victimization [”]. (Atwood, *Survival* 36)

This permissiveness on the part of Anna (in the sense of sexual freedom, as David exemplifies when trying to have intercourse with UP in chapter 18, towards the end of part two) is unmistakably obvious in a conversation between the two female characters, narrated this way by the protagonist: “She gives me an odd glance, as though I've violated a propriety, and I'm puzzled, she told me once you shouldn't define yourself by your job but by who you are. When they ask her what she does she talks about fluidity and Being rather than Doing; though if she doesn't like the person she just says ‘I'm David's wife’” (70). If we accept the aforementioned idea that Margaret Atwood hybridizes many of her own thoughts

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about feminism with those of UP –the vehicle through which she, in a sense, indirectly theorizes in *Surfacing*–, then this passage is to be taken as a paradigmatic example. In her doctoral thesis, Suman Makhaik (147) refers to this fact as follows:

The character of Anna stands for women who, against all odds, wish to continue their victim roles even if it demands their total effacement as individuals. Such characters comply with binary masculine hegemony and help in its firm establishment. Ecofeminists raise a voice against doing so, and Atwood establishes the same by defining the negatives.

Ecofeminism, which is a type of feminist theory linked to ecology, is arguably also in the background in Atwood's novel. We will succinctly comment on this aspect in the next point.

3.2. The protagonist

The title of the book –*Surfacing*– is not meaningless either: the unnamed protagonist, a castaway in the sea of patriarchal society and in her own sea of fractured memories and experiences, goes through a process of self-discovery when investigating the disappearance of her father. This inner journey is metaphorically represented by the natural environment where most of the story takes place and, in particular, by water. In chapter 23, once she has managed to remain alone in the island, UP steps into the water and floats with her clothes on, which she soon takes off: “When every part of me is wet I take off my clothes, peeling them away from my flesh like wallpaper. They sway beside me, inflated, the sleeves bladders of air” (230). Then, after leaving the water, the metaphor cannot be more explicit: “When I am clean I come up out of the lake, leaving my false body floated on the surface, a cloth decoy; it jiggles in the waves I make, nudges gently against the dock” (231). In order to understand this twofold process of surfacing we must, however, clarify UP's position as a victim first. G. Sankar and R. Soundararajan (41) have indeed observed a strong sense of gender victimization in the character:

The main issue of the novel is that of searching for identity. The unnamed protagonist perceives herself as a victim; ... as a member of patriarchal society, she is a victim of men: not only, in the protagonist's view, do they make use of women's bodies for their own satisfaction, but also have more rights. They are those who have the main voice in creating history and think they are responsible for “saving the world, men think they can do it with guns. (*Surfacing* 176)

This victim status of the protagonist, originating from society as an abstract whole, crystallizes in her interpersonal relations with Joe, David and even Anna; the macrocosms in which she feels trapped is concretized, in the novel, in a microcosm where gender discrimination takes shape. As it happened with Anna, the reader may initially believe that UP is making the journey simply because she wants to enjoy herself with her friends and boyfriend. Nevertheless, it is soon discovered that she has no choice: she depends on David's car and she has not told any of them the true reason why she wanted to go to the island (investigating her father disappearance). Even if she wishes to leave the place, she is subject to her friends' will:

I sit down on the bed. They might have asked me first, it's my house. Though maybe they're waiting till I come out, they'll ask then. If I say I don't want to they can't very well stay; but what reason can I give? I can't tell them about my father, betray him; anyway they might think I was making it up. There's my work, but they know I have it with me. I could leave by myself with Evans but I'd only get as far as the village: it's David's car, I'd have to steal the keys, and also, I remind myself, I never learned to drive. (86)

During her sojourn in the place, she is invaded by the memories linked to the objects with which she interacts in the house. It is then that she recalls different points of her life when she has been a victim of machismo and of men's impositions. When she tried to become an artist, her wings were clipped by her ex-husband for being a woman: "For a while I was going to be a real artist; he thought that was cute but misguided, he said I should study something I'd be able to use because there have never been any important woman artists" (63). At school, she was an object of ridicule for the boys: "When the boys chased and captured the girls after school and tied them up with their own skipping ropes, I was the one they would forget on purpose to untie. I spent many afternoons looped to fences and gates and convenient trees, waiting for a benevolent adult to pass and free me" (88). Even with her family, she was conditioned by the manly habits of her father: "There's more than one way to skin a cat, my father used to say; it bothered me, I didn't see why they would want to skin a cat even one way" (117). On top of all these memories, one weighs heavily: the feeling of having lost her child, presumably aborted against her will. We will refer to this point at the end of the analysis of the character.

Considering animal mistreatment (epitomized by the skinned cat) and the defilement of nature by Americans in the novel, the critics have underlined the presence of an ecofeminist message in Atwood's work. In this line, Ambika Bhalla (1) has observed a parallelism between the victim status of the main character and

nature, which becomes a revealing force in her process of self-awareness: “The protagonist realizes the gap between her natural self and her artificial construct only when she encounters nature. The ecofeminist impact is seen implicit in the novel by the protagonist’s return to the natural world. Her association with nature raises her consciousness of victimization of women.” Towards the end of the story, in chapter 24, the fusion reaches its climax; firstly, a desultory frog symbolizes the connection: “A frog is there, leopard frog with green spots and gold-rimmed eyes, ancestor. It includes me, it shines, nothing moves but its throat breathing” (233). Later in the chapter, there is a key passage, intentionally written by Atwood in the form of separate paragraphs, that highlights the symbiosis between UP and nature:

The animals have no need for speech, why talk when you are a word

I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning

I break out again into the bright sun and crumple, head against the ground

I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place (236)

In contrast with this union with the natural environment of the island, there is a sense of rupture with Joe, who works as a masculine archetype for the protagonist: “Everything I value about him seems to be physical: the rest is either unknown, disagreeable or ridiculous” (68). UP’s indifference towards him also increases throughout the story; at the beginning of chapter 8, the tedium is evident:

In the early morning Joe wakes me; his hands at any rate are intelligent, they move over me delicately as a blind man’s reading Braille, skilled, moulding me like a vase, they’re learning me; ... A phrase comes to me, a joke then but mournful now, someone in a parked car after a highschool dance who said *With a paper bag over their head they’re all the same*. At the time I didn’t understand what he meant, but since then I’ve pondered it. (83)

This feeling of sexual objectification will permeate the mood of the protagonist, who will progressively distance from Joe in emotional terms: “Joe stayed on the wall bench, arms wrapped around his knees in lawn-dwarf position, watching me. Every time I glanced up his eyes would be there, blue as ball point pens or Superman; even with my head turned away I could feel his x-ray vision prying under my skin, a slight prickling sensation as though he was tracing me” (106). Eventually, their relationship will become noticeably deteriorated (up to the

point that Anna will realize) and Joe's attempts to have sex will be dismissed over threats of pregnancy:

"Don't, I said, he was lowering himself down on me, "I don't want you to."

"What's wrong with you?" he said, angry; then he was pinning me, hands manacles, teeth against my lips, censoring me, he was shoving against me, his body insistent as one side of an argument.

I slid my arm between us, against his throat, windpipe, and pried his head away. "I'll get pregnant," I said, "it's the right time." It was the truth, it stopped him: flesh making more flesh, miracle, that frightens all of them. (188)

Nonetheless, despite their dissimilarities and lack of a deep consistent affective bond, they end up having sexual relations by mutual agreement: he satisfies his carnal desires and she will be able to redeem herself from the loss of her former child: "Nobody must find out or they will do that to me again, strap me to the death machine, emptiness machine, legs in the metal framework, secret knives. This time I won't let them" (210). UP's resolve constitutes an act of both redemption ("I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me" [209]) and of self-assertion as a woman, since she will give birth to her child (the "goldfish" [249] in her belly) all by herself in nature, without the interference of a society that has proven patriarchal to her: "This above all, to refuse to be a victim" (249). She has surfaced.

All the same, she is posed a last crux when, after having remained alone in the island for a period of time, Joe comes back in search of her: she must decide whether returning to civilization together with Joe, for whom her love is "useless as a third eye or a possibility" (250), or staying in the place at the risk of isolation in a wild atmosphere. Although there is no certainty that she decides to go with Joe because the end is, once again, intelligently open to ambivalence by Atwood, it seems quite likely that she does: "To trust is to let go. I tense forward, towards the demands and questions, though my feet do not move yet" (251). Should this be the case, we believe that there would be an emphasis on survival: she hopes nothing from neither Joe nor men in general, but she is no less aware that, albeit not strictly necessary, her possibilities of enduring are significantly larger if she is reintegrated into society, in spite of everything it entails. It is a purely rational choice.

4. Conclusion

In light of the current study, it seems indubitable that there is a strong sense of victimization in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, which concerns both imperialism and gender. In particular, female victimization is quite clearly reflected in the two women characters of the story: Anna and the unnamed protagonist. Yet, whereas the former does not seem to care about her position and ends up suffering abuse from David because of it, the latter –a victim of masculine dominance since childhood– goes through a process of inner discovery that results in her decision to give birth and live isolated in nature, thus constituting an ecofeminist vision of life. At the end, however, it is suggested that she will return with her boyfriend to become a part of the social gear again.

This being the case, the story could be interpreted as a message towards equality: women need men to fully ensure their survival as a human species, but civilized society is too patriarchal a system for them to develop themselves in equal conditions as men. While most of the characters in the book are fit within archetypes –the dominant cynical male, the abused submissive woman, the ruthless American imperialist– to construct the fiction, it is no less true that it is precisely through those roles that Atwood's work becomes relevant from a (eco)feminist point of view. To this approach we must add a whole series of relevant features, such as the richness of the narrator's reflections on her own personal life, her presentation of her family relationships, the unreliable nature of her narration, her process of self-discovery, her contribution to her own victimization or the symbolic language used. All these characteristics have turned Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* into a contemporary classic, in which feminism undoubtedly occupies a very significant position.

This article, in an attempt to let the text breathe and speaks (almost) by itself, has very modestly tried to gather some particularly pertinent academic contributions to the topic and to observe how the novel, *Surfacing*, reflects such notions through the use of language and through the unfolding of events on the part of the author. Rather than corseting the book with a perhaps excessive number of theoretical concepts, we have tried to focus on the novel and to use scholarship as a complement, instead of the other way around. If this paper may thus have any value, it might precisely be the strict consideration of Atwood's writing as such, sometimes forgotten at the expense of other labels which, although indubitably interesting, could push the text –the actual object of analysis– into the background.

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THE STRANGE CASE OF TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH THE GOTHIC NOVEL

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Abstract

In this article I endeavour to encourage teachers of Secondary Education to use English literature in their English language lessons. Indeed, literature provides a huge amount of authentic reading materials, making the students practise extensive as well as intensive reading, which is crucial for the foreign language acquisition. Moreover, it is an enormous source of motivation, allowing students to give free rein to their imagination and enjoy their English lessons. The election of gothic fiction is linked to this latter purpose: the 19th gothic genre is generally well accepted by adolescents as it represents a way to reflect on themselves through a journey to “self-revelation”. The double personality/identity-theme of R. L. Stevenson’s novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* fits well into their interests and their quest for self-knowledge. It offers them the chance to process what they are going through in this often unstable stage of their journey into adulthood by trying to figure out their place in the world.

Key words: Reading skill, Literature in ELT, Gothic fiction, R. L. Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Double identity

Resumen

En este artículo pretendo alentar a los profesores de educación secundaria a emplear la literatura inglesa en sus clases de inglés. La literatura proporciona una gran cantidad de materiales de lectura auténticos, lo que hace que los estudiantes practiquen tanto la lectura de todo tipo de textos como el análisis minucioso de algún texto en particular, lo cual es crucial para la adquisición del idioma extranjero. Además representa una enorme fuente de motivación, permitiendo a los estudiantes liberar su imaginación y disfrutar de las clases de inglés. La elección de la novela gótica está vinculada a este último propósito: el género gótico del siglo XIX es generalmente bien aceptado por los adolescentes. Se identifican con el género gótico porque representa una forma de reflejarse en sí mismos a través de un viaje hacia la “autorrevelación”. El tema de la doble personalidad/identidad de

la novela *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* de R. L. Stevenson encaja con sus intereses y su busca del autoconocimiento. Les ofrece la oportunidad de procesar lo que están viviendo en esta inestable etapa de su viaje a la madurez, tratando de descubrir su lugar en el mundo.

Palabras clave: enseñanza de la lectura, enseñanza del inglés a través de la literatura, novela gótica, R. L. Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, doble identidad

1. Literature in foreign language teaching

The role of literature in the second/foreign language classroom has traditionally had an intermittent presence throughout the history of EFLT, varying in intensity according to the different methodologies or approaches applied to the language teaching. Only fairly recently has it gained a new level of importance in natural association with the reading experience and the acquisition of the reading competence. Indeed, reading literature in ELT has of late gained a higher value among scholars, teachers and students as they have come to realise that it presents numerous advantages for the acquisition of the second/foreign language. Literature provides an assorted range of authentic texts and exposes students to different types of language, it broadens the students' minds by stimulating their imagination and a more mature perception of other cosmologies; it also motivates them to practise the reading skill through a wide range of appealing topics.

"How can I hope to explain Literature to you, with its capital 'L'?", Fay Weldon asks Alice, an imaginary niece, in his work *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen*. Weldon tries to convince the young girl, who belongs to a generation absorbed by the universe of discos and television, to read literature "before it's too late" (10). In the first chapter the author gives a revealing description of the literary universe defined as a "City of Invention", where every writer builds his/her own "House of Imagination":

Let me give you, let me share with you the City of Invention. For what novelists do (I have decided, for the purpose of your conversion) is to build Houses of Imagination, and where houses cluster together there is a city. And what a city this one is, Alice! It is the nearest we poor mortals can get to the Celestial City: it glitters and glances with life, and gossip, and colour, and fantasy: it is brilliant, it is illuminated, by day the sun of enthusiasm and by night the moon of inspiration. It has its towers and pinnacles, its commanding heights and its swooning depth: it has public

buildings and worthy ancient monuments, which some find boring and others magnificent. It has its central districts and its suburbs, some salubrious, some seedy, some safe, some frightening. This who founded it, who is to this city that the readers come, to admire, to learn, to marvel and explore. (11)

This book, apart from attempting to bring some thoughtful insights to the work of Jane Austen in particular, endeavours to provide an answer to those who question the relevance of literature in general. By presenting the three aforementioned metaphors (City of Invention, Houses of Imagination, Celestial City) Weldon drives his niece through the magnificent books which form the literary universe, thus providing her with a definition of literature. He also drives the readership to the double dilemma of whether the literary universe is worth being taught at school or not, and whether EL teachers should teach literature and train students in the literary competence or just in the linguistic one instead. Indeed, according to Brumfit and Carter, “[Literature] offers a context in which exploration and discussion of content (which if appropriately selected can be an important motivation for study) lead on naturally to examination language” (15). According to them, linguistic competence and literary competence can (and should) go hand in hand in the acquisition of a second/foreign language. The concept of literary competence is closely knit to the learning of literature as a formative process of the student. S/he aims to “read” literary texts by accepting the literary features that may characterize them, with the purpose, among others, of learning how to analyse and apprehend them and be able to finally express a critical judgement on them (Caon and Spaliviero 18). In other words, the modern EFL models see literary texts as useful and valid resources to actively involve students and foster in them a number of active and positive attitudes towards the target language, literature and culture.

No one doubts nowadays that literary texts provide authentic language, i.e. real language in context as created by a native writer for a native readership. But this current unanimous belief has not always been so unanimous among scholars. The relationship between English literature and ELT has always been a rather difficult marriage and a controversial issue. Teachers are often influenced by curriculum constraints and usually experiment a lack of faith in literature as a means of teaching because they consider it as inferior to achieving the main goal of teaching grammar or because of the difficulty that is usually inherent in literary texts as they usually reproduce cultural aspects that may not always be easily understood by a younger type of student. On the contrary, literature should be perceived and conveyed as an invaluable resource of motivating material and as a bridge to provide access to the cultural background of the language studied. Literature encour-

ages language acquisition, expands the students' language awareness and interpretation abilities and it educates the whole person (Lazar 1993, cited in Banegas 2-3). Collie and Slater (1987, cited in Banegas 2) support the inclusion of literature in the language classroom as it provides a valuable source of authentic material, develops personal involvement and helps to contribute the reader's cultural and language enrichment.

If it is assumed that literature is a body of written works which have an artistic or intellectual value (due to its Latin root "littera", which means letter or handwriting), according to Bruner (cited in Giusti 4), a literary text is capable of stimulating the reader's imagination through a mental representation of what is read. Literature is a very strong cognitive and cultural instrument with which it is not only possible to give a meaning to the human actions and intentions but also to build and explore all the possibilities and negotiate one's own social and personal identity. Literature is a cultural instrument, a forum in which the values of a defined social group are negotiated (10).

The answer to the question "why should we use literature in English language teaching?" would therefore be: because it promotes reading (either intensive or extensive), it stimulates motivation in learning English and improves the communicative competence as well as the cultural and the intercultural awareness. According to Demetriou and Ruiz Mas (91), literature exposes learners to other cultures broadening their minds and teaching how to respect "otherness". It also increases the linguistic knowledge by introducing learners to a much "varied range of contexts and situations that would be difficult to reproduce faithfully in the daily practice classroom" (91). So, it contributes not only to the acquisition of grammar knowledge but also to the development of the four skills. One may think that literature is mainly reading, and it is; but the rest of the skills can and should also be practised: speaking can be trained by reciting poems, performing drama or singing songs; listening can be fostered through the oral narration of tales, songs, watching a play, or attending poem recitations; writing can be practised through short stories, descriptions or dialogues (91), etc.

Moreover, literature provides a world which stimulates students' imagination and creativity as they have to recreate mentally what they have read and infer meaning. It also provides a universe of characters with which students cannot help being identified, making them feel "motivated to learn the language if they feel their own world is represented in front of them" (91). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) also defends the imaginative and artistic use of language which is educationally significant. This approach of language teaching is embodied by productive, receptive, interactive or mediating (oral and written) tasks. With certainty, literature is seen as a productive resource

which may be exploited in several ways, providing a wide range of activities like singing, storytelling, creative writing, performing scripted or unscripted plays, listening to imaginative texts, etc. (CEFRL 56).

About the authenticity of the literary texts Brumfit and Carter affirm that,

A literary text is authentic text, real language in context, to which we can respond directly. It offers a context in which exploration and discussion of *content* (which if appropriately selected can be an important motivation for study) leads on naturally to examination of language. (15)

So literary texts provide learners with a genuine production of language that would serve as a better example of how natives of the target language communicate verbally in a multiplicity of situations, as previously stated. On this topic Littlewood argues that:

A major problem of language teaching in the classroom is the creation of an authentic situation for language. A language classroom especially one outside the community of native speakers, is isolated from the context of events and situations which produce natural language. In the case of literature, language creates its own context. (179)

The CEFRL also defends the idea that national and regional literatures contribute to the European cultural heritage, which the Council of Europe regards as “a valuable common resource to be protected and developed” (56). It states that “literary studies also serve many more educational purposes - intellectual, moral and emotional, linguistic and cultural - than the purely aesthetic” (56). The multiple advantages of introducing literature in the language classroom are once again confirmed. Literature is one of the cultural manifestations of a defined social group in a certain period of time and acquiring a language without its culture is unconceivable. McKay argues that “literature may work to promote a greater tolerance for cultural differences for both the teacher and the student” (193). Fenner goes further by stating that “literature does not only represent contemporary foreign culture: it also represents the past” (20). On aspects related to intercultural awareness, Fenner also states that,

Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the “world of origin” and the “world of the target community” produce an intercultural awareness. It is, of course, important to note that intercultural awareness includes an awareness of regional and social diversity in both worlds. It is also enriched by awareness of a wider range of cultures than those carried by the learner’s L1 and L2. This wider awareness helps to place both in context. (103)

In other words, literature, by bringing students closer to the past cultures that still influence our modern societies, leads them to a major understanding of the contemporary foreign cultures, thus improving plurilingualism and fostering interculturality. In this respect, the CEFRL affirms that,

The linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language are modified by knowledge of the other and contribute to the intercultural awareness, skills and know-how. They enable the individual to develop an enriched, more complex personality and an enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences. (CEFRL 43)

Language is not only a tool of communication but also an instrument to come closer to another culture, its customs and its values. So literary texts in the target language provide learners with the cultural knowledge they have to assimilate in order to eventually become fluent speakers. In Weldon's words, "it is in the literature, the novels, the fantasy, the fiction of the past, that you find *real* history, and not in the textbooks" (13).

Following Giusti (4), speaking about the literary text, it is "uno strumento cognitivo e culturale col quale e' possibile dare un senso alle azioni e intenzioni umane, ma anche costruire e esplorare mondi possibili, negoziare il proprio ruolo sociale e la propria identita'". And he continues:

la letteratura non e' solo un magazzino di storie. La letteratura può essere considerata a sua volta un testo, una storia che viene continuamente narrata dai membri di una comunità, i quali negoziano il significato e il valore dei singoli testi sulla base della storia che li tiene insieme. In questo senso la letteratura e' uno strumento culturale, un forum all'interno del quale vengono negoziati i valori di un gruppo sociale. (10)

To sum up, apart from the many advantages already mentioned for the development of the skill of reading and for the improvement of the language acquisition, literature is not just a storehouse of stories; it can be considered a text itself which the members of a certain community continually narrate in a certain society and in a certain time. Literature is therefore a cultural tool, a forum within which the values of a given social group are negotiated. Literature is part of the culture of its speakers and learning a language also includes learning its culture, where literature represents one of its highest manifestations.

2. Teaching gothic literature

Why teach English to adolescents through Gothic fiction? Gothic literature is a literary genre that combines fiction and horror, death and more often than not romance too. Gothicism easily mirrors the contradictions which teenagers go through in that delicate period of their lives. Gothic literature fascinates teenagers as it offers the chance to process what they are going through, combining romantic emotions with the most proscribed and unexplored feelings.

According to Fred Botting, Gothic is characterized by excess, transgression and diffusion. In his work *Gothic*, he describes its main features of the genre and explains why from being an often mocked genre and an easy target for satire at the beginning it started to enjoy a level of popularity that has prevailed up to the present times. Gothic represents excess as it depicts the contradiction of the eighteenth century society by opposing rationality and morality with irrationality, the supernatural and social transgression, where passion and excitement offend the moral laws: "It shadows the despairing ecstasies of Romantic ideals and individualism and the uncanny dualities of Victorian realism and decadence" (1).

The Gothic genre reveals what is rejected, what disturbs the cultural establishment, its values and beliefs. Initially it was a reaction against the eighteenth-century Enlightenment's views of the world, stubbornly organized and defined by reason, logic and categorization. The Gothic genre started as a literary reaction to the inadequacy controlling the irrationality of the human soul. It represented the irrepressible and the unspeakable struggle against "the limitations to Enlightenment rationality which claimed to elevating humanity through science" (Yang and Healey 4). The cultural anxieties were embodied through Gothic landscapes, thus going beyond the mere scenery of the main action. Decaying architecture, dark labyrinths, subterranean passages, frightening interiors, storms, fog, gloomy forests, medieval ruins, crumbling castles and abbeys reflected the social darkness, the chaos of a culture in transition. According to Valdine Clemens, "when reason and science usurped God, Gothic rushed in to fill the resulting vacuum with the daemonic" (cited in Yang and Healey 4).

Gothic is also based on feelings and emotions associated with the sublime. In 1759 the Irish political theorist and philosopher Edmund Burke published a philosophical essay on aesthetics, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke was unaware that it would be of the utmost importance in the development of the English fiction later on in the century. Burke provided a definition of the sublime by dividing its effects into a major one, astonishment, and inferior ones, admiration, reverence and respect, to conclude that it was based on terror. Whatever is terrible or great in dimension is sublime because it arouses a sense of danger and terror. But two conditions are

essential: obscurity and mystery. Among the causes of the sublime he mentions the idea of pain and death inflicted by a superior power and four sources which convey thrills and emotions to the reader's mind: strength, violence, pain and terror. Reflecting upon his concept of the beautiful and the sublime, his work served as a source of inspiration for the future Gothic novelists and paved the way for the new spirit of Romanticism.

The excesses and the ambivalence associated to Gothic fictional protagonists are seen as elements of transgression, but breaking the social and the aesthetic limits serves to reinforce the value and to restore the limits. The Gothic heroes and heroines, after having experimented excess and transgressed limits, finally restore the moral and social order:

Gothic terrors and horrors emanate from reader's identification with heroes and heroine: after escaping the monsters and penetrating the forest, subterranean of narrative labyrinths of the Gothic nightmare, heroines and readers manage to return with an elevated sense of identity to the solid realities of justice, morality and social order. (Botting 5)

For this reason, even presenting models of excessive feelings such as revenge, prohibited love or transgression, Gothic literature, far from inducing young readers/teenagers to act like the unbalanced characters depicted by the novels, constitutes an excellent source to catch the students' attention. By identifying themselves with the characters, students can see the consequences of the transgression and of dealing with negative emotions, thus inciting them to learn from them and channel their feelings in a positive way.

According to Botting (5), many of the anxieties in Gothic terms have reappeared throughout the centuries and this has helped to perpetuate the tradition; but what gave it its great and definitive popularity was the development of the cinematographic production at the beginning of the 20th century. Vampires, Jekylls and Hydes, Frankensteins and monsters have populated cinema and television screens all over the world, sometimes assuming the pretense of sinister characters, sometimes pushing the limits of the ridiculous:

The diffusion of Gothic features across texts and historical periods distinguishes the Gothic as a hybrid form, incorporating and transforming other literary forms as well as developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing. (9)

The aesthetic and moral worth of Gothicism as a literary/artistic genre has often been discredited, but the vivid imagery of the genre involving extremes of human endurance catches undoubtedly the students' attention and the influence of Gothic literature in ELT is currently confirmed by the amount of graded readers

based on Gothic novels which are made available by publishers in their yearly ELT catalogues, thus reinforcing their validity for teaching English and the success of the genre at every level of the EL learning process. Indeed, the most frequently adapted Gothic or gothic-like novels as graded readers are Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, R. L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and E. A. Poe's *Tales of Horror and Imagination*, all of which happen to stay out of the publishers' obligation to pay copyrights to their respective 19th-century authors. Rodabaugh (1996) lists five themes that adolescents and Gothic literature have in common: extreme emotions, the journey of self-revelation, the individual against the unknown, the rebellion against the authority, transgression and sympathy for the outcasts. Learning about Gothic literature allows students to think and to go deeper into their own feelings; it provides them with a way to reflect on themselves. They are attracted to it, as many characteristics which are inherent to the Gothic genre are also the characteristic of the period of adolescence. This is why Gothic genres have become so popular even nowadays, especially among teenagers. Kelly Hurley describes Gothic as "a cyclical genre that reemerges in times of cultural stress in order to negotiate anxieties for its readership by working through them in displaced (sometimes supernatural) form" (in Yang and Healey 4).

Adolescents are characterized by extremes of emotions: they change from feeling euphoria to being depressed, shuttling back and forth between everything (Rodabaugh 70). What they love today, they may hate tomorrow. Gothic literature is full of contrasts represented in the extremes of love and hate, of good and evil, of black and white, of light and darkness which also mirror the teenagers' perception of the world.

Gothic literature also represents the "journey" of the hero "in the quest for metaphysical and moral absolutes" (70), and the teenagers -midway between childhood and adulthood- are also searching for the absolutes, involving again the extremes. In the transition from childhood towards adulthood they try to discover their own identity while undergoing physical, psychological, emotional as well as intellectual changes.

Related to the journey of self-revelation is the concept of the individual against the unknown. In Gothic literature the unknown is represented by the dark landscapes, the mysterious architecture and the supernatural component. All what is beyond the sight or the understanding, hidden in the dark or out of control is unknown and perceived as a menace: "Adolescents too find themselves on the edge of the unknown" (70), which is adulthood: "Unsure of where they're coming

from and where they're headed, they may easily relate the aspects of Gothic literature which highlights this journey to the unknown" (70). The representation of the hero who challenges the unknown by trying to overcome his fears may encourage teenagers to face the unexplored world of their lives.

Rebellion against the authority or the established conventions is also part of their development into adulthood. They have to develop an identity, independent from their parents and family and a capacity for independent decision-making. They experiment with and use rebellion to test the boundaries of their freedom and struggle against what they feel unfair. They share this with Gothic literature, where the rebellion of the hero represents a rebellion against the society and the norm, also depicted in the gothic sublime landscapes where the decaying architecture is a symbol of aristocratic standing and powers. Decadence embodies the rebellion against those powers as it represents the decay and the corruption of morality. Both Gothic hero(in)es and adolescents rebel against any type of authority to obtain freedom or to affirm their identities.

To affirm his/her personality a teenager needs to be accepted by his/her peers, but sometimes if the acceptance, no matter how small it is, does not occur, the adolescent may feel like an outcast. This is why they sympathize with the outcast of the Gothic literature like the monster in *Frankenstein* or Hyde as opposed to the Jekyll figure, or with other "attractive" outcasts such as Heathcliff, or Jane Eyre...

To sum up, adolescents are trying to figure out their place in the world, they long to be accepted by their friends and acquaintances of similar age groups, future adults like themselves; they are forming their own identities and are often in conflict with the *status quo* rules and conventions and mores. They feel alone, and like outcasts/monsters, they want to be themselves, but they fear their peers may no longer accept them, so they often pretend to be someone else. In this regard they often sympathize with Gothic protagonists. Adolescents are going through a lot of physical, psychological and emotional changes, which affect their bodies as well as their relationships with their peers, adults and the world in general. The Gothic genre offers them the chance to process what they are going through by helping them to go deeper into their feelings and thinking. Adolescents enjoy reading literature that reflects the depths of their emotions and, in doing so, they feel "motivated to learn the language if they feel their own world is represented in front of them" (Demetriou and Ruiz Mas 91). The use of fiction in the English language classroom implies the involvement of motivational sources for pedagogical activities and to engage learners intellectually, emotionally and linguistically by offering a picture of another culture.

The choice of a Gothic graded reader by our EFL students also finds its justification in the internalisation that gothic forms underwent at the end of the nineteenth century. They represented the most significant shift in the genre and the gloom and darkness of sublime landscapes became external markers of inner mental and emotional states. Easy target for satire, the early Gothic romances, on the contrary, died of their own extravagances of plot, even though Gothic atmospheric machinery continued to haunt fiction. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is an example of late-gothic fiction which, beneath the surface, offers a narrative of legal philosophy as much as a story of suspense and horror. From the first pages it emerges to be more than a monster or a mystery story. It goes into the nature of the human condition showing the mental illness of the split or multiple personalities, foretelling what later Sigmund Freud and the psychoanalysis called the dissociative identity disorder (Arntfield 137). Crimes, investigation and jurisprudence are also new issues which distinguish Stevenson's novel from the extravagant and often absurd early Gothic romances.

This also justifies the election of Stevenson's novel, as, through the main theme of the double identity, it provides plenty of opportunities to tackle a lot of teenager-related issues.

3. Conclusion

This article cannot hide its intention to encourage teachers of secondary education to use English literature in the foreign language classroom. I intend to be some awareness-rising boost to those English secondary school teachers who are still reluctant to introduce literature in their language classroom. Literature is not a separate element but it is part of the language learning and teaching process as it is the cultural and the artistic manifestation characterizing the English civilization, their life style, ideas and values. Literature is not just reading texts, but a bridge to provide a cultural background of its speakers. Teaching English through Gothic literature may seem "strange", but it should not. I have tried to illustrate that literature, on the contrary, may provide a huge amount of useful material which can be exploited in many multicoloured and multifaceted ways, as far as the imagination is able to go, "the sky is the limit" in the immeasurable possibilities that literature can offer.

In a nutshell, literature provides a genuine, authentic sample of language, real sample of a wide range of styles, text types and registers and learners need to be trained in a variety of registers, style and genres to discern the function of each of them. Literary texts have multiple interpretations motivating an interaction with

the text (Widdowson 1983, cited in Agustín Llach 9). By interacting and communicating a language is learned. The learner becomes active, autonomous and central in the learning process. Literary texts also show the writers' feelings that the learner can identify with and this generates a powerful motivation. Literature has a strong motivating power due to its calling on to personal experience.

Teaching English through Gothic literature should not be "strange" anymore; it should be "commonplace". I found the "commonplace" in Gothic fiction and most particularly in Stevenson's fiction, both of which have provided me with an inestimable amount of material to be adapted to the TESL/TEFL context. Students easily identify themselves with the characters and the universe offered by literature and so they "feel motivated to learn the language if they see that their own world is represented in front of them" (Demetriou and Ruiz Mas 91).

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LEAR AND QUIJOTE, TWO WANDERERS ON UNEVEN PATHS

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Abstract

King Lear of Britain and Don Quijote de la Mancha, both old and frail, are dwellers of two very different worlds and eras. The ways they were devised and shaped by William Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes generate nonetheless diverse similarities that emphatically expose crucial traits of the human nature.

The meaningful, more obvious dichotomies in the texts – such as Reality/Fantasy, Sight/Blindness, Truth/Falsehood, Loyalty/Treachery – frame the complexity of the protagonists and are metaphors of their antithetical features. On the other hand, their alienation, misapprehension and distortion of the surrounding realities turn them into wanderers on uneven, problematic paths, while their frail physical condition discloses a surface layer that encapsulates assertive individuals.

This essay approaches Shakespeare's and Cervantes' texts by focusing on such aspects, as well as on the respective contextualisation. Each work constitutes a challenging exemplum of a unique, proficuous broad age that wisely amalgamated the old and the new: amidst a multitude of cultural traditions, King Lear primarily embodies the expansion of Tragedy, while Don Quijote de la Mancha primarily materialises the transition to a new stage of Modernity.

Keywords: Lear; Quijote; dichotomies; alienation; tradition; innovation

Resumen

Ambos viejos y débiles, King Lear de Bretaña y Don Quijote de la Mancha viven en dos mundos y eras muy distintas. La forma en la que fueron creados y moldeados por William Shakespeare y Miguel de Cervantes generan sin embargo varias similitudes en donde se empatiza con los rasgos más cruciales de la naturaleza humana.

Estas significativas y más obvias dicotomías en los textos – como Realidad/Fantasia, Vista/Ceguera, Verdad/Falsedad, Lealtad/Traición – describen la complejidad de los protagonistas y son metáforas de sus características antitéticas. Por otro lado, su alienación, confusión y distorsión de

las realidades que les rodean los convierte en nómadas por senderos irregulares y problemáticos, mientras que sus delicadas condiciones físicas revelan una capa superficial que condensa a unos individuos asertivos.

Este ensayo hace una aproximación a los textos de Shakespeare y Cervantes centrándose en dichos aspectos, al igual que su respectiva contextualización. Cada trabajo constituye un complejo caso de una era única y productiva que sabiamente amalgamó lo Viejo y lo Nuevo: entre la multitud de tradiciones culturales, King Lear principalmente personifica la expansión de la Tragedia, mientras que Don Quijote de la Mancha principalmente materializa la transición hacia una nueva era de la modernidad.

Palabras clave: Lear, Quijote, dicotomías, alienación, tradición, innovación

William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Lear* and Miguel de Cervantes' *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*,¹ published a few years apart, belong to a proficuous broad age when a multitude of cultural traditions coexisted, when the old and the new learning were wisely amalgamated, when both England and Spain experienced a series of peculiar events, in the aftermath of their sovereigns' policies. Consequently, the texts cannot but encapsulate the diversified, heterogeneous elements that were intrinsic to such rich, complex broad age.

Amidst the incessant production of critical readings on canonical texts, in general, and on the ones here under consideration, in particular, the present essay proposes further perspectives to approach the English play and the Spanish narrative;² above all, it seeks to understand the way their protagonists, two of the most outstanding fictional characters of Western literature, were devised and characterised by the authors. The following fundamental guidelines will then be taken into account: on the one hand, the assumption that each work constitutes a relevant *exemplum* of the context briefly alluded to a while ago; on the other hand, the nature of the works themselves – Shakespeare's play as primarily embodying the expansion of Tragedy, Cervantes' narrative by primarily materialising the transition to a new stage of Modernity.

¹ Quixote, in the frontispieces of the 1605 (Primera Parte/First Part) and 1614 Segunda Parte/Second Part) editions.

² *King Lear* Act I and *Don Quijote* Primera Parte constitute the *corpus* for the textual analysis, which constitutes, in its turn, the basis for the major reflections developed in the essay.

King Lear of Britain and Don Quijote de la Mancha are introduced as aged dwellers of different fictional spaces, times and social milieus. The elaborate ways they were shaped by the authors go, however, far beyond the obvious differences and similarities that simultaneously separate and approach them, emphatically exposing crucial, universal traits of the human nature. An antithesis starts to be delineated right at the opening of each text and will steadily take consistency until the end: for different reasons and circumstances, Lear and Quijote are out of reality, in the sense that they do not fit in the spaces they physically occupy; concomitantly, there is a discrepancy between the way they see the others and the way they are seen by the others, certainly more acute in the case of Quijote but substantially more hazardous in the case of Lear. These antithetical aspects will be replicated in a series of meaningful dichotomies that frame the characters' complexity.

In Shakespeare's play, the antithesis starts with the monarch's disastrous, hubristic decision of parting the realm and abdicating:

Meantime, we shall express our darker purpose.
 Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
 In three our kingdom, and 'tis our fast intent
 To shake all cares and business from our age,
 Conferring them on younger strengths while we
 Unburdened crawl toward death. ...

(Act I, Sc. 1, 36-41)

Although here the adjective 'dark' (in "darker purpose") corresponds literally to Lear's own intention, or plan, secretly devised by himself before the public announcement, one cannot ignore its inherent primary meaning that, as a shadow, will spread along the play to be fully projected on the tragic epilogue. By parting the realm and abdicating, Lear ceases to fulfill his duties, deprives himself of his 'Body Politic', of his essence invested by God, thus shattering vital bonds; he opens a Pandora's box, metonymically coincident with the play's first scene, that will unleash chaos and lead to catastrophic events. Such decision implicates yet another distortion, when matters of the Mind, or Reason, are blended with matters of the Heart, i.e. when the king grounds the way he divides the kingdom on exterior signs of filial love:

... Tell me, my daughters—
 Since now we will divest us both of rule,
 Interest of territory, cares of state—
 Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
 That we our largest bounty may extend

Where nature doth with merit challenge?

(Act I, Sc. 1, 48-53)

He then misunderstands his three daughters' words, misreads their intentions, misapprehends their characters – summing up, he mistakes semblance for essence and vice-versa, when Goneril says

Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter;

Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty;

Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,

...

Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

(Act I, Sc. 1, 55-61)

The same happens, when Regan states

I am made of that same mettle as my sister,

And prize me at her worth. In my true heart

I find she names my very deed of love—

(Act I, Sc. 1, 68-70)

The king's misunderstanding is eventually emphasised by Cordelia's short, incisive, proleptic asides, which immediately insert a sense of uneasiness also at the beginning of the play:

What shall Cordelia speak? Love and be silent.

(Act I, Sc. 1, 62)

Then, poor Cordelia—

And yet not so, since I am sure my love's

More ponderous than my tongue.

(Act I, Sc. 1, 77-79)

When Lear urges her to speak ("Now our joy ... what can you say ...? – Act I, Sc. 1, 82-85), she simply replies "Nothing, my lord" (Act I, Sc. 1, 87). This brief declaration, which deeply contrasts with her sisters' hollow verbosity, constitutes the heart of the matter, because Cordelia's 'nothing' is rather 'everything', full of meaning and power, containing the essence of her feelings, not only towards her father but also towards her king, whose dimension is emphasised and reminded by her through 'my lord' and, later, through 'your majesty'. Kent will become a sort of Cordelia's *alter ego*, another pillar of fortitude and devotion towards the legitimate lord and sovereign.

Lear is unable to grasp where truth and falsehood, loyalty and treachery, generosity and greed, stoicism and eagerness lie; his sight and insight are therefore not coincident (as it happens with Gloucester regarding his sons). He does not understand Cordelia's 'nothing', as he does not catch the true meaning of her next speech, which starts with

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
According to my bond, no more nor less.

(Act I, Sc. 1, 91-93)

Subsequently, Lear does not understand Kent's reaction either, when the Earl objects to the way Cordelia is treated by her own father.

The king will only gain (or regain) the capacity of judgement after taking a long step from hubris to anagnorisis that involves alienation, repentance, madness and despair. From the moment he abdicates and shatters both the unity of the nation and the integrity of his private dwelling, he initiates an uneven walk on sinuous, deserted, lonely grounds, by deambulating from Goneril's to Regan's households, gradually becoming aware of the gravity of his previous decision, the consequence of his deeds and the repudiation of his 'Body Politic'. Eventually accompanied only by his Fool and the Earl of Kent, disguised as Caius, Lear's loneliness is the materialisation of the void where he had placed himself.

The superlativeness and nature of the tragic pathos bursts forth from the character's own features: because he is a sovereign, his decisions have deep, disruptive repercussions on every subject in the whole realm; because the metaphorical path from blindness to sight is a long one, anagnorisis and repentance come too late, thus ensuring the catastrophic epilogue whose climax is, naturally, Cordelia's death; and because order is eventually restored, not only through the king's process of anagnorisis but also through the punishment of Goneril, Regan, Edmund and Cornwall, catharsis is accomplished.

Let us now focus on *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. In Cervantes' narrative, the initial antithesis is anchored in the protagonist's voracious reading of chivalric books – Quijana, not yet Quijote, at this stage:³

... se daba a leer libros de caballerías, con tanta afición y gusto, que olvidó casi de todo punto el ejercicio de la caza y aun la administración

³ Hereafter, the English forms 'First Part' and 'Ch.' ['Chapter'] will be used for each quotation in Spanish.

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de su hacienda; ... y así, del poco dormir e del mucho leer se le secó el cerebro, de manera que vino a perder el juicio.⁴ ...

(First Part, Chap. I, 37, 39)

Quijana's submersion in the writings transports him to a dimension doubly alienated from his own time and world, once the events, characters and deeds depicted in the books belong to a fictional, idealised, mythical past that he, clad in another, also idealised identity – Don Quijote de la Mancha – will committedly seek to experience (the events), emulate (the characters) and perform (the deeds).

Llenósele la fantasía de todo aquello que leía en los libros, ... batallas, desafíos, heridas, requiebros, amores, tormentas y disparates imposibles; y asentósele de tal modo en la imaginación que era verdad ... [que] le pareció conveniente y necesario ... hacerse caballero andante y irse por todo el mundo con sus armas y caballo a buscar las aventuras ...

(First Part, Ch. I, 39-40)

The beginning of the work, particularly this passage, explains the genesis of the protagonist's long, adventurous, chivalric path, and encloses everything that will be developed later (as it happens with the beginning of *King Lear*), whereas the subtle epithet in the title – 'ingenioso'⁵ – will be endlessly expanded. Don Quijote will prove to be a resourceful, tireless, fearless knight, full of energy, enthusiasm and commitment during his hard quest.

The royal abdication in the English play meets a relevant antithesis in the Spanish narrative, when an old member of the lesser nobility invests himself as rescuer, valiantly moved and motivated by the sense of loyal service, no matter how mad his decision, behaviour or actions may be (or seem to be). From the moment Quijote starts riding his Rocinante – and let us bear in mind that the horse was the paramount element of every knight, an extension of his own status – he chooses *praxis* and rejects *gnosis*, in total opposition to Lear.

⁴ Although the essay is in English, the author decided not to use a translated version for the quotations, once the work was studied and analysed in Spanish. Moreover, the use of a translation would involve hermeneutic questions that go beyond the scope of this work.

⁵ The epithet encapsulates the plural meanings inherent to the Renaissance concept of 'wit', approached by Philip Sidney, Luís de Camões and Baltasar Gracián, among other authors.

... se armó de todas sus armas, subió sobre Rocinante, ... embrazó su adarga, tomó su lanza, y ... salió al campo, con gradísimo contento ...

(First Part, Ch. II, 45)

The knight-errant's activity could not but include a series of problematic occurrences, once he moves in a sort of parallel universe. The dichotomy sight/insight present in *King Lear* also constitutes a key issue in Cervantes' text but it assumes different contours. In Quijote's case, the process of misapprehension and misunderstanding is particularly emphasised in two emblematic episodes, both focused on the martial dimension of the knight and on his duties. First, he takes windmills for armies

... dio de espuelas a su caballo *Rocinante* ... él iba tan puesto en que eran gigantes, que ni oía las voces de su escudero Sancho, ni echaba de ver, aunque estaba ya bien cerca, lo que eran ...

(First Part, Ch. VIII, 95)

Afterwards, he takes sheep for armies:

... se entró por medio del escuadrón de las ovejas y comenzó de alanceallas, con tanto coraje y denuedo como si de veras alanceara a sus mortales enemigos.

(First Part, Ch. XVIII, 194)

Moreover, the peculiar ways his squire (Sancho Panza) and his idealised lady (Dulcinea) are characterised, together with their role in the adventures, reinforce such misapprehension and alienation.

Quijote *contra mundum* constitutes a metonymic long quest materialised in a myriad of episodes, where a multitude of characters takes part, providing consistency to the core of the long work: some are devised as stereotypes, some as caricatures, others as idealisations, but all of them appear to play a specific role in Cervantes' analysis of the human nature. A deep reflection on fundamental values, like justice, generosity, tolerance, equity, dignity and righteousness, takes then form, simultaneously exposing and rejecting devious traits of humankind, as it occurs, for example, in Desiderius Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, Thomas More's *Utopia*, Baltasar Gracián's *El Héroe / El Discreto / Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, among many other Renaissance writings, Shakespeare's naturally included.

As Lear, Quijote also walks on sinuous grounds, despite the different circumstances and motives; as it happens in the play, a strong antithesis between semblance and essence takes form in the narrative and contains the dichotomies

sight/insight, reason/madness, order/disorder, as well as the dichotomic relation between the protagonist and each one of the other characters. However, Cervantes constantly reverts the primary, literal senses of the alluded dichotomies because it is Don Quijote who, moving in a parallel dimension and moved by strong, pure ideals, embodies all those positive traits of humankind.

Some lines of thought must now be recovered, regarding the wide context and further ones should be taken into account, regarding the particular circumstances that involved these two masterworks of Western culture, once the texts constitute perspicacious ‘signs of their times’.

As we have seen, it was an era of dynamic experimentalism, of intersection between tradition and innovation in every domain. The vernacular literature of the age, in general, and the two texts, in particular, vividly exemplify that same intersection and dynamism, by recreating, reinterpreting and rewriting cultural substrata through elaborate techniques. Then, in England, all the Tudor monarchs, in one way or another, faced the question of legitimacy, the precariousness of progeny and the survival of the dynasty, which could imply the loss of independence; therefore, the fictional staging of certain royal conducts, namely in *Lear* and *Richard III*, could constitute dangerous, inconvenient, bitter reminders of that same precariousness. In Spain, the powerful, opulent empire previously created by Charles V and Philip II was declining, ‘El Siglo de Oro’ was fading away, with broad consequences in every sphere of politics, religion, society, culture and economy; therefore, it was natural that disenchantment, nostalgia and uneasiness should coexist with a strong desire of change and improvement.

In the two fictional works here under consideration, the monarch’s and the knight-errant’s alienation, misapprehension and distortion of the surrounding realities turn them into wanderers on uneven, hard paths, while their frail physical conditions disclose a surface layer that nevertheless encapsulates assertive individuals whose actions didactically lead us not only to the exercise of reflection, but also to the exposition of every sort of abuse and the rejection of inequity. Shakespeare and Cervantes use elaborate rhetorical devices to emphasise a series of complex processes, regarding the art of writing, the characters’ conduct and the ambivalence that, in both works, regards the past, the present and the future. Quijote’s nostalgic eyes and mind are deeply fixed on the past; however, it is through the parodic use of convention that the positive side of innovation (or the need of it) is accomplished in the narrative. Lear’s eyes and mind are, contrariwise, placed on the future; however, it is through the rejection of the *status quo* ensuring stability, legitimacy and order, originated by the

unprecedented royal decisions, that the negative side of innovation is shaped in the play.

King Lear embodies Tragedy in its whole plenitude, exhibiting the calamitous consequences caused by lack of discernment and misrule, while *Don Quijote* ingeniously encapsulates a new form of prose which is wrapped in the shape of the ancient, conventional one. Shakespeare chose tragedy, Cervantes parody; but the two works, so different in genre and extension, are permeated by the same crucial premise: any need of change, no matter how urgent or inevitable it may be, must never erase fundamental values that reside – or should reside – at the core of human nature. Both authors were indeed ‘ingeniosos’, when, in early modern times, devised the elaborate complexity of these protagonists and of their paths in a complex world, full of contradictions, challenges and adversities. During the next four hundred years, and despite so many great achievements in every sphere, similar dilemmas took consistency, along with a series of new paradoxes. The notions of justice, generosity, tolerance, equity, integrity and righteousness, so outstandingly approached in the English play and the Spanish narrative, need therefore a constant re-evaluation in this world of ours, where perversity, distortion and abuse seem to subsist and to persist.

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**MICHAEL DAVIES, 2017. *LEGAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS FOR LAWYERS. A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO WORKING IN ENGLISH FOR LEGAL PROFESSIONALS*. LONDON: AMAZON, 2017.
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La variedad de inglés en la que se centra la guía *Legal English Language Skills for Lawyers. A Practical Guide to Working in English for Legal Professionals* es sin duda la que menos atención había recibido hasta hace unas décadas. Sin embargo, la proliferación de materiales didácticos para la enseñanza de Inglés Jurídico a partir de este ya avanzado milenio es muy destacada tanto por su expansión como por su diversidad.

Así, si en la década de los años 80 y 90 destacaron principalmente cinco manuales -*Law Today* (Powell, 1993), *A Guide to Legal English. Inglés para juristas* (Fernández & Almendárez, 1994), *English Law and Language. An Introduction for Students of English* (Russell & Locke, 1995²), *Introduction to Legal English* –volúmenes I, II– (Chromá & Coats, 1996) y *English for Law* (Riley, 1997²); desde el año 2000 hasta la actualidad la oferta se amplía a más de quince manuales de distinta índole, entre los que destacamos sólo algunos de ellos por razones como: su gran valor académico y didáctico -*El inglés jurídico. Textos y documentos* (Alcaraz Varó, 2001⁵), su carácter pionero -*Market Leader. Business Law* (Smith, 2001), *Test your Professional English. Law* (Brieger, 2002); su autoría nacional, circunstancia ciertamente excepcional -*English for Law: An Introduction to Legal English* (Alejos, 2004), o por su reciente aparición -*The Lawyer's English Coursebook* (Mason, 2016) y *Legal English Language Skills for Lawyer. A Practical Guide to Working in English for Legal Professionals* (Davies, 2017).

Este resurgir de materiales para dar respuesta a las necesidades de los estudiantes y profesionales del Derecho en lo que al aprendizaje y la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa se refiere puede obedecer a la expansión internacional de las empresas en la sociedad actual, las estrategias de marketing en inglés en internet hoy más necesarias que nunca y con las que se consigue una mayor publicidad frente a otros métodos tradicionales de promoción de los negocios y, asimismo, a la movilidad internacional en la Unión Europea y otros países. Por unas u otras razones es un hecho innegable y alentador que en estos momentos contemos con

un gran banco de materiales didácticos para la enseñanza y aprendizaje de Inglés Jurídico.

La propuesta de Davies (2017) es una breve guía de carácter informativo e introductorio para los profesionales del Derecho centrada en las destrezas lingüísticas y extralingüísticas necesarias en el ejercicio de esta profesión. Su diseño responde al de una guía al uso a partir de una sucesión lineal de destrezas que aparecen en negrita organizadas a partir de 16 capítulos muy breves, concisos y precisos; al tiempo que repleta de consejos de suma relevancia tanto por la visión práctica como por la utilidad de los mismos.

Así, esta guía se dirige a los profesionales y estudiantes de Derecho no hablantes nativos de la lengua inglesa que pretendan trabajar en este campo a nivel internacional en países de habla inglesa, para lo que sería necesario un nivel entre intermedio y avanzado de inglés equivalente al nivel B2 de acuerdo con el Marco Común Europeo, según el autor de esta guía señala.

Los dos primeros capítulos -*What is Legal English?* y *How to Improve at Legal English*- tienen un carácter introductorio al centrarse, de una parte, en la delimitación del significado de Inglés Jurídico como una de las variedades de IFE (Inglés para Fines Específicos), los requisitos necesarios para trabajar en un contexto de habla inglesa (como el examen TOLES-*Test of Legal English Skills*) y las peculiaridades del Inglés Jurídico frente a lo que se denomina inglés estándar y, de otra parte, en cómo mejorar en este campo, para lo que se destacan 21 aspectos críticos con consejos básicos y prácticos de gran utilidad, circunstancia ya adelantada en líneas anteriores. A modo de ejemplo, uno de estos 21 aspectos es que la ortografía correcta nos aporta credibilidad y favorece la disposición a hacer negocios con nosotros y se aconseja que se aprenda la ortografía de la lengua inglesa sin hacer uso de correctores ortográficos.

Los 21 aspectos que se destacan y que listamos, dada su relevancia en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de inglés como lengua extranjera, son los siguientes: aprender vocabulario propio del campo, mejorar la ortografía, leer más, mejorar la gramática, ampliar el conocimiento de términos jurídicos, conocer la conexión entre el latín y el Inglés Jurídico, aprender expresiones hechas, mejorar el conocimiento de estas expresiones hechas, leer textos jurídicos en voz alta, saber cómo intervenir con éxito en una conversación, parafrasear más, desarrollar una modulación de la voz, disfrutar aprendiendo, conocer mejor la propia lengua materna, analizar el acento en las palabras y oraciones, deletrear palabras y decir números en voz alta, conocer la lengua inglesa a través de la poesía y el rap, utilizar respuestas cortas en la dúplica, utilizar contracciones y elipsis en lenguaje oral y evitarlas en lenguaje escrito, llegar a ser un buen narrador y

utilizar tiempos verbales propios de la narración y, por último, aprender a hacer pausas.

En una línea y un estilo similares esta breve guía se adentra en los capítulos siguientes en aspectos muy diversos como distintos géneros de la escritura (capítulo 3 -las cartas; capítulo 5 -los contratos), aspectos conceptuales (capítulo 4 -el Inglés Jurídico británico y americano), destrezas lingüísticas como la expresión oral en distintos contextos profesionales (capítulo 6 -cómo mantener conversaciones con clientes), aspectos culturales (capítulo 7-cómo relacionarse con los británicos), fuentes y recursos para los estudiantes de Derecho (capítulo 8 -artículos de periódicos, actas judiciales, programas de radio especializados en Derecho...), las nuevas tecnologías (capítulo 9 -cómo actuar en las redes sociales), aspectos lingüísticos (capítulo 10 -los conectores en el inglés para los negocios y el Inglés Jurídico; capítulo 11-errores gramaticales que hay que evitar; capítulo 14 -la gramática del Inglés Jurídico; capítulo 15 -los verbos preposicionales o *phrasal verbs*) y, finalmente, algunas de las destrezas comunicativas (capítulo 12 -el uso del teléfono; capítulo 13 -las reuniones de negocios).

De estos 16 capítulos destaca el carácter genuino de los capítulos 2, 8, 9 y 15. En el primero de ellos, “How to Improve at Legal English”, la sucesión de los 21 aspectos descritos en líneas anteriores aúna un conocimiento propio de un especialista en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, el campo del Derecho y la realidad del ejercicio de esta profesión en el Reino Unido y otros contextos culturales. Asimismo, el capítulo 8, “Resources for Legal English Students”, en concreto, recursos fuera del aula, ofrece una selección de series de televisión (dramas y comedias) británicas, estadounidenses y australianas centradas en el campo del Derecho (*Rumpole of the Bailey* -serie creada y escrita por el abogado británico John Mortimer; *Crownies* -serie de televisión australiana que recrea la vida de un grupo de abogados recién egresados; *Suits* -serie estadounidense que tiene por protagonista al mejor abogado de Nueva York y a su socio, que no es abogado), programas de radio, revistas, páginas *web* y *blogs* del campo del Derecho que constituyen una fuente de gran valor tanto para los usuarios a los que se dirige esta guía como para los profesores de Inglés Jurídico. De igual forma, el capítulo 9, “How to Network and Socialise”, está repleto de consejos de primera mano que difícilmente se pueden encontrar en ningún otro tipo de manual y como conclusión de este capítulo señalamos el siguiente consejo: “Read widely. Listen to podcasts, the radio, learn about everything. It will help you with your overall English and improve your vocabulary immensely” (p. 17). Por último, en el capítulo 15, “Phrasal Verbs”, contamos con un listado breve, como la propia guía centro de atención, de los verbos preposicionales más

usuales en el campo del Derecho listados de la *a* a la *z* con comentarios y ejemplos de gran valor.

Esta guía de destrezas para estudiantes y profesionales del Derecho en el campo de Inglés Jurídico es útil tanto para los usuarios a los que se dirige como para los docentes de inglés para fines específicos que impartan por primera vez cursos intensivos o extensivos de Inglés Jurídico si se concibe como prontuario que proporciona una visión de conjunto muy acertada de las destrezas primordiales que los estudiantes y profesionales mencionados han de potenciar.

Asimismo, es oportuno destacar que esta guía es novedosa si se compara con los materiales didácticos y no didácticos existentes en el mercado editorial desde la década de los 90 hasta el momento presente en el campo de Inglés Jurídico, ya que aporta una visión panorámica de las necesidades término de inglés de los profesionales del Derecho con expectativas laborales internacionales y, en concreto, en Gran Bretaña, visión que se proporciona no como un libro de texto o manual de autoestudio sino en forma de guía. Si bien esta es breve, ofrece mucha información de sumo interés difícil de encontrar en cualquier otro tipo de manual, como ya se ha señalado. En este sentido, es oportuno subrayar que el autor de esta guía es especialista en la enseñanza de la variedad de Inglés Jurídico en el Colegio de Abogados Internacionales de Wimbledon.

De igual forma, también se descubren ciertas limitaciones en la guía *Legal English Language Skills for Lawyers*, entre las que hemos de destacar el hecho de que la población a la que se dirige no está bien definida, la organización de contenidos no parece seguir ningún criterio y este además no se explicita, aspecto que habría sido de gran utilidad para los distintos destinatarios que puede tener esta guía. Asimismo, si bien se indica el nivel de inglés necesario para trabajar en un contexto internacional en el campo del Derecho, no se delimita el nivel de entrada que se ha de tener para poner en práctica la potenciación de las destrezas que son centro de atención en esta guía. Así, en algunos casos los consejos y los materiales auténticos que se proponen no siempre pueden resultar idóneos para el nivel de entrada de los usuarios la guía. No obstante, es oportuno destacar que en algún caso aislado se indica qué se ha de hacer dependiendo del nivel de entrada que se tenga. A los aspectos señalados hay que sumar el hecho de que en la contraportada de la misma se crean unas expectativas que no se ven cumplidas a lo largo de los distintos capítulos, esto es, el trabajo se describe como guía para las reuniones y la oficina, no siendo esta destreza comunicativa el principal centro de atención de la misma y, de igual forma, el contexto profesional de la oficina no se menciona de forma explícita en los distintos capítulos.

Para terminar, cabe subrayar que *Legal English Language Skills for Lawyers. A Practical Guide to Working in English for Legal Professionals* aúna componentes lingüísticos, destrezas lingüísticas/extralingüísticas y comunicativas y aspectos conceptuales y culturales; integración que le confiere este carácter novedoso al que hemos hecho referencia a lo largo de estas páginas. Así, la visión y la experiencia en el campo de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras y del Derecho del autor de esta guía hacen que el compendio de las destrezas en el aprendizaje y la enseñanza de Inglés Jurídico sea sin duda enriquecedora para los estudiantes y profesionales de este campo, así como para los profesores de IFE/ESP.

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EROULLA DEMETRIOU AND JOSÉ RUIZ MAS. 2018. *ENGLISH TRAVEL ACCOUNTS ON CYPRUS (1960-2004). THE JOURNEY TO EUROPE*. GRANADA: CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS BIZANTINOS, NEOGRIEGOS Y CHIPRIOTAS. 143 PAGES. ISBN: 978-84-95905-93-2.

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E. Demetriou (University of Jaén) and J. Ruiz Mas (University of Granada) are no newcomers in the genre of travel writing. The former is known for her recent edition of Sarah (Stickney) Ellis's *Summer and Winter in the Pyrenees (1841)* as part of the "Women's Travel Writing in Iberia, Chawton House Library" Series (2014),¹ and for other works on travels in the Eastern Mediterranean; the latter is remembered for his studies on British and American travellers in Spain in the 19th and 20th centuries mainly, as well as for his edition of Marianne Baillie's *Lisbon in the Years 1821, 1822, and 1823 (1824)* (of the aforementioned series, 2014, volumes I and II).² Dr Demetriou and Dr Ruiz Mas's latest book on English-speaking travellers in Cyprus is a logical sequel to their earlier *English Travel Literature on Cyprus (1878-1960)* (2004).³ In their 2004-monograph they analysed the sub-genre of travel accounts on Cyprus as written and published by British and –to a lesser extent– American travellers during the period spanning the British occupation, that is, from 1878, when Lieutenant General Garnet Wolseley was sent to Cyprus as high-commissioner to the newly acquired British possession, up until the island finally refused to aspire to *enosis* with Greece and gained her independence in 1960. The two books on travel literature on Cyprus authored by Demetriou and Ruiz Mas (2004 and 2018) must be placed in the context of an increasing scholarly interest in English travel accounts of the last two decades, as is evidenced in Rita C. Severis and Loukia Loizou Hadjigraviel's *In the Footsteps of Women: Peregrinations in Cyprus* (1998),⁴ Rita C. Severis's *Travelling Artists in Cyprus from the 1700s to 1960* (2000),⁵ and Jim Bowman's *Narratives of Cyprus: Modern Travel Writing and Cultural Encounters since Lawrence Durrell* (2014),⁶ among others.

¹ London: Chatto & Pickering, 2014, volume V.

² London: Chatto & Pickering, 2014, volumes I and II.

³ Granada: Centro de Estudios Bizantinos, Neogriegos y Chipriotas and A. G. Leventis Foundation, 2004.

⁴ Nicosia: Leventis Municipal Museum and the Cultural Centre of the Popular Bank, 1998.

⁵ London: Philip Wilson, 2000.

⁶ London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014.

English Travel Accounts on Cyprus (1960-2004) spans the period covered from 1960 up until 2004, i.e. the year when Cyprus officially achieved her longed-for entrance in the European Union, though without its northern part. The authors have employed these key dates in Cyprus's recent history to frame the travel accounts published in the late 20th century and the very early years of the 21st century. Naturally, this is no history book. However, the country's most traumatic 'civil-war' episodes in the 1960s and especially in 1974 and the subsequent massive migrations within the island of Greek Cypriots towards the south and Turkish Cypriots towards the north are inevitably referred to in it, albeit from an 'Anglo' perspective. Anglophone travellers in the 1960-2004 period did not fail to depict Cyprus in its uncomfortable infancy as an independent country. They also witnessed its first ethnical and religious clashes and the 1974 conflict, and included ample references about the embittered feelings and prejudices existing between many members of the two main communities regarding Cypriot identity.

The objectivity employed by Demetriou and Ruiz Mas deserves due credit in their scarce appreciations and interpretations: they have shown no preference for the cause of one or the other side of the Cyprus-conflict. This policy of non-commitment (for which one has to be thankful) has no doubt been aided by the fact that the authors are Spanish: they are not suspicious of favouring any specific side of the current communal conflict for reasons of national alliance. The same could not be said about the travellers themselves. Barbara Toy and Colin Thubron are clear-cut examples of travellers who sided with the Turkish Cypriots, whereas most of the other Anglophone chroniclers of the period did side with the Greek Cypriots.

The Spanish compilers have analysed around thirty travel narrations written by visitors of various walks of life. It is true that among these Anglophone travellers in Cyprus in the last fifty years there is not one of the literary status of Lawrence Durrell, there is no Henry Rider Haggard, no H. V. Morton, no William Hurrell Mallock, no Sir Samuel Baker, no Agnes Smith, and no Esm  Scott-Stevenson either. With the exception of the professional British travel writer Colin Thubron, the contemporary travel writers and scholars on things Cypriot included in this monograph do not carry, on the whole, the literary weight of their Victorian, Edwardian or Colonial predecessors in British Cyprus. Nevertheless, included in this book are some relevant names in Anglo-Cypriot relations, namely the British historians Gordon Home and Sir Harry Charles Luke and the German art historian Kraus Gallas (the latter writing in English about his disappointing experience on visiting the other side of the Green Line); or the Anglicised Greek Cypriot Reno Wideson trying to promote the island's

touristic potential; or heavy-weight political journalists such as the Australian Barbara Toy and the English Nancy Crawshaw in pre-1974 Cyprus; or even some examples of British and Irish expatriates, the most famous of whom was Sheila Hawkins, who authored the so called 'Beyond' trilogy of travel accounts/memoirs about her paradisiacal life in a small Greek Cypriot village 'in the middle of nowhere'; or the Australian archeologist Diana Wood Conroy, a modern representative of the strong tradition of archaeological travellers in Cyprus; or even two medical doctors of mysterious identities, the Irishman 'Peter Paris' –most probably a pseudonym–, who was working in a hospital in the thick of 'the troubles' in an EOKA-threatened British Cyprus, and the dynamic but also mysterious Anglo-Russian doctor George Sava, who authored a probably 'imaginary' travel account on the island and a (probably equally 'imaginary') interview with Archbishop Makarios. And last but not least, there is a unique example of a British tourist, Oliver Burch, author of the much sought-after travel account *The Infidel Sea: Travels in North Cyprus* (1990),⁷ who spent some holiday time with his family in the Turkish Cypriot tourist resort of Girne/Kyrenia in the late 1980s and offered a first-hand depiction of what everyday life in North Cyprus was like then. Irrespective of their literary quality, most of the travel narrations described in this monograph may contribute to the knowledge of the period as valuable historical documents of the recent past of the island as depicted and/or interpreted by first-hand Anglophone witnesses, if one ignores any subjectivity they could contain.

The amount of English-speaking travellers who have written travelogues on Cyprus has not diminished after 2004 at all, as is proved in Appendix III of Demetriou and Ruiz Mas's book. The interest of non-Anglophone readers in learning about the Mediterranean island as portrayed by the most relevant British travellers of yore is also noticeable in a large number of translations into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Turkish, Dutch and the various Scandinavian languages of Morton's, Durrell's and Thubron's travel accounts, as collected in Appendix II. The most famous English travel books, especially Lawrence Durrell's *Bitter Lemons*,⁸ continue to be regularly reedited, as shown in Appendix I. Indeed, the three appendices of the book ascertain that Cyprus has of late been a moderately successful literary *locus* both for Anglophone writers and for worldwide potential visitors.

Cyprus is no simple land to comprehend despite its small size. Those who have landed on its shores at different times of her history have been many and their purposes amply varied. Few of her visitors have remained indifferent to its

⁷ Southampton: Ashford, Buchan & Enright, 1990.

⁸ London: Faber and Faber, 1957.

mythological spell and to its unequivocal literary resonances, but no less to its politically and geographically strategic position as a crossroads between Europe and the near East. Its proximity to Palestine soon converted the island into the last stop in any sea pilgrimage to the Holy Land, a route that has been followed since medieval times to the early 20th century. Foreign travel writers (especially those coming from Britain) have sometimes endeavored to deny or at least disguise Cyprus's European vocation in their narrations. The most influential examples of this image of the country may have been Durrell's *Bitter Lemons* (1957) and Thubron's *Journey into Cyprus* (1975).⁹ The island and its Turkish/Greek Cypriot inhabitants were depicted as the straightforward result of a peculiar blend of Oriental and Byzantine flavours. They also systematically depicted the relatively recent British 82-year occupation of the island as being too spiritually distant from the local lay population. For these travel writers it was as if Cyprus had the duty to remain picturesquely Oriental, Byzantine and medieval, more Phoenician than Greek, hardly Lousignan (i.e., French), hardly Venetian (i.e., Italian) and not at all British. As a matter of fact Europeism was more often than not denied to 20th-century Cypriots. However, in my opinion, the most relevant merit of Demetriou and Ruiz Mas's book is that it has successfully managed to attract the attention of the world historians and political observers and travel specialists, who have been able to ascertain that the Anglophone travellers in Cyprus of the last decades, unlike Thubron or Durrell, have fully noticed the bi-communal country's slow progressive growth into a fully-fledged European identity. This certainly complicated but eventually successful 'journey to Europe' became a reality for Greek Cypriots in 2004; alas, not for Turkish Cypriots.

⁹ London: Heinemann, 1975.

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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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 **1,4 cm** (0,5") 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. (Burns 188–89)

If part of the original text is omitted, three dots without brackets should be included.

Bibliographical References. Examples:

Monographs:

Duiker, William J., and Jackson J. Spielvogel. *The Essential World History, Volume 2*. 2005. 6th. ed. 2 vols. Boston: Wadsworth, 2011.

Multiple works:

Follett, Ken. *Lie Down with Lions*. New York: Signet, 1986.

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Edited book

López-Peláez, Jesús. Ed. *Strangers in Early Modern English Texts*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011.

Chapter in an edited book:

Kavanagh, James H. "Shakespeare in Ideology." *Alternative Shakespeares*. 1985. 2nd ed. Ed. John Drakakis. London: Routledge, 2002. 147–69.

Translated book:

Eco, Umberto. *The Name of the Rose*. Trans. William Weaver. New York: Harcourt, 1983.

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.

Rivara, Frederick P., et al. "Prevention of Bicycle-Related Injuries: Helmets, Education, and Legislation." *Annual Review of Public Health* 19 (1998): 293–318.

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Solé, Yolanda. "Valores aspectuales en español." *Hispanic Linguistics* 4.1 (1990): 57–85.

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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.

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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>>.

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>>.

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- The font Times New Roman (10) should be used in the whole manuscript.
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- Footnotes numbers must be included after punctuation marks.
- Centuries must be referred to as follows: "18th" instead of "18th."

“Untitled”, by David Swartz

An old man
with a small voice
and a long train of journeys
into the history of hopes
dragging behind
shaved off his wrinkles
and walked into the future bakery
where he saw your sparkling eyes.

To himself:
I was searching wild
for the present time
where the long spent past
finds the doorway to the future
opened wide,
and I found it right here
right now
in a waking vision
of a life saving smile
from out the portals
of your gracious soul
that filled my heart
with the momentary joy
of present bliss:
perpetual and eternal
is moment like this!

Originally from Toronto, Canada, David Swartz has resided in Lisbon, Portugal since 2013, where he teaches English at the New University of Lisbon (NOVA). Concurrently, David is writing a PhD thesis at NOVA on Shakespeare's Sonnets. He has recently completed a translation of Nuno Júdice's 1982 novel *A Manta Religiosa* which will be published by New Meridian Arts in March, 2020. He has kindly contributed to *The Grove* on request of the Editor with the above poem.