Revista Canaria de

ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Universidad de La Laguna 74 2017

Revista Canaria de

ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Revista Canaria de
ESTUDIOS INGLESES
Universidad de La Laguna

PUBLISHER
Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de La Laguna
Campus Central. 38200 La Laguna.
Santa Cruz de Tenerife.
E-mail: servicio.publicaciones@ull.edu.es

DESIGN
J.H. Vera/Javier Torres/Luis C. Espinosa

TYPESET BY
Servicio de Publicaciones

ISSN: 0211-5913 (edición impresa) / ISSN: e-2530-8335 (edición digital)
Depósito Legal: TF 275/81

Revista Canaria de
ESTUDIOS INGLESES

74

Servicio de Publicaciones
UNIVERSIDAD DE LA LAGUNA, 2017

REVISTA canaria de estudios ingleses. —Nº 1 (1980)—. —La Laguna: Universidad, Servicio de Publicaciones, 1980—
Semestral
ISSN 0211-5913
1. Literatura inglesa-Publicaciones periódicas 2. Lengua inglesa-Gramática-Publicaciones periódicas I. Universidad de La Laguna. Servicio de Publicaciones, ed.
820(05)
802.0-5(05)

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

RCEI invites contributions of articles in such fields as linguistics, literature, critical theory, history, and cultural studies within the English Philology. Manuscript submissions, presented in English between 4,500 and 5,500 words, should conform to the guidelines found in the latest *MLA Style Manual*. For specific instructions on style contact the editorial office. Authors are expected to send their contributions as an attachment to *rceing@ull.es* and mail three double-spaced, printed copies with wide margins. Short abstracts (about 100 words) in English and Spanish are required, along with the keywords (4-8) of the essay in both languages. The Editorial Committee reserves the right to introduce stylistic changes and to adjust illustrations. Further details on submissions: http://webpages.ull.es/users/rceing/submissions.html.

Any acknowledgments must appear as an initial, unnumbered note. Footnotes, numbered consecutively throughout the manuscript, must be, in the case of quoted material, after the punctuation mark (indented quotes) or the quotation marks. Digressive or excessively lengthy footnotes should be avoided. Subsequent references to a previously cited work require only the author's last name but in the case of previous citations to more than one work by the same author, a title must appear (as is clear, *op.cit.* is not to be used).

Each contributor should send a note stating specifically his/her manuscript is only being considered for publication by *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. Authors may republish their own material, provided such republication provides due acknowledgment. Published twice yearly, in April and November.

Editorial correspondence and all copies of books to be considered for reviews should be addressed to the Editor, *RCEI*, Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana, Facultad de Filología, Universidad de La Laguna, Campus de Guajara, 38200 La Laguna, Tenerife, Islas Canarias, España. Decisions on articles submitted are normally made within three months and those accepted published within a year. As is traditional academic practice, *RCEI* only publishes (blind) peer-reviewed essays. For further details on *RCEI* editorial policies, please visit our website: http://webpages.ull.es/users/rceing.

The *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* is scanned, indexed, abstracted or ranked by the following: ABELL (Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature), Agence Bibliographique de l'Enseignement Supérieur, AustLit (The Resource for Australian Literature), BD-ISOC, British Humanities Index, Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (CSA), CARHUS, CINDOC, CIRC (Clasificación Integrada de Revistas Científicas), Dialnet, DICE, DULCINEA, ERA (Excellence in Research for Australia), ERIH (European Reference Index for the Humanities), Google Scholar Metrics, Humbul Humanities Hub, IBR (International Bibliography of Book Reviews of Scholarly Literature on the Humanities and Social Sciences), IBZ (International Bibliography of Periodical Literature on the Humanities and Social Sciences), IN-RECH, JournalBase, Latindex, Linguistics Abstracts On-Line, LLBA (Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts), MIAR, MLA Directory of Periodicals, MLA International Bibliography, Periodicals Contents Index, RESH, SCImago Journal Rank, RI (Regesta Imperii), Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, WorldCat, The Year's Work in English Studies, and Zeitschriftendatenbank.

To consult the frequency of international and national citations of articles published in our journal, please visit this site: http://webpages.ull.es/users/rceing/citations.html.

Our e-mail address is: rceing@ull.es

For further details concerning journal exchange, back issues, etc., please contact:

Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses
Servicio de Publicaciones
Universidad de La Laguna
Campus Central
38200 La Laguna (Tenerife, España)
E-mail: servicio.publicaciones@ull.edu.es

CONTENTS

SPECIAL ISSUE

The (Female) Body: New Encounters/Readings in British Fiction

INTRODUCTION

The body, and the female body in particular, does not only loom large in academic discussions whether in its discursive, material or cultural dimensions; it actually pokes out as a site of contestation and rewritable possibilities beyond customary forms within Western representation and its adhered narratives of subjectivity and belonging. Although corporeality occurs conspicuously in any single aspect of human life—which literature magnifies and addresses in nuanced representations—, the technologies of the self informing body images and their concomitant disciplining narratives have proved deeply impairing and detrimental to the female body. The latter thus becomes an easy prey to essentializing discourses, which often inscribe their ideologies on gendered bodies by presenting them as, for instance, unbearably abhorred in the Judeo-Christian tradition, bound to silence and accessoriness in the Cartesian dualist architecture of the self and its ensuing somatophobia, or disciplined and made natural, biology-centered, self-evident truths of scientific inquiry.

Notwithstanding, literature manages to better account for the body's constitutive part in any delineation of the experiencing self, as its changing, amorphous complexity relates us to the world we live and the bodies we inhabit too. Literary texts do rarely bet on straightforward or downright answers; quite the contrary, they respond significantly to carnal fluidity and its transformative potentials. Literature therefore makes the closest ally to the female body; in so doing it attests to today's critical eclecticism about corporeality and embodied experience of the self while laying bare institutionalized truths constructed/pivoting on the body (race, gender, sexuality, social class, age, disability) and, eventually, providing—*fleshing out*—representational frames to let the (long silenced) body speak out its own sensuous/sensorial discourse.

Contemporary British women writers have more than frequently resorted to the body—figures, images, inscribing strategies, identities—so as to propose new rewritings, creative contestations and empowered transgressions meant to metamorphose the female body and the narrative profiles it is written in: gender and transgender figurations, whether in canonic or popular literature, or genre typologies mutating "corporeally" as they break free from mandatory narrative legibility and open ground for new representations of the body and bodiliness, or the recasting of traditional frontiers between material-cultural, interior-exterior, animal-human, male-female, biological-technological, personal-national, mental-corporeal, etc. The female body lends in these fictions to an ever-growing multiplicity of approaches which can only be mapped out but partially, assuming from the start of this editorial project the unfinished nature of the volume we present. Though not initially intended to be a sequel to the previous monographic volume of RCEI, which likewise delved into female corporealities in contemporary culture, the present issue we introduce undoubtedly benefits from a happy sequential coincidence: contiguity once more attests to continuity, and to the endless supply offered by new insights into the female body and its overlapping, inter-disciplinary dimensions, on this occasion in contemporary British fiction by women writers. Seemingly, this latter statement might be the cue for readers to expect a much limited scope of contents, gestures, fields of vision and spatial locations, whether in place or time, which parallels one of Britain's most cherished and quintessential idiosyncrasies, the love for its cultural and fictional past—crystallizing at present in prolific literary revisits to a much wider catalogue of corporeal rituals, forms of containment, explicit or covert violence and stereotypes about women's bodies. Notwithstanding, these forms of bodily understanding accruing from British literature are concurrent with another 'natural' drive underlying British identity, its long-endorsed capacity to reinvent itself, all the more in the sphere of literary studies and practice. The female body in contemporary British literature by women novelists does really unleash a bulky *body* of questions not only intent on pursuing the long raised issue of 'what is a body?' but on inquiring into an ample spectrum of aspects creeping into literary discourse: the role of affect introducing new cognitive/representational paradigms, the proposal of new embodied sexualities, bodily agency and cognitive capacities, death-trauma and the body, to mention just a few.

That the past revisited casts present-day understandings is a certainty that neo-Victorian Studies rest on, which keep on rendering—much successfully in recent times—academic approaches to one of the most paradigmatic niches of British literature and identity. The Victorian past and fiction, long held responsible of both stern policing of women's bodies and lives and of women's first emancipatory projects as well, inspires the work of Michel Faber (*The Crimson Petal and the White*) and Emma Donoghue (*The Seal Letter*), which Lin Petterson's contribution examines so as to find in the body of the female philanthropist the basis for the contestation of dominant constructions of masculinity and feminity. Victorian anxieties with respect to deviating from the mandatory separation between sexes is led to an extreme as Pettersson confers on the figure of the female philanthropist deeply transgressive valences that destabilize one by one the firm partition walls between gender spheres, attitudes, roles, duties and physical appearance. Gender disruption—and its marked charges of female impropriety—finds its bodily projection in the odd, scandalous and anxiety-raising figure of the female invert, the female freak or masculine woman, that the character of the philanthropist incarnates in these novels. The neo-Victorian female philanthropist thus manages to undermine not only mid-nineteenth century patriarchal-inflected gender frames; as Petterson's insight makes clear, she likewise opens new spaces for cross-gendering, inter-sexedness, gender slipperiness and same-sex relationships via new gender embodiments that advance a wider, freer, more hospitable perception of gender beyond patriarchal or feminist heteronormativism, in the present, in the future.

In a way, Petterson hands over the baton of neo-Victorian rewritings of the past to Rosario Arias, whose contribution sets the literary legacy of Victorian gender and bodily policies informing Sarah Water's trilogy (*Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*) against the backdrop of phenomenological, queer and affect studies.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 9-12

Past and present, object and subject, get mutually transformed as experienced and perceived by the sensuous, material body. Attentive to embodied situatedness, Arias focuses particularly on tactility—skin and hands. Far from being mute facticity, the body and the corporeal organize the horizon of sense and meaning, thus cancelling binary dichotomies, while the course of sensorial, material experience transforms itself through contact with subjects, bodies, discourses, memories or ideas. Drawing on these critical stands, Arias starts a double-oriented move back to the Victorian past; tactility, and, in particular, the skin manage to produce bodily encounters allowing for the flow of sensations, affects, objects and subjects that ultimately renew the perception of both past and present. Sarah Waters—Arias claims—resorts in her fiction to these corporeal, tactile and affective relationships to bring lesbianism from spectrality in Victorian fiction to contact zones of queer desire and sexuality attuned to contemporary approaches to gender.

Affect and space theories also help Carla Rodríguez delve into Scottish novelist Zoë Strachan's first novel, *Negative Space* (2002). Rodríguez's analysis centers on the novel's fictional figurations of human disaffection, alienation and dislocation hinging on the female body and its reciprocrated emotional relation with space. From corporeal void—the female narrator's embodiment of death trauma, suspected incest and urban loneliness in the city of Glasgow—and the hypersexualized body of domestic spaces perpetuating the reifying gaze of hetero-patriarchal discourse, Rodríguez develops the analytical line linking the first attempts at retrieving the absent or emotionally disordered body—unable to negotiate satisfactory emotions in the city's spaces, still too menacing and fraught with threatening gender constructions—to, ultimately, move out from harmful emotional insularity and accomplish subjective empowerment. Once a estranged, resistant self, prone to projecting its corporeal dimension on urban space and the gender boundaries attributed to the female body, Stella's body now becomes attuned to the rhythmical diversity of other bodies, spaces, times beneficially integrated via a more relational, affective, alterity-oriented and corporeal representation of the self.

The feminist debates on pornography and the female body have traditionally prompted, since the 1970s onwards, impassionate critical debate edging on the contentious. Whether a site of gender exploitation or potential liberation for woman desire, the female body has been placed at the center of much feminist preoccupation. Yet very few have dared to inhabit a middle-ground stance that combines narratives of woman sexuality targeting at the debunking of reductionist and detrimental sexual archetypes with the gender-based exploration of pornography as a genre. Angela Carter figures as one of the most prominent to venture into these questions. Vrinda R. Chanth explores the enrichingly complex relationship between gender/genre and the treatment of the female body by having recourse to Carter's fiction (*The Passion of New Eve*, *Black Venus*) and critical statements (*The Sadeian Woman*) so as to spot similar gender patterns shared by pornography conventions and patriarchal material-institutional practices. Drawing on Carter's figure of the "moral pornographer", Chant surveys the novelist's deconstruction of patriarchal, ethnic and heteronormative universals about woman and her body as well as the ways she subversively rewrites them: by displacing, parodying, or dislocating gender (and ethnic) assumptions about male and female embodied subjectivities so as to perform—in a Butlerian sense—them anew.

Far from being complete in any sense, we hope this issue keeps today's raising interest in bodies. Bodies matter: they conspicuously participate and decide human experience of life. We thus intend this monograph to become a meeting point for corporeal figurations within this ample field; above anything else, we intend readers to find scholarly and most pleasurable ways for the understanding of the body in literature.

The editors wish to express their gratitude to all our reviewers for their kind and generous disposition and for the quality of their academic suggestions and expertise, which undoubtedly contributed to intensify the academic quality of contributions.

ARTICLES

THE PHILANTHROPIST IN NEO-VICTORIAN LITERATURE: (IM)PROPER FEMININITY, GENDER INVERSION AND FREAKISHNESS

Lin Elinor Pettersson
University of Málaga

Abstract

The present article singles out the female philanthropist in neo-Victorian fiction to explore the patriarchal unease regarding the unsexing effect of feminism in the mid-Victorian era as well as the literary constructions and contestations of the concept of gender inversion. I will examine how social anxiety regarding feminists materialises through repeated attempts of locating physical traces of gender inversion on the body both then and now. First, I will analyse Michel Faber's use of Victorian sensationalist perspectives on the New Woman through the lens of freakery in *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002). Then I will explore how Emma Donoghue challenges dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity to support lesbian advocacy in *The Sealed Letter* (2008).

Keywords: Neo-Victorian, female philanthropy, gender inversion, improper feminine, freak, female masculinity, lesbian, Michel Faber, *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Emma Donoghue, *The Sealed Letter*.

Resumen

Este trabajo se centra en la filántropa de la ficción neo-victoriana para examinar los efectos des-sexualizadores del feminismo en la era victoriana, así como las figuraciones y rupturas literarias del concepto de inversión de género. En particular, se pretende analizar cómo el resquemor social que despierta el feminismo se materializa en intentos reiterados por descubrir huellas corporales de la inversión de género. Para ello se analizará la perspectiva sensacionalista victoriana sobre la figura enrarecida de la Nueva Mujer en la obra de Michel Faber (*The Crimson Petal and the White,* 2002), así como el desafío a los discursos dominantes de la masculinidad y la feminidad que sustentan la identidad lesbiana en *The Sealed Letter* (2008), de Emma Donoghue.

Palabras clave: Neo-victoriano, filantropía femenina, inversion de género, lo impropio femenino, *freak*, masculinidad femenina, lesbian, Michel Faber, *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Emma Donoghue, *The Sealed Letter*.

In the introduction to the special issue of the journal *Neo-Victorian Studies*, entitled "Neo-Victorianism and Feminism: New Approaches", the editors Tara MacDonald and Joyce Goggin emphasise how "it is striking that neo-Victorian narratives typically contain little in the way of feminist collectives and communities" (7). Neo-Victorianism is a historical genre that is highly preoccupied with gender issues, and its revisionary enterprise stretches far beyond a mere rescue of lost voices and the re-imagination of the fates of marginalised people to retrieve them from historical oblivion. Certainly, this sub-genre of modern historical fiction is used as a vehicle to criticise ideals, politics and cultural beliefs and prove a fruitful ground for contemporary authors to explore present-day issues and how they stand in relation to the past. As Marie-Luise Kohlke affirms "the neo-Victorian novel has been engaged in feminist consciousness-raising, whether directly or indirectly, both of its audience and its often outcast, persecuted, and exploited female character" (207). In recent years, several scholars have made an effort in establishing a link between first, second and third wave feminisms to explore the interface between feminist politics in Victorian period and twenty- and twenty-first-century feminist agendas in neo-Victorian literature.[1] Yet, as MacDonald and Goggin have noted, "neo-Victorian texts do not always perform in the ways that critics want them to, and the neo-Victorian media are not consistently as self-reflexive and radically feminist as academics may hope" (7). This paper explores Victorian philanthropy as a potential feminist community and singles out the female philanthropist in neo-Victorian literature in an attempt to disclose why contemporary authors insist on focusing on her body.[2]

Although Victorian feminist communities have been scarce in the neo-Victorian novels, the female philanthropist has appeared as an urban female character in at least four novels up to this moment, namely: Florence Banner in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), Emmeline Fox in Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), Lady Jocelyn in Belinda Starling's *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2007) and Fido Faithfull in Emma Donoghue's *The Sealed Letter* (2008). In these works, the female philanthropist is mainly a supportive character to the female protagonist with the exception of *The Sealed Letter*. The main character in Donoghue's novel is the social activist, writer and philanthropist Emily Faithfull (1835-95) and the narrative is set in the mid-Victorian period against the backdrop of the early stages of the women's movement. Notwithstanding, one common feature of the afore-mentioned novels is that all situate philanthropy on the axis of sexuality.

[1] See for example Caterina Novak (2013) and Claire O'Callaghan (2013). Nadine Mueller's Doctoral Thesis, *The Feminist Politics of Neo-Victorian Fiction, 2000-2010* (2011), is another useful source.

[2] The research behind this paper has been supported by the research project FFI2013-44154-P "Nuevos parámetros críticos en torno al concepto de la huella y su aplicación a la literatura reciente en lengua inglesa" (Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, Government of Spain) and research network FFI2015-71025-REDT "VINS: Victorian and Neo-Victorian Studies in Spain Network" (Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, Government of Spain).

In general, neo-Victorian literature infers contemporary gender theories onto the Victorian discourse on female sexual desire. Specifically, Sarah Waters incorporates Judith Butler's notion of gender performance into *Tipping the Velvet* where the early feminist movement is contextualised within lesbian sisterhoods and Victorian Sapphic erotica. Similarly, in *The Journal of Dora Damage*, Lady Jocelyn's engagement in the "Ladies' Society for the Assistance of Fugitives from Slavery" is rather libidinous than altruistic. As Caterina Novák points out, Lady Jocelyn is portrayed as "a caricature rather than an accurate depiction of a Victorian society woman that appears deliberately designed to deflect the reader's sympathies and serves as a foil for Dora" (121). Thus, the novel limits the philanthropist to an eroticized context in which the sisterhood objectifies the male racial Other by targeting liberated slaves as objects of sexual curiosity and erotic explorations. Kohlke links this literary sexualisation of the Victorians to the reader perspective and holds that "by projecting illicit and unmentionable desires onto the past, we conveniently reassert our own supposedly enlightened stance towards sexuality and social progress" (2). Although the scholar addresses neo-Victorianism in terms of "the new Orientalism" (12), her statement also brings issues regarding sexuality and gender equality to the forefront, which, I find, questions our own knowingness about the Victorians as well as it provides insight into contemporary society.

The scope of this paper is to explore why the neo-Victorian philanthropist is situated on the basic premise of women's sexuality and for what purpose. The ensuing analysis focuses on contemporary constructions and contestations of the concept of gender inversion by taking a closer look at the philanthropists in two neo-Victorian novels: Emmeline Fox as characterised by Michel Faber in *The Crimson Petal and the White* and Emily Faithfull as re-imagined by Emma Donoghue in *The Sealed Letter.* Both novels are set in the aftermath of W.R. Greg's seminal essay on the surplus of unmarried women in England, "Why Are Women Redundant" (1862). This text testifies to the anxiety aroused by the excess of single women who would not be able to fulfil their roles as mothers and wives. Thus, Faber and Donoghue arguably hark back to a period imbued with social anxiety regarding gender roles and women's social position. First, I will establish a connection between the Odd Woman and the philanthropist with the aim to demonstrate that a socio-historical background sustains the novels under analysis. Then, I will examine how Faber and Donoghue address the figure of the female philanthropist as an Odd Woman by invoking the female freak and female invert—two figures associated with gender transgression, hybridity and anomaly. On the one hand, I aim to demonstrate that Faber engages with Victorian sensation fiction and freak-show discourses in his portrayal of Emmeline Fox. On the other hand, I will analyse how Donoghue bespeaks lesbian identity in the past casting the philanthropist in terms of female masculinity in the *The Sealed Letter*. Taking this as a starting point, I hope to disclose how social anxiety regarding feminists materialises through repeated attempts of locating physical traces of gender inversion on the body both then and now.

1. SETTING THE SCENE: PHILANTHROPY AND WOMEN IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

Philanthropy was widely spread in Victorian Britain and catered for women's participation in the public sphere.[3] As will be discussed below, it afforded women a space of social contestation to the unbalanced gender relations inscribed by the public/private ideology. Several critics have drawn attention to the porosity of dichotomous realms, among those, Martha Vicinus who highlights that the definition of women's proper sphere started to widen by the 1860s. She holds that women who were involved in charity work managed to bend the limits between the public and the domestic, and hence, "expand[ed] their fields and their personal horizons" (*A Widening Sphere* x). Drawing on the work of Vicinus along with Mary Poovey, Lynda Nead, Lyn Pykett, Judith Walkowitz and Elaine Showalter, I will argue that the female philanthropist used the ideology of domesticity to take active participation in the public sphere from the mid-Victorian era onwards. This new socio-historical perspective on the nineteenth-century philanthropist proves a fruitful ground for historical literature to explore gender issues.

The nineteenth century is distinguished for its rigid gender norms and moral values, yet, it was also an era imbued with social unrest. Victorian media expressed concern for the uneven categorisations of sex and gender, and frequently evoked the notion of gender inversion. For instance, comic pictures of mannish women were published in *Punch* to portray the anxiety that emancipated women triggered among the male ruling elite.[4] Parallel to this, female sexual desire and lesbianism, as synthesised through male scientific perspectives and the medical gaze, classified unfeminine conduct in terms of gender inversion. For example, this comes to the fore in the writings by sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing or Havelock Ellis.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, critics such as Mary Poovey, Elaine Showalter and Lyn Pykett have drawn attention to the social construction of femininity in the Victorian period and traced the development of the Odd Woman back to the period around the 1850s and 60s. Then, femininity was perceived in terms of the proper and improper feminine as circumscribed by binary frames, i.e. the public/private divide or male/female and mind/body dichotomies. Accordingly, Pykett sustains that the proper feminine "is a system of difference which marks off woman as essentially different from man", whereas, the improper feminine is "the proper feminine's suppressed other" (7). The scholar argues that in the 1860s the

---

[3] For a detailed analysis of Victorian women's involvement in philanthropy see Elizabeth Prochaska *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (1980) and Ellen Ross *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (1993; or her more recent volume, *Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860-1920* (2007).

[4] For illustrations of the threatening image of emancipated women and gender equality see *Punch* cartoons at www.punch.photoshelter.com. Especially cartoons by George Du Maurier, as for example, 'Passionate Female Literary Types: The New School' (1894) or 'The Coming Race' (1874).

ideological framework that enshrined women's nature and gender roles was constantly put under pressure (19).

Many feminist critical approaches to Victorian gender politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s take Greg's figure of the redundant woman as a point of departure. Poovey sees Greg's text as an example of how the domestic ideology was promulgated through images and social institutions to frame a set of values that dictated the sexual difference between man and woman. Labelling the social normativity that surrounded gender as "the ideological work of gender" (Poovey 2), the critic stresses how ideologies exist not only as ideas: "[i]nstead, they are given concrete form in the practices and social institutions that govern people's social relations and that, in doing so, constitute both the experience of social relations and the nature of subjectivity" (2-3). Similarly, Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1990) produces a sustained account of how the single woman caused unease as she did not fit into a binary gender system. The critic affirms: "sexual anarchy began with the Odd Woman" (Showalter 2). The impact of the social anxiety caused by the Odd Woman became readily apparent as gender struggles were increasingly being fought out and contested within the public realm as the century evolved.

Lynda Nead and Showalter have drawn attention to the conceptualization of femininity in the mid-Victorian era. On the one hand, Nead's study of femininity in the 1850s proves that "through the discourse of medicine, respectable femininity was not only defined as socially significant and personally gratifying, it was also designated normal and healthy" (25). On the other hand, Showalter pays attention to deviance and maintains that the Odd Woman "undermined the comfortable binary system of Victorian sexuality and gender roles" (19). Along these lines, I will delve into how gender transgression is represented in terms of female masculinity, and subsequently probe how this feeds into neo-Victorian representations of female philanthropists.

The Odd Woman posed a challenge to the assumed clear-cut biological division between men and women. Hence her ambiguous gender status confronted the social division of male and female roles as well as sexuality. Subsequently, the Odd Woman's androgynous nature found its way into the medical discourse on women as sexology developed into a new discipline. William Acton's *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1867) was later followed by Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) and Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* (1897), and together they have become three key texts that testify to the male medicalised gaze on gender in the Victorian period. Acton wrote extensively on sexuality in the aftermath of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) to scientifically demonstrate how gender roles were supported by biological evidence that distinguished men as sexually active from women as passive or asexual. Later, Krafft-Ebing described women as "more spiritual than sensual" (4). The social uncertainty that surrounded the figure of the Odd Woman was embedded in the circumvention of biological femaleness and cultural concepts of the proper feminine. Generally, the label "Odd Woman" makes reference to the superfluous unmarried women who were forced to "lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own" (Greg 5). Moreover, this term is also highly pertinent to her status as "unusual" or "strange". The Odd Woman harboured a slippery and ambiguous identity, which was much speculated about by sexologists. This is indebted to the difficulty in defining her according to Victorian gender ideology and fitting her into the cult of domesticity.

Following the lead of Showalter, Pykett affirms that the anxiety of sexuality and gender was articulated in women's writing in the Victorian period. In *The Improper Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (1992), the scholar examines how the social unrest regarding gender instability was mediated in women's writing. In this work, Pykett provides a detailed taxonomy of opposed female identities in agreement with the proper and improper feminine:

> a set of polarities...: the domestic ideal, or angel in the house; the Madonna; the keeper of the domestic temple; asexuality; passionlessness; innocence: self-abnegation; commitment to duty; self-sacrifice; the lack of legal identity; dependence; slave; victim. In the economy of the improper feminine, woman is figured as a demon or wild animal; a whore; a subversive threat to the family; threateningly sexual; pervaded by feeling; knowing; self-assertive; desiring and actively pleasure-seeking; pursuing self-fulfilment and self-identity; independent; enslave; and victimiser or predator. (16)

Pykett's definition of the proper and improper feminine serves as a key referent to analyse the female philanthropist as, I suggest, this female urban figure was a liminal character who straddled these two opposing images of femininity.

The Victorian philanthropist destabilised the separation of gendered spheres as dictated by the public/private divide, and subsequently, unsettled the gender dichotomy of male/female. Several scholars have paid attention to the porosity of the public/private divide and demonstrated how philanthropy was informed by domestic ideals, and thus, approved of. Martha Vicinus, Judith Walkowitz, Mary Poovey and Deborah Epstein Nord have approached this female urban type from different angles coinciding on the point that female participation in the public sphere in terms of philanthropy was condoned by society rather than condemned since these women performed activities that were underpinned by the ideal of domesticity (183). The female philanthropist corresponds aptly to the definition of the proper feminine as she is self-abnegate and committed to charity. Yet, simultaneously, she possessed features of the improper feminine such as being knowing, self-assertive and in pursuit of self-fulfilment. Thus, this female urban character was occupying the middle-ground between two polarities of femininity. In this regard, the philanthropist used charity work as a strategy to venture out into the public sphere. As Vicinus claims, rather than stepping out of their assigned gender roles they "[t]ransformed their passive roles into one of active spirituality and passionate social service... women did not reject the Victorian myths but reinterpreted them" (*Independent Women* 5). In other words, middle- and upper-class women inscribed their domestic roles with new meanings as they expanded their domestic duty onto public charity work. By pushing the ideal of domesticity into the public realm, these women turned philanthropy into a strategy of agency and mobility. As a result, the public sphere became a scenario where gender roles were challenged within the context of philanthropy.

One particular characteristic of the female philanthropist has attracted scholarly attention, especially in the twenty-first century, namely, agency. While she appropriated a female space in the public sphere and gained authority, she also stood cultural debates concerning the denaturalising affect on femininity. Whether philanthropic visits to the slums were spurred by altruism, religious endeavour, class curiosity or sisterly affection for the outcast, female charity workers upheld a superior position of authority that instigated a feeling of empowerment. Paula Bartley insists on the fact that ladies' associations, for instance Ladies' Association for the Care of Friendless Girls and Ladies' National Association, held a women-centred approach that was "framed within a window of power and authority" (75).

Class issues circumscribed philanthropy, mainly because charity consisted in a unidirectional support where the accommodated classes helped the poor. Indeed, reform institutions and organisations that aimed at helping women were often constituted and run by women, who were thus endowed with authority. As Vicinus's study has demonstrated, women from the bourgeoisie "brought their social skill to bear upon slum work, but rather than using their education... they emphasized a nonprofessional shared women's world" (*Independent Women* 215). Hence, women from the accommodated classes took advantage of their domestic knowledge and social skills by adapting their knowledge into a charity appliance, which subsequently ensured them access to the public sphere. In other words, by working within the social and gendered framework that rested on a whole set of binary oppositions, women could experience a sense of independence, authority and control as they moved across the city. As a result, when speaking about female philanthropy, critics concur on the point that it was a rare chance for women to venture out into the public sphere and exert agency. All this pinpoints the slums as a social space were women could negotiate new roles and widen the domestic sphere into the public arena.

Women travelled through urban spaces while they moved across the city, and, as Ross remarks, by the 1860s female activists gained unprecedented access to new geographical sites and social arenas while most public spaces still remained inaccessible, i.e. "respectable women in the mid-nineteenth century were formally excluded from voting and office holding, from most economic activity, and from vast majority of professions and trades" (*Slum Travelers* 18). Vicinus understands this as a crack in the door, noticing that women who were active in charitable societies privileged independence and agency above financial reward (*Independent Women* 220-21). Accordingly, the female philanthropist was a liminal urban figure both spatially and socially. On the one hand, she was situated upon the threshold between the public and the private spheres—she was able to move in and out of the public realm in her role as an arbitrator of domesticity and morality in the slums areas. On the other hand, she utilised the public sphere a social space of self-reliance and self-assertion. In sum, the philanthropist was a liminal woman who managed to circumvent spatial boundaries to probe the resilience of gender roles. As I hope to demonstrate in the novels under analysis, writers of neo-Victorian fiction deploy this feminist perspective on the female philanthropist with the aim to invoke the spatial and gendered continuum of the philanthropist as a basis to depict the tension between the proper and improper feminine. In order to achieve this, authors bespeak the porosity of the public/private dichotomy focusing on female inclusion, presence and participation in the public sphere.

2. THE FEMALE PHILANTHROPIST IN MICHEL FABER'S *THE CRIMSON PETAL AND THE WHITE*: PROPERLY MALE, IMPORPERLY FEMALE

The philanthropist Emmeline Fox first appeared in Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) and later in the short story "Chocolate Hearts from the New World" as part of the short-story collection *The Apple: Crimson Petal Stories* (2006), which is based on characters from the novel.[5] In both narratives Emmeline Fox's male physical features are emphasised to the effect of neutralising her femininity and enhancing her masculinity. In this regard, I will examine how her character complies with the improper feminine rather than with the proper feminine as described by Pykett. Hence, I will argue that Faber's depiction of the female philanthropist testifies to what Poovey defines as "the ideological work of gender" (2). Accordingly, this ideology is underpinned by dualisms as "its apparent coherence and authenticity, on the one hand, and its internal instability and artificiality, on the other" (3). She further argues that "representations of gender constituted one of the sites on which ideological systems were simultaneously constructed and contested" (3).

In 'Chocolate Hearts from the New World', Emmeline is characterised as Dr Curlew's unmarried daughter who is more concerned with philanthropy than with finding a suitable husband. The short story is presented from the point of view of Dr Curlew, who describes Emmeline as being on the verge of becoming a spinster: "five years left before it is all over. Not her life, you understand; her prospects for marriage. The same physical features that made him such a distinguished-looking man... were a calamitous inheritance for a girl" ("Chocolate Hearts" 59). In contrast to *The Crimson Petal and the White*, in which a richer description of her character is provided, little more is said about her character in this short story. Nonetheless, Faber emphasises her masculine physical features as the major defining component in her character and this is an idea I will delve into in my analysis of the novel. In addition, her father approves of her philanthropic endeavour because he perceives it as a possibility to attract a husband. Taken this, the short story is worth mentioning as it brings the author's choice to depict Emmeline either as Miss Curlew or the widowed Mrs Fox to the forefront, and hence, it adds to viewing her as an Odd woman.

---

[5] "Chocolate Hearts from the New World" is set chronologically before *The Crimson Petal and the White*.

The significant lack of references to her married life enhances her status as an Odd Woman. As mentioned above, the novels under analysis are set in the period following W.R. Greg's "Why Are Women Redundant", and Emmeline Fox, in particular, embodies the social inquisitiveness that transgressive women caused. Faber emphasises her masculine features and portrays her as "improperly feminine", according to Pykett's description. Poovey highlights how "the message that the natural difference between 'manly' men and 'womanly' women dictated social roles permeated mid-Victorian culture" (6). In this regard I propose that Emmeline Fox disrupts the ideological frame of gender. The philanthropist is a liminal character both physically and socially as her character embodies "an inter-sexed subject, one who is anomalous in terms of conceptions of clear-cut, binarily opposed notions of male and female" (Grosz 59). Similarly, Emmeline Fox occupies the middle-ground in-between public/private spaces and male/female gender identities as she, on the one hand, transgresses spatial boundaries by taking active participation in the public sphere, and on the other hand, destabilises Victorian notions of male activity/female passivity as she gains authority and agency. Notwithstanding, as I will argue, Faber situates female agency on the axis of sexuality and evokes the hybridity of freak exhibits to describe gender transgression.

Emmeline Fox's philanthropic endeavour disconcerts the male characters as she straddles the proper and improper feminine. While she possesses qualities such as self-sacrifice and self-abnegation, she enjoys male privileges like authority and urban mobility. This philanthropist takes active participation in the public sphere and performs a social role outside the domestic realm. As Doreen Massey sustains, "the attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control, and, through that, a social control of identity" (179). Consequently, Emmeline Fox circumvents the limits that have been designated by patriarchal normativity to control gender and space. In the role of a philanthropist, she manages to assert self-identity and independence. This is revealed during a conversation between Agnes and William Rackham, when her independent character is disclosed:

> She... doesn't even wish to remarry, he says.' 'Oh? What does she wish to do?' 'She spends almost all her time with the Women's Rescue Society.' 'Working then?' '... Charity, she's a volunteer, she's expected to do... well, whatever she's asked to. The way Dr Curlew describes it, I understand she spends entire days away at the Refuge or even on the streets themselves, and that when she visits him afterwards, her clothes fairly stink. (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 144-45)

The passage reveals how Emmeline Fox has encountered an alternative lifestyle in her role as a charity worker within the Rescue Society. And we can clearly see a tension between the proper and improper feminine. While she is expected to perform charity work, her presence in the streets seems excessive and improper. Thus, Emmeline Fox's unwillingness to remarry relies on the fact that she prefers the independence and social mobility she is granted by philanthropy, to the stability and economic safety of marriage.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 15-39

As mentioned earlier, charity work was partly indebted to cross-class empathy and sisterly affection, but also situated philanthropists in the position of authority as these ladies offered advice, gave domestic instructions and expressed sympathy for the poor.[6] Accordingly, Dorice Williams Elliott refers to the female philanthropist as "the Angel Out of the House" holding that "[m]iddle-class women's volunteer philanthropic work was centrally concerned with two social and ideological issues—the appropriate role of women and the relations between the classes" (4). Certainly, the moral values cherished by volunteering charity workers and the altruistic labour performed in the impoverished areas were supported by the ideal of domesticity and underpinned by feminine qualities. Hence, society approved of this female social participation in the public sphere. Similarly, Prochaska contends that the duty of servitude that was embedded in the evangelical doctrine expanded to middle- and upper-class ladies' philanthropy, and more importantly, was considered "the most obvious outlet of self-expression" (7-9). Thus, philanthropy was not necessarily motivated by altruism, but as several critics have noted, also indebted to women's pursuit of agency and subjective experiences.

The Rescue Society grants Emmeline Fox the possibility to move within the slums and interact with its dwellers and when her consumptive state impedes her from participating in the organisation she complains to "be going mad with boredom" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 432). This testifies to the fact that she finds personal fulfilment outside the home rather than adhere to suffer and be still as Sarah Stickney Ellis famously stated. As Walkowitz notices, middle-class women used the role of philanthropy to make hazardous journeys into the East End slums "in search of adventure and self-discovery" (52), and, as a result, enjoy social freedom. Emmeline Fox's journey in the underground as she traverses the city is clearly linked to her independence:

> I was in the city, on my way to visit a wretched family I'd visited before, to plead with them once more to listen to the words of their Saviour. I was tired, I felt disinclined to walk far. Before I knew what I was doing I was in the Underground Railway pulled by an engine, mesmerised by the alternation of darkness and light, speeding through the earth of a sixpence. I spoke to no one; I might as well have been a ghost. I enjoyed it so much, I missed my stop, and never saw the family. (194-95)

The fact that Emmeline Fox misses her visit to the poor family because the thrill of speed and freedom of movement she experiences during the ride in the underground train reveals that she does not necessarily perform charity work because of altruistic interests. Conversely, she rejoices in the privileges that urban excursions grant her otherwise gender-delineated environment.

As argued earlier, for Victorian women the impoverished areas functioned as a social space outside the patriarchal framework, and I find that Emmeline Fox's

[6] Ellen Ross offers a comprehensive study of cross-class relationships in the context of female philanthropy in *Love and Toil* (1993).

unwillingness to remarry relies on the fact that she prefers the independence and social mobility she is granted by philanthropy to the stability and economic safety of marriage. Women's urban mobility clearly hinges on gender as they cannot frequent the streets at the same extent and under the same conditions as men. As Pilar Hidalgo's study of female *flânerie* in the literature of modernity has demonstrated, women's access to leisure in the city is not a mere question of participation/non-participation, but what is more, women's leisure depends heavily on the social and emotional demands by others (95). In this context, Emmeline Fox's independence and accessibility to the streets is connected to her self-sufficiency as a widow who lives on her own, and thus, freed from patriarchal restraints.

Significantly, mobility and agency converge within the subjective experience acquired through charity work. Women who took active participation in charity organisations challenged the public/private dichotomy in a dual manner—they managed to proclaim a female space within the public sphere simultaneously as they encountered privacy with the public realm. Wendy Gan contends that the cityscape was an ideal setting to subjective explorations of gendered space:

> [f]or women, being in the city was an escape from the domestic world and an experience marked as a new kind of spatial freedom. This transgressive incursion into male territory, however, was not the only appeal of the city for new urban modes of consciousness that privileged male reserve and aversion ... also provided women with a way to transform public spaces into private, creating a kind of public privacy. (48)

As a consequence, philanthropists not only destabilised the gendered ideology of separate spheres, but they also found a way to move outside the patriarchal framework. This is portrayed in *The Crimson Petal and the White* as the figure of the female philanthropist turns the city into a site of personal fulfilment not only through altruistic endeavour but in relation to her experience of freedom of movement and power.

Up to the moment I have concentrated on Emmeline Fox as an Odd Woman in relation to the Victorian ideal of femininity and domesticity. I have argued that this causes unease among the male characters as she straddles the proper and improper feminine in her role as philanthropist. Interestingly, the male characters constantly attempt to find physical evidence of her social gender transgression, and I propose that Faber echoes the Victorian freak-show discourse drawing on the taxonomy of male/female, normal/abnormal and human/animal. As several critics have demonstrated, the freakishness of human exhibits often stemmed from gender transgression,[7] and in literature the female freak frequently conveys as a "transgressive

[7] See for example, Leslie Fielder *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (1978); Robert Bodgan *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Profit* (1990); Rachel Adams *Side Show USA: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (2001); Marlene Tromp, ed. *Victorian Freaks: The Social Construction of Freakery in Britain* (2009).

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 15-39

potential of the unfeminine woman in a patriarchal culture" (Garland-Thomson 16). In these lines, authors like Pykett and Craton agree on the idea that the representation of deviant women as freakish circulated widely in press and sensation fiction from the 1860s onwards.[8] Pykett contends that Victorian sensation writing mirrors "a crisis of definition, a panic over the instability of established gender norms and categories" (123). Similarly, Craton finds that "the importance of gender roles in sensation fiction undoubtedly reflects the urgency of so-called Woman Question in the second half of the century" (67). Following the lead of these scholars, I wish to bring to the fore how Faber retrieves the motif of the freak as Emmeline Fox is visualized as an Odd Woman through the eyes of male characters.

The view of human oddities in the freak show stems from the blurring of lines between binary economies as human/animal, male/female, normal/monster and self/other. Firstly, Emmeline Fox is described as unattractive, and more importantly, self-assertive. Significantly, her unsightly appearance and gender transgression is mediated by images of freakishness. In the following excerpt her deviance is cast in an animalistic fashion as Boadley wonders: "'how can [Henry] stand the sight of her?' groans Boadley. 'She looks like a greyhound! That long, leathery face, and that wrinkled forehead – and always so terrible attentive, just like a dog listening for commands"' (*The Crimson Petal* 154). Her physical aspect, independent lifestyle, unconventional conduct and penetrating gaze disconcert the male characters. As a result, they attempt to find corporeal proof of her gender transgression, which is reminiscent of the process of enfreakment. Alexa Wright affirms that "freaks represent the values and concerns of the society that has produced them", and explains how the physiognomic tradition of reading the human body, found new outlet in the nineteenth-century freak show where the deviant body turned into site of ideological inscriptions (80).

Even though the consumption-affected philanthropist does not answer to the ideal of feminine beauty and bourgeois decorum, Henry Rackham is beguiled by her strength and posture: "that peculiar soul Emmeline Fox is unadorned. She holds her head as high as if she were beautiful, and holds her body as if she were strong" (190). In addition, Faber draws on Victorian prejudices regarding the New Woman whose presumed unfeminine habits are reflected in the masculine traits of her physical description. If the nineteenth-century freak discourse "eagerly exploits the ideological expectations of normative culture, and the Victorian freak performer holds a remarkable potential to expose the concerns and assumption of that culture'", then, the odd body in literature both asserts and questions normative culture (Craton 37). Rather than being promulgated by her physical aspect, Emmeline Fox's deviance is anchored in the social construction of gender. Since she embodies the improper

[8] See chapter 10 "Reviewing the Subject of Women: The Sensation Novel and the 'Girl of the Period'" in Lyn Pykett's *The Improper Feminine* (1992), and Lilian Craton's chapter on "Female Masculinity in Sensational Fiction 1860-1890" in *The Victorian Freak Show*: *The Significance of Disability and Physical Difference in 19th-Century Fiction* (2009).

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 15-39

feminine, the male characters' attempt to locate her oddity in her physical aspect by reading male qualities into her body. Freak-show representations of female freaks enhanced gender hybridity by attributing them with distinctly male features. As Bogdan points out "freakishness was often created from gender transgression" ("The Social Construction of Freaks" 31), and this is something Faber incorporates into the novel. At one point, Henry starts doubting over her female body: "Henry has never noticed before, and a red flush on her Adam's apple – if women have Adam's apples, which he's not sure they do" (*The Crimson Petal* 124). Faber's description of Emmeline Fox as unadorned, uncorseted, maintaining a strong upright posture or even having an Adam's apple, is reminiscent of the vindication of independent unmarried women as being masculine, particularly in sensation fiction.

Craton confirms that the social unease provoked by the emancipated woman found its way into the Victorian novel, highlighting that authors often invoked freak-show imagery of gender confusion to portray unconventional women. The critic remarks that nineteenth-century writers' use of masculine women was "to challenge the moral, cultural and political restrictions facing women by demanding the rights of men. Many of them share the unusual physicality of Collins's masculine women" (126). As Craton success-fully demonstrates, Collins portrays the ugly and uncorseted spinster Marian Holcombe in a freakish-like manner in *The Woman in White* (1860) emphasising her hybrid features:

> The instant my eyes rested on her, I was struck of the rare beauty of her form, and by the unaffected grace of her attitude... her waist... occupied its natural place, it filled in out its natural circle, it was visibly and delightfully unformed by stays... She approached nearer—and I said to myself (with a sense of surprise which words fail to express), the lady was ugly! ... [N]ever was the fair promise of such a lovely figure more strangely and startlingly belied by the face and head that crowned it. The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache. (36-37)

I find that a parallel can be drawn between Collins's and Faber's charac-terisations of Marian Holcombe and Emmeline Fox as both reveal a "shocking gender hybridity to build a case for non-traditional femininity" (Craton 126). Arguably, the characters have features that situate them in-between femininity and masculinity. Whereas their "naturally shaped bodies" reveal female corporeality, their apparent female features are combined with a dark complexion and "a coarse face" with distinctive male traits, as for example, Marian Holcombe's "moustache" or Emmeline Fox's "Adam's apple". Moreover, in the same vein as Walter Hartright feels sexually attracted to Marian Holcombe, Henry Rackham is infatuated with Emmeline Fox. Moreover, his fascination with her apparently androgynous gender identity is a replication of his brother William's obsession with the prostitute Sugar who "has an Adam's apple, like a man", albeit being "the most beautiful thing he has ever seen" (*The Crimson Petal* 109).

Finally, Faber links Emmeline Fox's agency to sexuality and depicts a mock-ing inversion of the Victorian male and female sex roles. Henry is not only seduced, but also deflowered by the mature and sexually experienced Emmeline Fox. Writings by sexologists such as Acton, Krafft-Ebing and Havelock, steeped women as sexual passive through the notion of sexual anaesthesia. As previously argued, Emmeline Fox is characterised as having agency, yet Faber determines to settle her authority in the context of sexuality and stages a comic reversal of male and female roles as sexually active and passive. On the contrary, Emmeline Fox is libidinous, desiring and actively pleasure seeking, i.e. she is improperly feminine. While Barbara Braid stresses how sexual desire not regulated by marriage was monstrous (2-3), Pykett labels it as "the proper feminine's other" (16). In this context, Faber describes the upper-class wife Agnes Rackham in terms of a disembodied Angel of the House. Conversely, the prostitute Sugar embodies a Fallen Angel who is socially threatening as she possesses a carnal and monstrous sexual appetite. In comparison, Emmeline Fox fits into none of these categories and her otherness is more politicized as she seduces Henry with the words "there is no marriage in Heaven, Henry" (*The Crimson Petal* 503). In sum, she is an Odd Woman, literally for being a single and self-sufficient woman and metaphorically for her perceived masculinity and challenge to gender discrimination. Consequently, she is perceived as a freak, which is made explicit as the philanthropist ponders: "By the next century, predicts Mrs Fox, buttering a slice of bread, women like me will no longer be regarded as freaks" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 223).

3. THE OLD WOMAN AND FEMALE MASCULINITY IN EMMA DONOGHUE'S *THE SEALED LETTER*

Emma Donoghue's *The Sealed Letter* (2008) is a fictional reimagination of a scandalous divorce case that took place in 1864, known as the Codrington divorce. At the time the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857) stipulated that men could file for divorce on the grounds of adultery whereas women had to prove their husband's adultery in combination with incest, bigamy, cruelty, neglect or abandonment (Shanley 138). The Codrington divorce caused great stir in society and was followed closely by the media. On the surface the divorce trial seemed to rest on a love triangle involving Admiral Codrington, his adulterous wife Helen and her lover Colonel Anderson. Yet, as Martha Vicinus has demonstrated, the implicit polemic behind the trial was the lesbian relationship between Helen and her friend, the philanthropist Emily Faithfull. This reveals the patriarchal anxieties and tension embedded in the ideology of gender roles, and as Vicinus claims:

> the widely publicized Codrington divorce trial exemplifies many of the mid-century public debates about the responsibilities of marriage, circumstances of divorce, and the role of single women. But more controversially, it exposes unease about women's friendships and about the possibility of lesbian sex. ("Lesbian Perversity and Victorian Marriage" 75)

Vicinus's case study illustrates how same-sex desire was condoned as long as it was kept in the margins and did not interfere with heteronormative marriage.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 15-39

In *The Sealed Letter*, Donoghue brings lesbian identity to bear on the shifting attitudes towards women in the mid-Victorian era. This work focuses on the philanthropist, feminist and social activist Emily Faithfull (1835-95), or Fido, as she is called in the novel, and the consequences of her implication in a scandalous separation between the Codringtons. The narrative accounts for the consequences of divorce for women in the Victorian era and, rather than being a commemoration of Emily Faithfull's life and achievements, Donoghue retrieves her story to explore the circumstances that conditioned lesbian identity in the nineteenth century. Up to this moment little or no evidence has been found to prove that Faithfull was lesbian although there are several facts that point towards this. For instance, Vicinus has convincingly argued for Faithfull's lesbian identity in her revision of the Codrington divorce ("Lesbian Perversity and Victorian Marriage" 74). Her study has been an important background source for Donoghue when writing *The Sealed Letter* and testifies to the author's prolonged interest in queer history.[9] In this regard, the novel manifests Donoghue's concern for the ideological and gendered complexities that hampered lesbian identities in the past as well as in the present.

The title makes reference to a letter that supposedly contains information that gives away Fido's lesbian involvement with Helen while living with the Codringtons. Fido's lesbian identity is flaunted in the press without explicitly naming it: "Miss Faithfull's poisonous role, ... his wife's passionate feelings for this person were causing her to shrink away from her husband. He entrusted to paper his thoughts on Miss Faithfull's role in the crisis, and his reasons for banishing her" (315-16). Thus, in light of Vicinus's argument, I find that Donoghue portrays how female bonding and affection were perceived as harmless, as long as it did not interfere with heterosexual marriage and men's conjugal rights.

Donoghue has a personal interest in alternative formations of family units, which often comes through in her writing. Whereas parenthood is a central theme in her acclaimed novel *Room* (2010), substitute parenthood and motherhood are in focus in *Frog Music* (2014),[10] which is set in nineteenth-century San Francisco. Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben draw attention to how "neo-Victorian writers have seized on the nineteenth-century family as a ready-made means of cultural critique, particularly from feminist, gender and post-colonial perspectives" (5). The definition of family has changed radically in the twenty-first century, yet the equation of a normal family to a nucleus, heterosexual and bi-parental family still persists in the contemporary mindset. This is explored by Yates through

[9] Donoghue has written extensively on lesbian history. For lesbians as double-sexed women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see "Imagined More than Women: Lesbians as Hermaphrodites, 1671-1766" *Women's History Review* 2.2 (2006): 199-216. For in-depth analyses of lesbian culture in the past see *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668* (Scarlet Press, 1993), and *Inseparable: Desire Between Women in Literature* (Cleiss, 2010). For further bibliographical references, visit Emma Donoghue's official webpage at www.emmadonoghue.com.

[10] Family is also a central theme in Donoghue's most recent novel, *The Wonder* (2016), which is set in nineteenth-century Ireland.

an analysis of the family unit in *The Crimson Petal and the White* and *Tipping the Velvet* in which the critic illustrates how "the family's centrality is used to highlight the flaws in equating heterosexual reproduction with 'the right to be parents' and thus the ability to be good parents" (107). Donoghue points at the possibility of an alternative family configuration in *The Sealed Letter* by setting the example of the fully functional and female-centred caretaking of the Codrington children by Helen and Fido against the dysfunctional heterosexual parenthood of traditional marriage. Setting the topic of queer families aside for others to explore, my analysis focuses on Donoghue's representation of the female philanthropist in the context of female masculinity by evoking the Odd Woman.

Although Donoghue treats Fido's sexual identity covertly in the narrative, the core of the plot builds on the lesbian affection between the philanthropist and the divorcee Helen Codrington. In this regard, the title stands as a metaphor for the silence that circumscribed lesbian affection in the Victorian era, which moreover, invites for interpretations of contemporary exclusion of lesbians in the public sphere as I have examined elsewhere.[11] Furthermore, as Claire O'Callaghan has demonstrated, the narrative is overtly informed by post-feminist views concerned with the cultural construction of gender and sexual norms (65). Thus, Donoghue brings the embedded societal misogyny, both then and now, to the forefront by drawing a parallel between the Victorians and us. This is clearly seen in the juxtaposition between Fido, the emancipated philanthropist, and Helen, the adulterous and promiscuous wife. The ensued analysis adds to previous work on *The Sealed Letter* by identifying it as one of the few neo-Victorian novels that incorporates the figure of the female philanthropist into the narrative. I suggest that Donoghue engages with the mid-Victorian discourse on female oddity and steeps the character of Fido in terms of female masculinity to pose a challenge to patriarchal-inflected gender roles as well as female sexuality.

According to the Victorian mind-set, Odd Women possessed characteristics that were regarded as male qualities. As a result, these women destabilised the societal balance (or rather imbalance) that framed gender roles as natural and relegated the proper feminine to male subordination. Judith Halberstam emphasises how

> far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity. In other words, female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity appear to be the real thing. (1)

Hence, masculinity's social construction becomes legible in female masculinity, which subsequently remonstrates against the equation of maleness to power and domination. The lesbian woman was seen as a masculine woman who was sexually

[11] See "'Not the Kind of Thing Anyone Wants to Spell Out': Lesbian Silence in Emma Donoghue's Neo-Victorian Representation of the Codrington Divorce". *Lambda Nordica* 2.18 (2013): 13-43.

inverted. As Halberstam asserts, one of the major mistakes committed by sexologists as Krafft-Ebing and Ellis in defining lesbian women has been to define lesbianism according to a heterosexual model, and subsequently, it has overseen "the different levels of sexualisation and gendering in intimate relationships between women" (77).

Donoghue alludes to the idea of gender inversion as well as Halberstam's critique of lesbian identity through three different characters. On the one hand, Fido is portrayed as a masculine woman, who according to Admiral Codrington's lawyer, Mr Bovill, "[has] become a strong-minded reformeress, [who] disapproves of out sex on principle" (292). On the other hand, Donoghue hints at possibility of a same-sex relationship between Helen and Mrs. Watson as a swift thought crosses Helen's mind: "I am the most exciting thing that has happened to her" (292). This is made clearer the moment Mrs Watson draws the lawyers' attention to the lesbian affair between Helen and Fido stating "'none knows better than I, after all,' says Mrs. Watson, eyes cast on the carpet, 'how Helen can take advantage of the strongest sentiments of female friendship'" (293). By insinuating that the true nature of the relationship between Fido and Helen is based on lesbian desire, Mrs Watson gives away her own personal experience in her remark. Thus, Donoghue's representation of the three different women involved as respectively a masculine woman, a passionate adulteress and an ideal wife, infers that lesbianism does not fit into the heterosexual model. Instead, lesbianism is portrayed as far more multifarious than binary frameworks of hetero- and homosexuality suggest. In this context, I will focus on the representation of Fido as an Odd Woman to examine how her digressive identity illustrates how emancipated women generated social unease. In addition, the characterisation of the female philanthropist is invested with nineteenth-century inquisitiveness regarding female identity and lesbian sexuality.

Fido is figured as a masculine woman according to Victorian stereotyped images of the lesbian as a sexual invert in her different roles as a spinster, philanthropist, feminist and lesbian. Moreover, the slipperiness of her gender identity undermines the ideological notions of femininity as well as heterosexuality in the mid-Victorian era. As the nineteenth century evolved, the established gender roles and the public/private dichotomy were increasingly being interrogated, challenged and destabilised by supporters of women's cause who struggled for a more equal social position between the sexes. This caused great social unease as it not merely questioned the assumption that gender roles were natural, but also posed a threat to the patriarchal social order. This resulted in a growing concern for maintaining a solid dichotomy, and in Halberstam words: "there was a larger cultural imperative at work, namely, the desire to reduce sexuality to binary systems of gender difference" (76). Women who did not fit into heteronormative models of gender were regarded as Odd Women belonging to a third sex, and in this context, Krafft-Ebing's and Ellis's views came to dominate the clinical discourse on female sexuality at length and more specifically on lesbianism.

Being an independent a self-sufficient woman, Fido represents the improper feminine. Women who demanded female independence were labelled as "unsexed" or "semiwomen" as early as the 1830s (Faderman 140), and these notions were intensified by the mid-Victorian era. Craton highlights how nineteenth-century media used nature and gender interchangeably and "characterized a woman who abandoned the domestic role as unnatural and unsexed" (130). Donoghue pores over gender identity by refiguring the philanthropist as a masculine woman to explore lesbianism in the past.

Women's emancipation was disquieting partly because it testified to the changing role of women in society, but more importantly, it probed values of masculinity not to be exclusively male. As established by now, the current critical perspective on female philanthropy casts this woman as someone who gained spatial mobility and authority within the male-dominated public sphere. In this vein, Halberstam draws attention to the prevailing notion of male supremacy as "[m]asculinity in this society inevitable conjures up notions of power, legitimacy and privilege" (2). The female deviant who declined to pursue women's domestic role was not really a woman and her transgression was perceived as social rather than sexual. As Faderman asserts,

> a lesbian, by the sexologists' definition, was one who rejected what had long been women's role. She found that role distasteful because she was not really a woman—she was member of a third sex. Therefore, she did not really represent women. All her emotions were inverted, turned upside down: Instead of being passive she was active, instead of loving domesticity, she sought success in the world outside, instead of making men prime in her life, she made first herself than other women her prime... such love became increasingly threatening to the social order. (104)

The patriarchal anxiety caused by divergent women is at heart of the novel, and conveys the social fear of negative effects of sexual inversion on heterosexual marriage.

Fido is characterised in terms of a masculine woman and her gender inversion stands as a signifier of lesbianism. Donoghue hints at Fido's sexuality, which echoes the nineteenth-century clinical discourse on lesbianism, by making reference to dress. This becomes evident as the author contrasts reactions to women wearing male apparel with the emblematic but liberating effect of going uncorseted—literally for health reasons and symbolically for emancipation. Helen's solicitor, Mr Few, informs his client:

> 'A solicitor of my acquaintance has heard a rumour that Miss Faithfull's still in London'. [Helen] blinks at him. 'In male disguise, if you can believe it.' 'I can't,' says Helen with disdain. That's just the kind of thing they like to invent about *strong-minded women.* Going uncorseted is one thing, but trousers? 'For all her strong views on certain subjects, Mr Few, she's an utterly conventional woman'. (238)

The unsexing effect of wearing male apparel hinges on Victorian notions of male and female dress codes that supposedly signal out the biological difference between men and women. Accordingly, Halberstam remarks that: "when the idea of sexual identities did come to dominate people's thinking about sex and gender, it was not some idea of the autonomous lesbian desire between women or a notion of outward hermaphrodism that provided the basis of those notions of identity; it was gender inversion" (77). The tension between cross-dressing and gender inversion is clearly at work in the fragment from the novel. On the one hand, wearing trousers signals out a distinctive masculine feature and, in the light of her lesbian identity, this invites for interpretations of sexual inversion. On the other hand, Fido's unwillingness to wear corset represents an act of rebellion against the social control of gender as it sets the female body free. Nonetheless, wearing trousers is a more vexed issue because it stands as a reversal of male and female dress codes. Therefore, the excerpt illustrates how Fido's gender transgression is located on the axis of sexuality: she is a sexual invert.

I have argued earlier that Donoghue aligns the Odd Woman with philanthropy evoking gender transgression and lesbianism in terms of sexual inversion. Reminiscent of Faber's characterisation of Emmeline Fox in *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Fido's social position as an Odd Woman becomes evident as the male characters stress her coarse physical appearance. According to them, the philanthropist remains unmarried because she cannot attract a husband, and moreover, her unfeminine appearance is an external sign the evidences her masculinity. In short, she is a masculine woman and, hence, a sexual invert. In Ellis Havelock's view, a lesbian was, on the one hand, intellectually superior to her sex since "[i]nversion is as likely to be accompanied by high intellectual ability in a woman as in a man" (196); on the other hand, gender inversion was visible: "their faces may be plain or ill-made, but seldom they possess good figures... the actively inverted woman... in one fairly essential character: a more or less distinct trace of masculinity" (222). In the novel, Fido is repeatedly described as ugly, and one example of this is when the court rapports in media read "the admiral's barrister mocks the very idea of his client's molesting a young woman *not reputed to be of conspicuous beauty*" (315), to discredit her statement of an attempted rape. Regardless of hurting Fido's feelings, the admiral bluntly states "[t]he fact is, not in my wildest dreams, not even if delirious or demented would I ever consider having carnal relations with you" (325).

Moreover, feminists were equally situated on the axis of Odd Women due to their non-normative behaviour and disallowance of gender roles. Whether being perceived as semi-women, sexual inverts or assumed to belong to a third sex, women who did not comply with the ideological image of the proper feminine were viewed as freaks mainly because they challenged the roles that were believed to be natural to their gender. As Tromp and Valerius note, we tend to think about 'freakery' as a self-evident physical anomaly with which somebody is born when, in fact, "freakishness is made, not just with biology, but with a social function in a social context" (4). Interestingly, nineteenth-century sexologists' definitions of female sexuality wielded same-sex desire between women as sexual inversion, and consequently, situated the lesbian woman on the same periphery as freaks. Faderman argues that sexologists attempted to daunt women from joining the cause by evincing a continuum of abnormality between lesbianism and feminism asserting that "[l]ove between women was metamorphosed into a freakishness, and it was claimed that such an abnormality would want to change their subordinate status in any way" (240).

The domain of feminist activism lent lesbians a woman-centred social environment where they could express same-sex affection. Yet, it was an ambiguous social realm, as lesbianism was perceived as a threat to the organisation. Faderman stresses how the fear that the public's suspicion of the existence of lesbianism could destroy feminism prevailed (240). In real life, Emily Faithfull was excluded from the feminist movement the moment she was drawn into the divorce scandal. When reported in the media, her colleagues in the Victoria Press and fellow philanthropists turned their backs on her. Yet, Vicinus pinpoints that Faithfull became socially stigmatized due to her lesbian identity and not exclusively on the grounds of her involvement in the Codrington divorce ("Lesbian Perversity and Victorian Marriage" 94). In this regard, social homophobia was embedded in feminist culture.

This is something Donoghue takes up in the novel. When discussing whether to include an article on the current divorce debate in society or not in their journal Bessie Parkes argues that "[d]ivorce is a dangerous subject. We could seem to be associating ourselves with women of doubtful reputation" (113), which Fido objects to by putting forwards "we're veteran journalists, we can raise these questions without verbal impropriety; there's always a way to refer to something without naming it" (114). Here, Donoghue brings the hegemonic discourse of heteronormativity that surrounds lesbianism to the forefront.

The two standpoints reveal the necessity of breaking down the system from the inside, but also emphasise the enforced ubiquity of lesbianism to silence. What is more, Donoghue draws attention to the troublesome relationship between feminism and lesbianism as Bessie Parkes manifests her disapproval of Fido's sexuality:

> There's an unsoundness in Emily Faithfull; a coarseness in the grain that I hoped might disappear, as she matured, but quite on the contrary,' she says, gazing into the middle distance. 'May I speak frankly? [...] 'In some few cases, especially if the individual lacks any real religious faith, something... goes awry,' says Bessie Parkes, her mouth twisting. 'Spinsterhood is a sort of armour that such women as Fido Faithfull wear with relish. What's been revealed in court about the lengths to which she's gone in thralldom to your wife—' She shivers. (223-24)

The embedded issue at hand in the excerpt focuses on the fact that while feminists struggle for equality between the sexes, the hegemonic discourse on heteronormativity still persists within the feminist movement. Lesbianism is relegated to the margins because it is perceived as a threat when, ironically, there actually is none.

5. MATERIALISING SOCIAL DEVIANCE ON THE BODY

In the beginning of this article I have drawn attention to how albeit few authors have explored nineteenth-century feminist movements in contemporary fiction, the female philanthropist appears, to my knowledge, in at least four neo-Victorian novels up to the moment, namely, *Tipping the Velvet*, *The Crimson Petal and the White*, *The Journal of Dora Damage* and *The Sealed Letter*. In these novels, the female philanthropist gains access, freedom of mobility and agency within the public realm. Arguably, this character represents unconventional femininity as she converts the ideological frame of gender into a strategy of appropriation of a female space within the public sphere. To this effect, contemporary authors portray the female philanthropist according to critical accounts of the porosity of the public/private divide. Significantly, a socio-historical background sustains contemporary fictional representations of the female philanthropist.

The neo-Victorian philanthropist is a woman who gains urban mobility and agency outside the home, and consequently, transforms the urban space into a site of self-fulfilment in the same vein as her nineteenth-century model did. Nonetheless, in literature female philanthropic endeavour and agency are related to sexuality. This is one of the possible reasons why the figure of the female philanthropist has remained in the blindspot in favour of other female figures, as for example the prostitute or the criminal, who belong to "the well-established neo-Victorian trope of an unconventional woman beating patriarchy at its own game" (Novak 116). While feminist movements and philanthropy offer a fruitful ground to explore feminist debates both in the past and the present, authors tend to situate the female philanthropist as a supportive character to the unconventional heroine. Nadine Mueller holds that "critics have for long discarded contemporary feminist theory as framework for their readings of neo-Victorian fiction" (22). Yet, a parallel socio-historical and literary revision of the philanthropist as a liminal figure who challenged the ideological frame of gender, opens up for feminist reinterpretations of gender both in the past and the present.

Faber and Donoghue write with different purposes in mind, and, consequently, depict the philanthropist in terms of the improper feminine and a masculine woman respectively. While Faber's Emmeline Fox is described as a freak, Donoghue's Fido embodies the Odd Woman, or, the sexual invert. On the one hand, I have analysed how Faber reiterates the Victorian freak-show discourse regarding gender anomaly echoing Wilkie Collins's description of Marion Halcombe in *The Woman in White*. On the other hand, I have examined how Donoghue characterises Fido's gender transgression in terms of female masculinity. Here, freakishness is related to non-normative sexuality. In both cases non-conformist femininity and gender confusion are predominantly associated with the body. Moreover, the body becomes the locus of social deviance as the male characters insist on finding physical evidence of gender transgression.

Contrary to Faber, Donoghue manages to further feminist debate by contextualising queer identity within a Victorian setting. By doing so, the author establishes a link between the Victorian period and the present regarding the situation of lesbians. As Mueller affirms,

> the desire to be "better" than previous feminist movements or the Victorians is thus also a desire sparked by the fear of being the same, or having failed to progress, of repeating the perceived mistakes by other feminists or living, still, in a society in which gender inequality is maintained and reinforced via social, cultural and political structures which is, potentially, uncomfortably, similar to the nineteenth century. (22)

In contrast to the progress in Irish law, which decriminalized homosexuality in 1993, social prejudices towards homosexuality persisted. As Emma Young notes, homosexuality was surrounded by taboo, and moreover, considered unspeakable and sinful in rural Ireland by the turn of the twentieth century. Moreover, Young argues that Donoghue uses the Victorian trope of the attic to symbolise deviant sexuality in an exploration of closeted lesbian identity in *Stir-Fry* (1994) and *Hood* (1995) (13). Along these lines, I suggest that Donoghue hints at the contemporary social intolerance towards lesbians in *The Sealed Letter*. In a recent interview, Donoghue has admitted that her non-normative sexuality identity has shaped her as a writer by drawing a parallel between the lesbian and the freak: "I realized I was a lesbian, and therefore, in my society's terms, a freak. This theme – not just homosexuality but the clash between individual and community, norm and 'other' – has marked many of my published works" (Fantaccini and Grassi 400). In this regard, the "othering" of lesbian women filters through in *The Sealed Letter* as Fido is described in terms of a freak.

By establishing links between the Odd Woman, the philanthropist and the sexual invert, authors echo the gender hybridity and transgression of the ontological status of the male/female body evoked in the freak show in order to represent the neo-Victorian philanthropist as member of a third sex. Similarly to Faber, Donoghue bespeaks non-normative femininity invoking gender hybridity, anomaly and transgression. Hence, the female philanthropist becomes a locus of neo-Victorian constructions and contestations of gender through a process of "oddering" women.

Reviews sent to author: 14 March 2017
Revised paper accepted for publication: 31 March 2017

WORKS CITED

Acton, William. *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs, in Childhood, Youth, Adult Age, and Advanced Life, Considered in the Physiological, Social, and Moral Relations.* 1857. Lindsay and Blakiston, 1867. https://archive.org/details/functionsanddis08actogoog.

Adams, Rachel. *Side Show USA: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*. Chicago UP, 2001.

Bartley, Paula. *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914.* Routledge, 2000.

Bogdan, Robert. *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Profit.* Chicago UP, 1990.

—— "The Social Construction of Freaks". *Freakery: The Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, edited by Rosemarie Garland Thomson, New York UP, 1996, pp. 23-37.

Braid, Barbara. "'Now Slips the Crimson Petal, Now the White': – Monster/Angel Dichotomy in the Representation of Women in Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White*". *Inter-Disciplinary.Net* (2009): 1-9. http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/braid-paper.pdf.

Collins, Wilkie. *The Woman in White*. 1860. Penguin, 2002.

Craton, Lillian. *The Victorian Freak Show: The Significance of Disability and Physical Differences in 19th-Century Fiction.* Cambria, 2009.

Donoghue, Emma. "Imagined More than Women: Lesbians as Hermaphrodites, 1671-1766". *Women's History Review* 2.2 (2006): 199-216.

—— *Inseparable: Desire between Women in Literature.* Cleiss, 2010.

—— *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1671-1766.* Scarlet Press, 2009.

—— *The Sealed Letter.* 2008. Picador, 2011.

Ellis, Havelock . *Sexual Inversion*. 1897. FA Davis, 1925.

Elliott, Dorice William. *The Angel Out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England*. Virginia UP, 2002.

Faber, Michel. *The Crimson Petal and the White.* Canongate, 2002.

—— "Chocolate Hearts from the New World". *The Apple: Crimson Petal Stories*. 2006. Canongate, 2011.

Faderman, Lillian. *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present.* 1981. The Women's Press, 1991.

Fantaccini, Fiorenzo and Samuele Grassi. "Emma in Borderlands: Q&A with Emma Donoghue". *Studi Irlandesi* 1.1 (2011): 397-406.

Fielder, Leslie. *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self.* 1978. Penguin, 1981.

Gan, Wendy. *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse. *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Ordinary Body*, edited by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, New York UP, 1996, pp. 1-22.

Greg, W.R. "Why Are Women Redundant?". Trüber, 1869. https://archive.org/details/whyarewomenredu00greggoog.

Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Duke UP, 1998.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 15-39

Hidalgo, Pilar. "Female *Flânerie* in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*". *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 6 (1993): 93-98.

Kohlke, Marie-Luise. "Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters". *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics,* edited by Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, Rodopi, 2011, pp. 1-44.

—— "Feminist Awakenings: Review of Essie Fox's *Elijah's Mermaid* and Stevie Davies' *Awakening*". *Neo-Victorian Studies* 6.2 (2013): 207-22.

—— "The Neo-Victorian Sexsation: Literary Excursions into the Nineteenth-Century Erotic". *Inter-Disciplinary.Net Proceedings of the 3rd Global Conference on Sex and Sexuality: Exploring Critical Issues* (2006). 1-18. http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ci/sexuality/s3/Kohlke%20paper.pdf.

MacDonald, Tara and Joyce Goggin. "Neo-Victorianism and Feminism: New Approaches". *Neo-Victorian Studies* 6.2 (2013):1-14.

Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place and Gender.* Minneapolis UP, 1999.

Mueller, Nadine. *Ladies, Lunatics and Fallen Women in the New Millenium: The Feminist Politics of Neo-Victorian Fiction, 2000-2010.* Phd Thesis. University of Hull, 2011. https://hydra.hull.ac.uk/resources/hull:5377.

Nead, Lynda. *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain.* Blackwell, 1990.

Nord, Deborah Epstein. *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City*. Cornell UP, 1995.

Nóvak, Caterina. "Those Very 'Other' Victorians: Interrogating Neo-Victorian Feminism in *The Journal of Dora Damage*". *Neo-Victorian Studies* 6.2 (2013): 114-36.

O'Callaghan, Claire. "'Smash the Social Machine': Neo-Victorianism and Postfeminism in Emma Donoghue's *The Sealed Letter*". *Neo-Victorian Studies* 6.2 (2013): 64-88.

Pettersson, Lin. "'Not the Kind of Thing Anyone Wants to Spell Out': Lesbian Silence in Emma Donoghue's Neo-Victorian Representation of the Codrington Divorce". *Lambda Nordica* 2.18 (2013): 13-43.

Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago UP, 1988.

Prochaska, Elizabeth. *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England.* 1980. Oxford UP, 2003.

Pykett, Lyn. *The Improper Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*. 1992. Taylor & Francis, 2006.

Ross. Ellen. *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918.* Oxford UP, 1993.

—— *Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860*-1920. California UP, 2007.

Shanley, Mary Lyndon. *Feminism, Marriage and the Law in Victorian England.* 1989. Princeton UP, 1993.

Showalter, Elaine. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de* Siècle. 1990. Bloomsbury, 1991.

Marlene Tromp, editor. *Victorian Freaks: The Social Construction of Freakery in Britain.* Columbus: Ohio UP, 2009.

Tromp, Marlene and Karyn Valerius. Introduction: Towards Situating the Victorian Freak. *Victorian Freaks: The Social Context of Freakery in Britain*, edited by Marlene Tromp, Ohio UP, 2008.

Vicinus, Martha, editor. *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women.* Methuen & Co, 1977.

—— *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920.* Virago, 1985.

—— "Lesbian Perversity and Victorian Marriage: The 1864 Codrington Divorce Trial". *Journal of British Studies* 36.1 (Jan 1997): 70-98.

Von Krafft-Ebing, Richard Freiherr. *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study*. 1886. Pioneer, 1939.

Walkowitz, Judith R. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London.* 1992. Chicago UP, 2000.

Wright, Alexia. *Monstrosity: The Human Monster in Visual Culture*. I.B. Tauris, 2013.

Yates, Louisa. "The Figure of the Child in Neo-Victorian Queer Families." *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics,* edited by Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, Rodopi, 2011, pp. 93-118.

Young, Emma. "No Place Like Home: Rewriting 'Home' and Relocating Lesbianism in Emma Donoghue's *Stir-Fry* and *Hood*". *Journal of International Women's Studies* 4.14 (Dec 2013): 4-18.

QUEER PHENOMENOLOGY AND TACTILITY IN SARAH WATERS'S NEO-VICTORIAN FICTION*

Rosario Arias
Universidad de Málaga

Abstract

Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian trilogy, *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999), and *Fingersmith* (2002), have been largely discussed from many perspectives. Queer approaches have been utilised in the analysis of these three novels, bearing in mind that Waters has made clear her lesbian agenda. This article will consider Waters's neo-Victorian trilogy from an altogether new perspective: Sara Ahmed's notions of orientation and queer touch, which she draws from Maurice Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists. In addition, this article will analyse the relevance of the Victorian past through affective materiality and corporeal hermeneutics, in particular the sense of touch with a special emphasis on the hand and the skin. Lastly, Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian fiction illustrates the sensuous interplay between the Victorian past and today's culture by employing critical approaches such as phenomenology and sensory studies.

Keywords: Sarah Waters, neo-victorian fiction, phenomenology, tactility.

Resumen

La crítica especializada ha analizado la trilogía neo-victoriana de Sarah Waters, *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999) y *Fingersmith* (2002), desde perspectivas diversas. Se han empleado los estudios *queer* para el análisis de estas novelas ya que la autora ha puesto en evidencia su punto de vista y orientación lésbicas. Este artículo examina la trilogía de Sarah Waters desde una perspectiva innovadora: las nociones de orientación y contacto *queer* de Sara Ahmed, quien parte de los presupuestos de Maurice Merleau-Ponty y otros fenomenólogos. Además, este artículo versa sobre la relevancia del pasado victoriano a través de la materialidad afectiva y la hermenéutica corporal, y sobre la importancia del sentido del tacto, en especial la mano y la piel. Por último, la narrativa neo-victoriana de Waters ilustra la interacción sensorial entre el pasado victoriano y la cultura contemporánea mediante la aplicación de enfoques críticos tales como la fenomenología y los estudios sensoriales.

Palabras claves: Sarah Waters, narrativa neo-victoriana, fenomenología, tactilidad.

Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian trilogy, *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999), and *Fingersmith* (2002), have been largely discussed from many perspectives: *Tipping the Velvet* was extremely well-received by critics interested in Judith Butler's notion of performativity, in spatial studies, and in Victorian culture of spectacle (Pettersson; Wilson 285-305). *Affinity*, in turn, drew the attention of those fascinated with spiritualism and the occult in the Victorian age, while signifying a landmark in neo-Victorian literature. Finally, *Fingersmith* was welcome as a well-crafted novel, heavily influenced by sensation fiction and Charles Dickens's work. Queer approaches have been utilised in the analysis of these three novels, bearing in mind that Waters has made clear her lesbian agenda. This article will consider Waters's neo-Victorian trilogy from an altogether new perspective: Sara Ahmed's notions of orientation and queer touch, which she draws from Maurice Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists. In addition, this article will analyse the relevance of the Victorian past through affective materiality and corporeal hermeneutics, in particular the sense of touch with a special emphasis on the hand and the skin. In so doing, my combined approach will shift the focus on corporeality and the phenomenon of the body in relation to the perceived world, as a source of transformative potential, which involves a re-orientation towards the flow between subject and the object world. Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian fiction illustrates the sensuous interplay between the Victorian past and today's culture by employing critical approaches such as phenomenology and sensory studies.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's figure is crucial to the philosophical debates over the body, and over the senses and perception, that have sprung in recent years. Partly neglected after his death in 1961, he attracted renewed interest towards the end of the twentieth century, including Jacques Derrida who engaged with Merleau-Ponty in *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (2005), a book which was already in production when Derrida died in 2004. Phenomenology was founded by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the twentieth century, a philosophical method later followed by French philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty. It is not an easy task to define phenomenology since, depending on the phenomenologist, the philosophy can be conceived differently. Komarine Romdenh-Romluc has succinctly defined it as "philosophy that investigates experience from a first-person point of view, that is, as it is presented to the subject" (4). What interests me here is Merleau-Ponty's view on phenomenology, heavily influenced by Edmund Husserl.

Merleau-Ponty's second doctoral thesis, with this emphasis on phenomenology, came to be published under the title *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), and constitutes his main contribution to philosophy. His last work was a book published posthumously, after his sudden death in 1961, titled *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964) (Baldwin 2-5). My focus is on the "phenomenon of the body" as embracing

* The research carried out for this essay has been financed by the *Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación* (Research Project FFI2013-44154-P and VINS Research Network FFI2015-71025-REDT).

and constituting the world: for Merleau-Ponty, there is a need to rediscover the perceived world (in the philosopher's terms, the real world) through the senses which organise experience and situate the subject as another object in the world of objects, with the indispensable help of modern art and philosophy (Baldwin 9-11). We, as embodied subjects, are situated in the world (as being-in-the-world), and our experience is always embodied, thus involving an embodied situatedness. In this sense, the sensory experience draws from and contributes to form and give meaning to the world, to social life. This means that there is mutuality between self and world in the constitution of sense and meaning, because it occurs in the interaction of both:

> We shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body. But by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover our self, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 239).

According to Christopher Watkin, "meaningfulness must be understood in terms of a strictly irreducible mutuality of self and world" (19), in an effort to move beyond the Cartesian duality. In other words, there is a mutual constitution, an interweaving between self and the world, subject and object, whose separation is cancelled out in a space, known as the "field", which is later developed into the "flesh" in *The Visible and the Invisible*:

> The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term "element," in this sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an "element" of Being. Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to *location* and to the *now*. Much more: the inauguration of the *where* and the *when*, the possibility and exigency for the fact; in a word: facticity, what makes the fact be a fact (139-40).

In paying attention to the space between subject and object, "midway" as Merleau-Ponty affirms, there is a movement from the object/thing to the field of experience and the flow. This results in "the mind-body and the subject-object dichotomies [becoming] redundant: the sensorial field and the sensorial flows encompass material substances... gestures, and movements, as well as discourses, affects, memories, and ideas, which, as far as sensoriality is concerned, are of equal ontological status" (Hamilakis 115). Additionally, there is a link between the sensorial and the affective because the senses contribute to activate and evoke affectivity, and unlock affect when they operate. The senses are a reservoir of material memories, and "every sensorial perception is at the same time past and present" (Hamilakis 122).

Phenomenology is now being utilised in a variety of contexts and disciplines, for example, studies of landscape and monumentality, particularly, archaeology,

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 41-54

and museology, feminist studies and literature, among others. John Wylie drew on recent work on the topics of landscape, embodiment, perception and material culture to explore the tension between *opening-onto* and *distancing-from*, openness and distance, by supplementing his analysis of the tension between presence and absence in landscape studies with Derrida's reading of Merleau-Ponty (275-89). Queer studies have made an incursion into phenomenology and have re-considered Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in a more positive light. This has been accomplished by Sara Ahmed, who has already discussed the possibilities inherent in phenomenology intersecting with migration: "migration involves reinhabiting the skin...the different 'impressions' of a new landscape, the air, the smells, the sounds... which accumulate like lines, to create new textures on the surface of the skin...the social also has its skin, as a border that feels and that is shaped by the 'impressions' left by others" (9). In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006) Sara Ahmed uses Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* as a springboard to discuss the notion of 'orientation' in a host of different ways: our embodied subjectivity is oriented towards others, as objects, and their place in sexual desire, and this perspectival orientation in turn affects other bodies and spaces:

> I suggest that a queer phenomenology might offer an approach to sexual orientation by rethinking the place of the object in sexual desire; by attending to how the bodily direction "toward" such objects affects how bodies inhabit spaces and how spaces inhabit bodies (Ahmed 23).

One argument against Merleau-Ponty's embodied subjectivities has been posited by feminist critics like Judith Butler who have found some critique of Cartesian philosophy (i.e. dismantling the subject/object division, for example), but lacking in gender specificities: "[Merleau-Ponty's] bodies are 'neutral' and un-gendered, leading thus to phallocentric effects" (Ahmed 68). Ahmed in a way corrects Judith Butler's criticism against Merleau-Ponty's "universal orientation towards the world" by suggesting a "sensitive body" in which orientation is a form of "bodily projection" in which orientation "becom[es] ways of inhabiting and coexisting in the world (67). Ahmed's sense of "orientation" has cast new light on the potential Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology offers for sexual desire, feminist and queer studies.

In this "sensitive body" the sense of touch plays a predominant role. In an attempt to open up the dialogue between self and world, subject and object, "carnal hermeneutics" has emerged as a new approach, proved by the publication *Carnal Hermeneutics* (2015). Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's analyses of embodiment become key texts in this perspective, according to which "all experience, from birth to death, is mediated by our embodiment and only makes sense of sense accordingly" (Kearney and Treanor 2). Flesh, in its ample incarnations as individual flesh and as "flesh of the world", the sense of touch and bodies have recently come under renewed scrutiny in this approach, also mediated through works by Jean-Luc Nancy and Julia Kristeva in the last few years. In "What Is Touch?," philosopher Matthew Ratcliffe argues that touch (or 'tactual perception' as he uses the two terms interchangeably) "encompasses a range of very different experiences and has many different functions" (2-3).[1] At this point it is necessary to remember that the sensorial turn has mainly privileged the sense of touch, while sight had always ranked highest in the scale of senses. Touch is an enigmatic sense, but also extremely philosophical because "touch crosses all the senses" (Kearney, "What?" 103). The sense of touch erases the distinction between self and other, and it has the capacity to bridge the gap between subject and object, and "to cross the threshold between the inanimate and the animate, the tomb and the flesh, the dead and the living" (Classen 35). In this sense, the tactile experience in contemporary novels set in the Victorian past seems to flatten out the distance, to narrow the time and space existing between the Victorian dead (past) and the contemporary present, thus inviting the reader in the present to 'inhabit' and 'embody' the past.

Since the beginnings of neo-Victorianism as a critical field, when Dana Shiller used the term "neo-Victorian" for the first time in her groundbreaking article "The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel" (1997), critics have mobilised conceptualisations and theoretical frameworks to offer productive readings into contemporary fiction set in the Victorian past. Critical interventions into the neo-Victorian mode have been carried out following theoretical frameworks such as intertextuality, haunting and spectrality, and adaptation, to name a few. All of them imply a double engagement with the Victorian age. Therefore, neo-Victorianism has been described as a double-oriented movement as it looks back to the Victorian past, as well as it turns itself to the future, possessing a double edge as developed by Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (2010).

In the latest issue of the online journal *Neo-Victorian Studies*, devoted to neo-Victorianism and the stage, co-editors Beth Palmer and Benjamin Poore acknowledge the impact of "the idea of haunting and hauntedness" on the field of neo-Victorian studies (1). Indeed, the pervasiveness of the Victorians in contemporary culture has been addressed through the master trope of haunting and spectrality, as I have explored elsewhere, alongside other critics (Arias and Pulham; Kontou). More recently, Kate Mitchell and Deborah Parsons have concretely made reference to the relevance of the spectral return of the past as questioning postmodern notions of the inaccessibility of the past:

> ...the spectral return of the past as it haunts the present, challenging, though not entirely discrediting, postmodern notions of the absence and inaccessibility of the past. Here, rather than existing only in its textualised remains, the past *returns* though fictional representation and, through the reader's imagination, achieves a phantasmic *presence* in the present (Mitchell and Parsons 12; my emphasis).

The *presence* of the (spectral) past, through "its textualised remains", has led me to move beyond the productive ambiguity (presence vs absence) that the figure of the ghost (spectre) encapsulates, and towards a consideration and conceptualisation

[1] I wish to express my gratitude to Matthew Ratcliffe who has generously sent me a copy of his article.

of the actual textualised remains and vestiges of the past, felt and perceived as vivid and present. Along these lines, Cora Kaplan in *Victoriana* (2002) aptly suggested that the Victorians are ghostly, but also *tangible* (5). Here I will focus on the materiality of the Victorian past, as well as the overflow of the past into the present through sensorial materiality, in contemporary literature and culture. In so doing, I will focus on Sarah Water's neo-Victorian trilogy that illustrates the sensuous interplay between the Victorian past and today's culture, and by employing critical approaches such as phenomenology and the senses. Then, I will give predominance to the sense of touch, tactility, which had been traditionally subordinated to the sense of sight, and that is now attracting more attention in various disciplines.

As the editors of *Thinking Through the Skin* pose, there is always a danger in fetishising the body if the focus is entirely on its singularity and on its meaning (Ahmed and Stacey 3). For that reason, I consider phenomena of the body, in connection with the world, that allow for the flow of sensation and affection between the subject and the object-world: these are phenomena that precisely interrogate the limits and boundaries of the body, such as the skin. Through tactile encounters, bodies and the world engage in a meaningful relationship and challenge some poststructuralist accounts of "subjects without bodies" (Ahmed and Stacey 4). In what follows, I offer a reading into Waters's neo-Victorian fiction in the light of phenomenology and sensory studies.[2] To my knowledge, there has not been any in-depth analysis of Waters's novels from this combined perspective. Despite the fact that Rebecca Pohl mentioned Sarah Ahmed's theorisation in connection with Waters's *Affinity* (29-41), she did not expand on the fruitful relationship between Ahmed and Merleau-Ponty and its application to Waters's fiction.

Tipping the Velvet (1998) deals with gender issues, sexuality, and entertainment in late Victorian England. Whitstable is the setting for the first chapters, since the protagonist, Nancy Astley, lives and works in an oyster-parlour. Fascinated with music halls and entertainments, Nancy falls in love with Kitty Butler, a male-impersonator and singer and both begin to perform on the stage as a pair of mashers. When she is disappointed with Kitty and abandoned by her, Nancy, already in London, engages in a lesbian relationship with Diana, a wealthy woman who sexually exploits her and presents her to her "Saphic" friends, thus becoming her mistress. Finally, Nancy finds true love and a mature relationship in Florence, a lesbian and a socialist. Helen Davies aptly states that "[i]t has become a critical commonplace to note the influence of Judith Butler's theories of gender as performance on the music hall world of male impersonation as depicted in *Tipping*

[2] I have very briefly considered the relevance of the sense of touch in *Affinity* and in *Fingersmith*, in "Traces and Vestiges of the Victorian Past in Contemporary Literature". *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations,* edited by Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss. Routledge, 2014, pp. 111-122; and in Arias "Neo-Sensation Fiction, or 'Appealing to the Nerves': Sensation and Perception in Neo-Victorian Fiction". *RSV - Rivista di Studi Vittoriani* (*Journal of Victorian Studies*). Guest editors: Mariaconcetta Costantini and Saverio Tomaiuolo, n. 40 (2015): 13-30.

the Velvet" (117). Even though it is hard to deny that Nan undergoes a process of development in which she uses her performing abilities to imitate and, later, move away from constricting scripts, some critics, like Davies, argue that Waters manifests some ambivalence about the liberating potential of "talking back to Judith Butler's work" (Mitchell 9). However, Sarah Ahmed's queer phenomenology opens up new ways of engaging with the body and sexual orientation, since it might offer "an approach to sexual orientation by rethinking how the bodily direction 'toward' objects shapes the surfaces of bodily and social space" (68). She contends that there exists a 'contact zone' of lesbian desire in which there are lines of connection between bodies. This involves a shift from the body to the field and the flow, in which affective relations and sensorial engagements predominate. In other words, there is a mutual constitution, an interweaving between self and the world, subject and object, whose separation is cancelled out in a space, known as the "field", which, as mentioned before, Maurice Merleau-Ponty later developed into the "flesh" in *The Visible and the Invisible*. In this work, Merleau-Ponty reflects on touch and "on forms of contact between bodies as well as between bodies and the world" (Ahmed 106). This can be seen in *Tipping the Velvet*, for example, when Florence is recounting her experience to Lilian, a young woman, who, after delivering a baby out of wedlock, had been thrown out by her landlady, and accepted as a member of the family by Florence and her brother, Ralph. Just the fact of living with them made their life different and transformed, precisely in the interweaving of subjects and objects:

> 'Those were, I think, the happiest months of all my life. It was dazzling; I was dazzled with happiness. She changed the house — really changed it, I mean, not just its spirit. She had us strip the walls, and paint them. She made that rug.' ... 'It didn't matter that we weren't lovers; we were so close — closer than sisters. We slept upstairs, together. We read together. She taught me things" (395).

This connection between bodies, and between the bodies and the world in the 'field' that they construct, is potentially liberating for Florence (and for Lilian, too). However, it is in Waters's *Affinity* where the concept of the 'field' acquires an added significance.

Affinity (1999) revolves around the trauma that Margaret Prior suffers, caused by the recent death of her father, as well as by her former lover's decision to marry her brother. Recovering from a suicide attempt, Margaret, an upper class spinster, is given the opportunity to do charity work visiting the inmates of Millbank prison. Her encounter with Selina Dawes, a renowned spiritualist medium, convicted of fraud and assault, will turn her life upside down. Questions of gender and spiritualism, Victorian issues of control and surveillance, and historical veracity come to the fore in this neo-Victorian novel, which proves how lesbianism has been spectralised, following Terry Castle (60). The novel is written in diary form in which Margaret's and Selina's journal entries alternate. The story is set in 1874, but there are flashbacks to 1872 and 1873.

Clearly, *Affinity* portrays queer sexuality in a gothicised form. Critics such as Paulina Palmer have considered the queer gothic in Waters's fiction. However,

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 41-54

Ahmed's concept of orientation offers another view upon queer sexuality, since in her terms "[p]henomenology helps us to consider how sexuality involves ways of inhabiting and being inhabited by space" (67). The spatial metaphor is particularly relevant in *Affinity*, whose spaces and places, namely Millbank prison (panopticon-like) and Margaret's home, dominated by the wardens and Margaret's mother respectively, attempt to exercise control upon those under the disciplinary gaze, whilst at the same time allowing for subversion within the boundaries of the space. Therefore, queer sexuality finds a diverted way to manifest itself, thus producing a contact zone for desire. The space for desire is mainly produced between Selina and Margaret and their meetings at Selina's cell, and this is recorded in Margaret's "journals of the heart", which she often rereads. In this sense, Rebecca Pohl argues that:

> [i]t is through the repetition of a spatial practice that sexuality is produced...[following Ahmed] Margaret makes out [a 'crooked passage'] on the pages of her diary [where she recorded her desire]... it is this re-reading, enabled by *turning* pages and moving backwards along the same path she has previously been moving forwards on, that makes the passage 'grow firmer'...and through this repetition the heart... becomes more solid, more 'material' in as much as it enhances the realness of the experience" (Pohl 33).

The 'realness of the experience', which turns their relationship into a more solid, tangible and material interaction, is perceived in the novel in the field produced by "the coming and going of the bodies that inhabit" that space (Ahmed 106). This is illustrated in bodies getting into contact, as happens when, for example, Vigers, Margaret's maid and, crucially, the mastermind of the plot to deceive her, assists Margaret in straightening her pins that are working loose: "[Vigers] held her tray against her hip a moment, and put her hand to my head—and it seemed the kindest gesture, suddenly, that anyone had ever shown me, anyone at all" (254). Margaret is deeply affected by this small gesture in which for once the distinction between these subjects becomes erased in the field of experience, through tactility.

Indeed, touch is a privileged sense in *Affinity*, a novel dealing with the fluid relationship between the visible (corporeal) world and the invisible (spiritual) world, and with the ways in which disembodied spirits become 'materialised' in carnal forms. I would like to centre on three instances of the relevance of touch in the novel, which prove how "[t]his model of touch shows how bodies reach other bodies, and how this 'reaching' is already felt on the surface of the skin" (Ahmed 107). Thus, the first scene describes the moment in which Margaret peruses Selina's belongings at Millbank prison; the second instance refers to the scene in which one sitter, Miss Isherwood, desires to develop her spirit powers and she has a private sitting with Selina and her spirit control, Peter Quick. Lastly, I will explain Margaret's description of the plaster cast of Peter Quick's hand when she visits the library and meeting rooms of the British National Association of Spiritualists as a case of haptics.

The entry dated 28 November 1874 marks Margaret's visit to the 'Own-Clothes Room', the prison's storeroom, whose walls "are arranged...in the shape of a hexagon; and they are lined entirely, from floor to ceiling, with shelves, that are filled with boxes" (235). The prisoners' belongings are kept in boxes that have plates with their names on them. Margaret looks for Selina's box, to see "something of hers, something of her—some thing, anything, that would explain her to me, bring her nearer" (237). This idea of apprehending a subject through her objects in a sensorial way flattens out the dichotomy between subject and object, and underlines the flow of sensations and emotions established between the perceiver and the perceived world. In this case, the sense of touch will be crucial, especially when Margaret touches Selina's objects ("I touched and lifted and turned them all" [239]), and her hair. Here Selina's hair functions as a metonymic element, replacing her for a part of her body: "I put my fingers to it. It felt heavy, and dry...I had made her vivid to me; it had made her real" (239). Galia Ofek in her *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2009) has discussed the Victorian fascination with hair and hair artefacts, not only in literature but also in culture. Margaret's tactile encounter with Selina's hair could be considered an example of fetishisation, as in the case of "hair memorabilia... seen as an objectification of human relationships, emotions and memories... It may be said to objectify people, not only their sentiments, as it turns the body parts into material tokens" (Ofek 51). However, Selina's hair is and is not a "material token", as the hair bears significant meaning in itself for Margaret, and this in-between status facilitates the flow of emotions through the tactile experience, and contributes to the erasure of the distinction between subjects/objects in a "midway" encounter, following Merleau-Ponty. In fact, later on, Selina uses her mesmerising powers over Margaret to make her believe that there is no separation between them: "'your flesh comes creeping to mine'...I felt the tug of her, then. I felt the lure of her, the grasp of her" (276). It seems that the demarcation between their bodies has been erased, thus allowing for the emergence of a sensorial materiality. This is particularly illustrated in the nature of the skin, "a permeable boundary that permits congress between inside and outside" (Cohen 65). Touch is conducted through the skin that "becomes a site of possibility in which the nature of the encounter is established through the process of 'touching', one body *in relation* to another" (Castañeda 234).

Attentiveness to the skin is necessary in *Affinity*, where personal interaction is established through the sense of touch. One such instance is the scene in which Selina and 'Peter Quick' help Miss Isherwood to achieve her 'development' in spiritual terms. This occurs after a sitting in the dark room where Selina had held a séance in the presence of Miss Isherwood. She claims that on that occasion "[Peter] touched her upon her face & hands & she can still feel his fingers there" (260). In their private séance the sense of touch underlines how the subjects perceive their interaction with the world, dissolving the boundaries of the skin and opening up the possibility of encountering the other, thus collapsing outside and inside:

> Then Peter said 'Now you see my medium unclothed. That is how the spirit appears when the body has been taken from it. Put your hand upon her, Miss Isherwood. Is she hot?' Miss Isherwood said I was very hot. Peter said 'That is because her spirit is very near the surface of her flesh. You must also become hot.' She said 'Indeed I feel very hot.' (262)

The whole scene, which reveals how tactile encounters materialise in the subject's interaction with the other, remains ambiguous as regards Miss Isherwood's willingness to engage in that tactile experience. Therefore, the skin does not always guarantee the possibility of pleasure in the actual moment of the tactile encounter. Nevertheless, there exists an interpenetration between the external world and inside in touching, as opposed to vision. William A. Cohen argues that "[b]y contrast with visual apprehension, which accentuates distance, hierarchy, and difference, the proximate senses [i.e. touch], which physically incorporate the outside world into the subject, occur on the sensitive, inscribing surface of the body" (75). Granted that vision and sight predominate in *Affinity*, because of the coercive power exerted by the gaze (mainly in Millbank prison and in Margaret's home), as mentioned before, it is also true that even in a scene where sight is privileged, it acquires a haptic quality. Haptics derives from the Greek *hapticos*, meaning tactile, used by Aristotle to refer to tactile sensations in both *De Anima* and *De Sensu et Sensibilibus*. This way, vision assumes tactile characteristics such as proximity and nearness, and shifts its disembodied quality in bringing subjects and objects in contact, into the world (Cohen 17).

On 23 October 1874 Margaret records her visit to the library and reading room of the British National Association of Spiritualists. Once there, she contemplates the display of plaster casts and waxen moulds of faces and fingers, feet and arms, which constituted the proof of the veracity of the mediums in materialising spirits' disembodied forms, according to the spiritualist belief. One mould attracts Margaret's attention in particular:

> Here, however, was the grossest thing of all. It was the mould of a hand, the hand of a man—a hand of wax, yet hardly a hand as the word has meaning, more some awful tumescence—five bloated fingers and a swollen, vein-ridged wrist, that glistened, where the gas-light caught it, as if moist... 'Hand of Spirit-Control 'Peter Quick', it said. 'Materialised by Miss Selina Dawes' (130).

The description of Peter's hand emphasises the closeness of the object to the perceiving subject, to the extent of bridging the gap between them. Then, Margaret trembles and feels dizzy, being affected by a visual apprehension that has acquired a tactile quality. In haptics, subjects and objects engage in a mutual relationship where there is fluidity between them.

Undoubtedly, Waters's *Fingersmith* offers a convincing description of the importance of touch from a phenomenological point of view. In this novel, Waters draws on sensation novelists like Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. There are also Dickensian motifs and elements as critics have aptly noted. In the opening chapter of the novel, Sue Trinder, an orphan and a petty thief living under the protection of Mrs Sucksby, narrates how Gentleman concocted a plan to deceive an innocent heiress, Maud Lilly, and make her believe that he had the intention of marrying her. Sue must become lady's maid and chaperone to Gentleman and Maud in his seduction plot at Briar, where Maud lives a life of seclusion with her uncle, Christopher Lilly, a collector of pornographic books and treatises. As one reviewer stated about the novel: “This is the plot, ostensibly. Yet the plot of the novel must run deeper” (Mullan). Indeed, the plot offers multiple deceptions to the reader, since it is “founded upon a double first-person narration split between the novel’s two principal protagonists, Sue Trinder and Maud Lilly” (Gamble 43). Despite the emphasis on doubling and duality in the novel, there is ample space for the collapse of those dualisms in the encounters between subjects and objects, where the sense of touch is particularly privileged. Arguably, “words...act as vehicles for authentic knowledge” in a “distinctively queer context” (Gamble 54), when the secret of both girls’ true identity is revealed in the letter written by Sue’s real mother, thus dismantling the sense of dualism that presides over the novel. However, the sense of touch also flattens out the distance between perceiving subjects and the world, as well as allowing for the interaction between subjects in a field where queer orientation is made possible. The growing attachment between Sue and Maud is enacted through the sense of touch from the very beginning of their mistress-maid relationship:

> ’Your hands, Susan, are hard...and yet your touch is gentle.’
> She reached and put her fingers quickly upon mine, as she said this; and I rather shuddered to feel the kid-skin on them—for she had changed out of her silk gloves, only to button another white pair back on. Then she took her hands away and tucked her arms beneath the blanket. I pulled the blanket perfectly smooth. (84)

As happened in *Affinity*, the sense of touch conceptualises the encounters between the characters and their perceiving world, and “in the act of ’feeling’ the other’s particularity, establishes a relation in and through alterity” (Castañeda 234). Scenes with an emphasis on tactile experience proliferate in an attempt to present the relation between subject and the world “less in terms of abstract distance than proximate contact”, as in Victorian materialist writing (Cohen 25).

Inevitably, this concept of subjects and objects as mutually constituted through the sense of touch cancels out “[t]he conflict between the human body of the writer/reader and the ’body’ of the physical book... [which lies] at the heart of Waters’s novel” (Miller). Christopher Lilly treats his books as objects, as well as objectifies her niece, Maud, as much as the female body has been largely objectified in pornographic material. She touches the books, under her uncle’s instruction, with gloved hands, which impedes any proximity or interaction between subjects and objects. When on one occasion she is ordered to take off her gloves, she does as requested, and “shudder[s] to touch the surfaces of common things” (198), keeping herself at a distance from the object-world, not establishing any embodied encounter. As Victoria Mills states, “Waters’s use of books as a metaphor for the female body is interesting as it draws on a nineteenth-century discourse of book collecting, which largely excludes women as desiring subjects” (145).

Nevertheless, this binary dualism, objects as opposed to subjects, also collapses when Maud and Sue succeed in subverting Christopher Lilly’s objectifying notion of touch by establishing a phenomenological notion of touch in which interior and exterior, thoughts and emotions become intertwined. This involves “the transition from the limitations of the pornographic material book to the more open potentialities of the erotic text" (Miller). At the end of the novel Sue watches Maud composing pornographic texts herself, as she states: "I am still what he made me. I shall always be that" (546). She earns her living by writing pornography, taking the pen and thus becoming an authoress, claiming ownership of the topic that once objectified her, thus turning it into lesbian erotica, which is in itself a moot aspect in lesbian literature and culture (Palmer 90). What remains clear is that Maud no longer wears her gloves and both she and Sue become texts to be mutually read and decoded through sensory perception: "I didn't need to say [I love you], anyway: she could read the words in my face. Her colour changed, her gaze grew clearer. She put a hand across her eyes... I quickly reached and stopped her wrist..." (*Fingersmith* 547). This tactile encounter illustrates the collapse of the binaries that sustained Christopher Lilly's world, and the encounter with the other through the sense of touch.

In conclusion, as I hope to have demonstrated, Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian novels show a particular interest in queer orientations through the sense of touch and tactile encounters. Arguably, Waters is proposing a 'slantwise' line, a 'border', which involves a phenomenological orientation towards other bodies, producing her own genealogical line of (neo-)Victorian lesbianism. In looking back to the Victorian past, these novels look in a different way to that past because "[l]ooking back is what keeps open the possibility of going astray. This glance also means an openness to the future, as the imperfect translation of what is behind us", following Sara Ahmed (178). In fact, paying attention to the overflow of the Victorian past into the present through sensorial engagement, from the point of view of phenomenology and tactility, illustrates the affective interaction between the Victorian past and today's culture, in which a reassessment of materiality is deemed necessary in the light of the relevance of social media and virtual human interaction.

Reviews sent to author: 26 April 2017
Revised paper accepted for publication: 26 April 2017

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Sara. Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others. Duke UP, 2006.

Ahmed, Sara and Jackie Stacey. "Introduction: Dermographics". *Thinking through the Skin*, edited by Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, Routledge, 2001, pp. 1-17.

Arias, Rosario and Patricia Pulham, editors. *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Baldwin, Thomas. "Introduction". *The World of Perception*. By Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Trans. by Oliver Davis. With a Foreword by Stéphanie Ménasé. Routledge, 2004, pp. 1-28.

Castle, Terry. *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*. Columbia UP, 1993.

Castañeda, Claudia. "Robotic Skin: The Future of Touch?". *Thinking through the Skin,* edited by Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, Routledge, 2001, pp. 223-236.

Classen, Constance. "Touch in the Museum". *The Book of Touch*, edited by Constance Classen, Berg, 2005, pp. 275-286.

Cohen, William A. *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses*. U of Minnesota P, 2009.

Davies, Helen. *Gender and Venriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Gamble, Sarah. "'I know everything. I know nothing': (Re)Reading *Fingersmith*'s Deceptive Doubles". *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives,* edited by Kaye Mitchell, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 42-55.

Hamilakis, Yannis. *Archaeology of the Senses: Human Experience, Memory, and Affect*. Cambridge UP, 2013.

Heilmann, Ann, and Mark Llewellyn. *The Neo-Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Kaplan, Cora. *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism*. Edinburgh UP, 2007.

Kearney, Richard. "What is Carnal Hermeneutics?" *New Literary History* 46 (2015): pp. 99-124.

Kearney, Richard and Brian Treanor. "Introduction: Carnal Hermeneutics from Head to Foot". *Carnal Hermeneutics,* edited by Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor, Fordham UP, 2015, pp. 1-11.

Kontou, Tatiana. *Spiritualism and Women's Writing: From the Fin de Siècle to the Neo-Victorian*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. by Colin Smith. Routledge, 2002.

—— *The Visible and the Invisible,* edited by Claude Lefort. Trans by Alphonso Lingis Northwestern UP, 1968.

Miller, Kathleen A. "Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith*: Leaving Women's Fingerprints on Victorian Pornography". *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 4.2 (Spring 2008): np. http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue41/miller.htm.

Mills, Victoria. "'Books in my Hands – Books in my Heart – Books in my Brain': Bibliomania, the Male Body, and Sensory Erotics in Late-Victorian Literature". *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture,* edited by Katharina Boehm, Palgrave, 2012, pp. 130-152.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 41-54

Mitchell, Kate and Nicola Parsons. Introduction. *Reading Historical Fiction: The Revenant and Remembered Past,* edited by Kate Mitchell and Nicola Parsons, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 1-18.

Mitchell, Kaye. "Introduction: The Popular and Critical Reception of Sarah Waters". *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, edited by Kaye Mitchell. Bloomsbury, 2013. pp. 1-15.

Mullan, John. "Blessed Plots". Rev. of Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith*. *The Guardian* 10 June 2006. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jun/10/sarahwaters.

Ofer, Galia. *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture*. Ashgate, 2009.

Palmer, Paulina. *The Queer Uncanny: New Perspectives on the Gothic*. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2012.

Pettersson, Lin Elinor. *Gender Performance and Spatial Negotiation in the Neo-Victorian Novel*. Universidad de Málaga, 2014.

Pohl, Rebecca. "Sexing the Labyrinth: Space and Sexuality in Sarah Waters' *Affinity*". *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, edited by Kaye Mitchell, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 29-41.

Ratcliffe, Matthew. "What Is Touch?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (2011): pp. 1-20.

Romdenh-Romluc, Komarine. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge, 2011.

Shiller, Dana. "The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel". *Studies in the Novel* 29.4 (Winter 1997): pp. 538-560.

Waters, Sarah. *Affinity*. Virago, 1999.

—— *Fingersmith*. Virago, 2002.

—— *Tipping the Velvet*. Virago, 1998.

Watkin, Christopher. *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?: The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Nancy*. Edinburgh UP, 2009.

Wilson, Cheryl. "From the Drawing Room to the Stage: Performing Sexuality in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*". *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 35.3 (2006): pp. 285-305.

Wylie, John. "Landscape, Absence and the Geographies of Love". *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 34 (2009): pp. 275-289.

BODIES ON DISPLAY: AFFECTIVE AND SPATIAL PRACTICE IN ZOË STRACHAN'S *NEGATIVE SPACE**

Carla Rodríguez González
Universidad de Oviedo

Abstract

Drawing from space and affect theory, the aim of this article is to analyse the representation of the female body in Zoë Strachan's novel *Negative Space*. First of all, it studies the construction of its protagonist's "negative" body, as well as the strategies she develops in order to cope with the void of positive representation in which she feels immersed. Secondly, it focuses on her affective practices in public and private spaces. In order to do so, it concentrates on the alienation and dislocation caused by her embodiment of the city of Glasgow, to then examine her highly sexualised bodily practice of the domestic spaces that are central in the text, chiefly her family home and the flat she used to share with her now deceased brother Simon. Finally, it revises her translocation in the Orkney Islands, together with the alternative spatial and emotional attachments she creates in her journey towards an eventual bodily reintegration into the rhythms of socialisation.

Keywords: body, affect, spatial practice, Zoë Strachan, *Negative Space*.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la representación del cuerpo femenino en la novela de Zoë Strachan *Negative Space* desde la teoría espacial y afectiva. En primer lugar, estudia la construcción del cuerpo "negativo" de su protagonista, así como las estrategias que desarrolla para negociar el vacío de representación positiva en el que se siente inmersa. En segundo lugar, se centra en sus prácticas afectivas en espacios públicos y privados. Se examina la alienación y deslocalización causadas por su experiencia corpórea (*embodiment*) de la ciudad de Glasgow, así como sus prácticas corporales altamente sexualizadas en los espacios domésticos que son centrales en el texto: su hogar materno y el piso que compartía con Simon, su hermano recientemente fallecido. Finalmente, revisa la translocación de la protagonista en las Islas Orcadas, junto con los vínculos espaciales y emocionales alternativos que crea en su viaje hacia una recuperación corpórea y su integración en los ritmos de socialización.

Palabra clave: cuerpo, afecto, práctica espacial, Zoë Strachan, *Negative Space*.

Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, 74; April 2017, pp. 55-72; ISSN: e-2530-8335

1. NEGATIVE SPACES IN SCOTTISH FICTION

"Negative space" is defined in Zoë Strachan's first novel as "the gaps in the composition, between arm and body, leg and leg, the empty areas" (173). As the title announces, this is indeed the central metaphor of a text that is structured on different layers of interpretation attributed to such void in relation to the body of its protagonist, Stella, a young Scottish woman who is trying to cope with the emotions provoked by the recent death of her brother Simon. *Negative Space* has been analysed from different perspectives, ranging from the association of Stella's split self with the Scottish nation and its culture to cosmopolitan readings of Scottishness at the dawn of the millennium.[1] Strachan herself has contributed to such contextualisation of her novel —also of her writing in general— within a markedly urban tradition integrated by some consolidated Scottish women writers, such as A.L. Kennedy, Jackie Kay, Denise Mina, Ali Smith, Louise Welsh, together with other outstanding younger voices like Laura Hird, who react against previous masculine models, primarily those of the canonical voices represented by Alasdair Gray, James Kelman or Irvine Welsh ("Is that a Scot or am Ah Wrang?" 54). In this vein, as Kirstin Innes remarks in relation to Janice Galloway's complaints about the standardisation and globalisation of contemporary Scottish voices in the aftermath of the *Trainspotting* phenomenon, it seemed necessary to react against "the promotion of a particular minority voice as representative of a whole nation's struggle for emancipatory self-expression [which occurred] at the expense of all other subordinate and disempowered groups" (301). Thus, arguably, these women have occupied and vindicated the negative space allowed for female writers in the nation at the turn of the twenty-first century. Many of them are based in Glasgow, and the city has been present some way or another in their writing. The quality of the work they have produced has been widely acknowledged, as explained by Alan Bisset: "never before have so many female Glaswegian novelists achieved such prominence" (60).

Added to that, and with a clear political agenda in mind, what makes Strachan's writing innovative within this tradition is her focus on queer identities, which subverts what she regards as "the tendency towards repressed queer characters and subtexts in pre-devolution's Scottish literature [which] was linked to class as well as homophobia" ("Is that a Scot or am Ah Wrang?" 53). Rather than rejecting com-

* The research carried out for the writing of this article is part of the project "Encuentros incorporados y conocimientos alternativos: habitar y crear la ciudad" (Embodied Encounters and Alternative Knowledges: Inhabiting and Creating the City), financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiviness (MINECO) (code FFI2013-45642-R).

[1] Fiona McCulloch, for instance, argues that "writing in an evolving cultural climate, Strachan's text crosses a bridge away from the gendered negative space perpetuated by traditional masculinity to discover new possible Scotlands (...) that will allow for the positive diversity of supranational citizenship. By looking forward to the infinite potential of her own future and finding her own narrative voice, Stella encapsulates the need for Scotland to accommodate the cosmopolitan citizens of its postdevolution era" (25).

pletely the merit of her male models, she incorporates them into her own writing, translating the strength of their masculine characters, "their yearning, their angst" (55), into equally powerful female voices, like Stella's. Indeed, as Fiona McCulloch contends, "writing in an evolving cultural climate, Strachan's text crosses a bridge away from the gendered negative space perpetuated by traditional masculinity to discover new possible Scotlands" (25).

These alternative Scotlands are explored in Strachan's novel by means of a complex articulation of the body of her female protagonist in relation to the gendered power structures she must negotiate in a process of self-recovery. In her book *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Susan Bordo maintains that "[th]e most powerful revaluations of the female body have looked, not to nature or biology, but to the culturally inscribed and historically located body (or to historically developed *practices)* for imaginations of *alterity* rather than 'the truth' about the female body." She goes on to explain that these "imaginations and embodiments" can only be constructed "through alliance with that which has been silenced, repressed, disdained?" (41). This is precisely what Strachan achieves in *Negative Space*, where by choosing to situate Stella in the active/passive coordinates of artistic representation —she works as a life model, as Strachan did occasionally in the past (Hind 2011)—, the focus on the female body and the gaze projected on it become central in the narrative. Such tensions, as Linda Nochlin contends, are embedded in "the total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, [because they] occur in a social situation, are integral elements of this social structure, and are mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions" (158). In a similar vein, Fran Tonkins argues that "gender and sexuality, after all, are not defined by the limits of the individual body: they involve social relations that extend across and are shaped by space" (94). As this article will argue, such structures inevitably have a wider social and spatial dimension determining Stella's alternative embodiments of public, domestic, urban and rural spaces in the course of the novel. Drawing from space, body and affect theory, the aim of this article is, first of all, to study the construction of Stella's "negative" body, as well as the strategies she develops in order to cope with the void of positive representation in which she feels immersed. Secondly, this work will focus on Stella's affective practices in public and private spaces. In order to do so, it will concentrate on the alienation and dislocation caused by her embodiment of the city of Glasgow, to then examine her highly sexualised bodily experience of the domestic spaces that are central in the text, chiefly her family home and the flat she used to share with her brother Simon. Finally, it will focus on Stella's translocation in Orkney in the second part of the novel, in terms of the alternative spatial and emotional attachments she develops in her journey towards an eventual bodily reintegration into the rhythms of socialisation.

2. NEGATING THE BODY

The metaphor of the absent body recurs throughout the text and is mainly projected on two characters, the siblings Stella and Simon Flett. His death has deprived him of a body —there is no corpse after the cremation— and of the possibilities of spiritual transcendence, according to his sister's beliefs, but most importantly, from the point of view of the narrative, it has left Stella without a physical reference with which she can identify. She defines herself in relation to the void left by her brother, occupying his negative space. Such perception forces her to undergo a complex spatial and corporeal process to reconstruct her identity, before eventually healing and taking over her life again. The strong connection between the two bodies, that in numerous flashbacks insinuates an incestual relationship, is reinforced by Stella's internalised responsibility that there is "no place for him to exist now, except maybe inside of me" (25). Her body has become the receptacle and the physical structure, the *space*, inhabited not only by her but also shared with Simon. Such circumstance even makes her assume the existence of a doppelgänger, a masculine form she can see "on the edge of [her] peripheral vision" (15). This haunting presence, which is a recurrent topic in Scottish literature dating back to Robert L. Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* or James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, disturbs Stella's body and contributes to her emotional and physical deregulation.

This is particularly manifest in the chapter "Under Observation," where Strachan situates Stella under the supervision of the doctors after a suicide attempt, a circumstance that adds to her lack of control over her body. The first person narrative voice of the rest of the novel changes now to the second, with Simon as its interlocutor, but most importantly, it also incorporates the voice of the medical authority. This highly emotional imaginary dialogue with her brother, where she recalls his painful final hours, is interfered with by the rational detachment of the medical discourse, which explains scientifically what aneurysm consists in. Such heteroglossic portrayal of Stella's split psyche, together with other thematic concerns, such as the "investigation of the private world of unhappy individuals in a context of urban loneliness," has made Marie-Odile Pittin-Hedon (16) find parallelisms between Strachan's novel and Janice Galloway's contemporary classic *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), which portrays the spiral of physical destruction caused by the strong emotional disorder of its protagonist, Joy Stone, who struggles to take over her life and the embodied spaces she negotiates on a daily basis in Glasgow, after the death of her lover.

As it happens to Galloway's character, Stella's body is problematic because it manifests the emotions she cannot control. It has become a medium for the expression of intense distress, which is personal, but which also has other external motivations. Indeed, as Susan Bordo contends, "the body of disordered women (...) offers themselves as an aggressively graphic text for the interpreter — a text that insists, actually demands, it be read as a cultural statement, a statement about gender" (169). In this vein, it must be remarked that Stella's corporeal coordinates place her in a very specific crossroads as a young, single woman, living in an alienating urban environment with no clear family bonds. Her emotional landscapes are crucial to understand her arrhythmical interaction with harmful patterns of socialisation that are highly dependent on gender constructions and, therefore, regarded as threatening rather than as an opportunity to heal. Stella's decontrolled embodiments do in fact represent a rejection of heteronormative practices, of what Adrienne Rich calls "compulsory heterosexuality," which for the author is a political institution in itself (1980). Stella performs these practices unwillingly at first, until she eventually dismisses them.[2]

Such emphatic representation of the relation between body and mind is in line with contemporary feminist analyses, which have emphasised the need to avoid the Cartesian differentiation between body and mind to suggest integrative approaches. Susan Bordo denounces that this differentiation "has been one of the most historically powerful of the dualities that inform Western ideologies of gender" (11). On the other hand, authors like Susie Orbach argue that "our bodies are made both in a literal physical sense and in a feeling sense" (57), whereas Liz Bondi sustains that an analysis of the body will necessarily "require that we re-examine the interplay between mind and body and between the social and the biological" (183). There cannot be a dissociation between our emotions and our bodies, since they are what mediates between us and the world around us. Stella's incontrollable physical reactions are motivated by a precarious state of mind, and to her, the consumption of drugs —prescribed, legal and illegal alike— seems the only means to attenuate her pain. Such search for physical sedation in fact contributes to reinforcing the central space occupied by the body and its physicality in Stella's experience of grieving, whereas her emotions, the actual cause of her state of disorder, become more difficult to be grasped. For instance, in one of the passages describing an intensification of her pain, where she indistinctively uses the third and the first person to refer to herself, Stella explains, "she feels like she's been hurt physically except this is worse, this is intolerable" (123). Stella needs to see her body from "the outside," in a mirror, a recurrent urge throughout the novel, in an attempt to make sense of the situation, to resituate herself, through the observation of her reflected corporeality. It is only by seeing herself from the outside that she can identify her emotions: "she's distraught and it's running through her mind that this time she really has cracked. (...) She is broken." When she eventually calms down, physically exhausted and avoiding the mirror this time, she resumes using the first person to verbalise with more precision how she feels: "I'm fucking terrified, petrified with fear in fact" (24). Such change is in line with Drew Leder's analysis, where she explains that a strong focus on the

[2] In fact, Stella's reaction seems to correspond to Adrienne Rich's conceptualization of "lesbian existence," which, for her "comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. It is also a direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women. But it is more than these, although we may first begin to perceive it as a form of nay-saying to patriarchy, an act of resistance" (Rich 649). Indeed, as Rich explains later in her study, "woman-identification is a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, violently curtailed and wasted under the institution of heterosexuality" (657).

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 55-72

body frequently reflects situations of crisis: "Insofar as the body tends to disappear when functioning unproblematically, it often seizes our attention most strongly at times of dysfunction; we then experience the body as the very *absence* of a desired or ordinary state, and as a force that stands opposed to the self" (4, emphasis in original). Thus, what is missing is a coordinated, regulated bodily condition that, in turn, responds to a balanced emotional state.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* Sara Ahmed explains that "emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others. Indeed, attending to emotions might show us that all actions are reactions (...) what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others" (4). Such relational approach to emotions and bodies becomes particularly interesting to understand the significance of Stella's loss. Growing up in a dysfunctional family, with an absent father and a mother who has married again a man with two young sisters who take over the space previously allotted to her and her brother, Simon becomes the only reference for Stella. They have established an allegiance that is simultaneously physical and emotional, which provides them with a strong sense of identity and belonging, especially in the case of Stella, as far as the reader can know, since her perspective dominates the narrative now that Simon is gone. As Ahmed explains, in our interaction with other people, "not only do I have an impression of others, but they also leave me with an impression; they impress me, and impress upon me" (6). In the case of Stella, Simon's impression is felt so intensely that it re-emerges in any interpersonal and spatial interaction, and it is not until she leaves Glasgow for Orkney that she manages to find alternative affective practices, what Margaret Wetherell conceptualises as "the figuration where body possibilities and routines become recruited or entangled together with meaning-making and with other social and material figurations" (19), and which in Stella's case are connected to a strong sensorial experience of the insular space.

Another important factor in the relationship between Simon and Stella is their symbolic relation with art and the different roles they play in the process of representing and expressing the other and the self. These are highly dependent on gender constructions and based on the active or passive attitudes attributed to their bodies, a scopophilic game they both have played for years.[3] Simon is a painter and thus controls the representation of the bodies he paints, most significantly Stella's: "drawing things, just looking at things and thinking about them then putting them down on paper makes me feel in control" (185), he explains in one of Stella's flashbacks. On the other hand, Stella is a life model who sometimes poses for her brother. These are the only occasions when she feels dignified, even if she is aware

---

[3] In her influential 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey explains this asymmetrical representation on the grounds that the "male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (19).

of the different power positions involved in the process: "Being a muse, that's the a [sic] romantic way of saying it's someone else who's looking and creating" (183). Yet, when she tries to reverse the roles and become the painter, she is unsuccessful, producing a "hairy and bestial" childlike figure of Simon, a "lopsided faun" (191), which in the context of the passage describing the level of intimacy they reach while posing and drawing, hints again at an incestual relationship.

In this part of the book it is particularly important how Simon decides to change the relation with his sister's body and instead of sketching it on paper, he decides to paint on it, copying on her skin the patterns that appear in an art book representing the figure of Salome: "heavy bracelets and armbands circle my wrists and biceps, and necklaces wrap themselves around my throat," describes Stella. In spite of such an asphyxiating description, she remembers how she felt "warm and relaxed" (188), consciously ignoring the dangers of such imprint on her body, while perfectly aware of the ambivalent figure with whom she is being connected, the apparently powerful temptress who is, in fact, only a sexualised image projecting the masculine gaze: "she's a safe little fantasy woman painstakingly created on paper where she'll stay under control, unable to break free from the mould in which she's been cast. (...) an aesthetic ideal, decorative, no more important than the dais behind her or the floor she stands on" (186). Stella's narration of the events that happened that night is interrupted to avoid clarifying what occurred later in the bedroom, but Stella's body speaks for itself the morning after: "the ink is still there on my skin, but the patterns have smeared and run and smudged black across my body" (192). Such gaps are also connected to other intentional elusions in the novel, most notably, Stella's name, which is only revealed in its final pages once she has managed to heal.[4]

Stella's body does indeed speak for itself in various ways that escape her control. Remarkably, such quality, as Pittin-Hedon states, guarantees Stella's progressive reconstruction, and thus "the negative space [implies] no longer the space of negation, but rather the space where the outline of the subject becomes more real, more focused, maybe even more alive" (20). While modelling naked, she is exposed to the gaze of the teachers and the students in the art school, where she must remain static, obedient to the poses she is asked to perform, when her body "becomes just like any other object which the students are intent on drawing" (166). The representation of her body is not merely physical, and once the students acquire the necessary skills, they also project an interpretation of Stella's personality on their drawings: "I'm used to pictures that don't look like me, people distorting me

---

[4] In an interview with Keir Hind, Strachan explains: "With not revealing my character's name in *Negative Space* it seemed, I think it was to do with her identity being so hard to pin down and so difficult for her to isolate or name in any way. There's lots of things that she can't name to do with what she's feeling, or things that've happened (...). But I think that's kind of a fun thing about writing, sometimes things are missing at first because you haven't quite realised what they are, and then the things that are missing become much more present, which I suppose is what the title, *Negative Space* is actually about" ("Is that a Scot or am Ah Wrang?").

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 55-72

to suit themselves. Leaving gaps in their sketches for inconvenient parts they don't want to draw" (108).

Yet, interestingly enough, this fragmented, appropriated body will develop strategies of empowerment even before Stella is capable of recognising them as such, as evidenced in the chapter entitled "Blurring the Edges," where she is hired by a professional male painter who asks her to pose in his private studio. In spite of the power position he occupies, this section presents Stella in charge of the situation, precisely because her affective practices, due to which she no longer aims to partake in standard forms of socialisation, allow her to act more freely, reversing the gender roles that would have determined the interaction with this artist otherwise. When he shows her his previous works, she sees "they were all of women, some clothed, a few nude, most somewhat dishabille" (140), which is in accordance with the predominant presence of the female nude in the Western visual arts, where women are systematically reified as objects of the male gaze (Nochlin 1998). Gradually, as the session advances and the scene becomes more and more intimate, partly because of the effects of the wine they are drinking, Stella feels more relaxed, "hardly aware of his looking at [her]" (143), even sexually aroused to the point she ends up masturbating in front of him. When he tries to approach her, she pushes him "out of [her] space" (145), because "he had come along with a whole sexual agenda he wanted to impose" (147), as she explains later. Nonetheless, when she narrates the scene to her friend Mhair, she assumes this is another example of her "lack of control," unaware of the fact that she has managed to subvert the gendered dynamics of representation involved in the situation.

A different response appears when Stella confronts another form of artistic representation, which is photography. This is mostly associated with her female friend Alex, whose relationship often resembles a very positive egalitarian romantic affair. Stella poses for Alex several times, even naked, but the control over her image is offered to the model, since the photographer promises: "I'll let you know exactly what I'm doing with the prints, and give you the negatives when I'm finished, whatever you want" (203). She is very much aware of the manipulation involved in the art of photography and this ethical reflection situates Alex in a different position as an artist than the painters in the novel, including Simon. Thus, while she acknowledges the power of the artists' gaze over the object they are representing, what she calls the "lies" of the camera (107), Simon regards drawing as a means to have "control over something" (185), which again reifies the bodies displayed in front of him, especially his sister's.

Significantly enough, Alex's photographs allow her and Stella to move out of the oppressive atmospheres of the city, when she receives a fellowship to be part of a collective artistic project in Orkney. As it will be discussed further in section five, this all-female collective experience will allow Stella to regain control over the representation of her self and her body, which is connected to her use of the camera in the final act of reconciliation with her emotions, which takes place after performing a telluric-oriented ritual for Simon. It is particularly interesting that Stella's photograph of the moment cannot focus on her brother's absent body. This centrality is occupied instead by the space where the ceremony takes place, which is

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 55-72

appropriated emotionally by Stella and translated into what will become an object, the photograph, that is not intended for the consume and the gaze of others' but for her own individual purposes. Stella's highly embodied experience of space empowers her here, once she has escaped the burden of representation over her body, over what Elizabeth Grosz conceptualises as a "sociocultural artifact" (297). However, before reaching this state, she must negotiate very problematic relations with space, both private and public, where gender hierarchies are essential to understand her crises.

3. URBAN EMBODIMENTS: GLASGOW

As Nancy Duncan contends, knowledge is embodied, engendered and embedded in the material context of place and space. As such, the body becomes a space of resistance, a politicised space itself (4). Space, as bodies, is constructed according to gender dichotomies and, therefore, it reproduces power asymmetries and social hierarchies. In our contemporary societies, cities congregate the largest numbers of the population worldwide and, therefore, constitute the most common space where the negotiation of such hierarchies takes place by means of conscious or unconscious subversive performances of gender identities. In this vein, Fran Tonkiss contends that "setting gender and sexuality in the city is partly a question of putting bodies in space. But it is also to ask how embodied subjects are located within more general social structures and relationships" (94). These structures, as remarked by Liz Bondi, "are generally viewed as the product of patriarchal gender relations (177) and have traditionally reproduced, as Duncan argues, the "gendered dualism of mind and body [which] has spatial corollaries in other dualisms such as the interiority/exteriority and public/private distinction" (2). Such differentiation appears clear in Strachan's novel, while at the same time it is subverted through Stella's complex embodied performances in the public and private spheres. For instance, the dividing lines between her body and Simon's are unclear at the beginning of the story, and she repeatedly wonders whether she has actually become her brother. Stella's intense feelings serve to interrogate such Manichean understanding of bodies and spaces, since they appear much closer to Sara Ahmed's model for the socialisation of emotions, where these "create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. (...) It is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made; the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (Ahmed 10). Similarly, as Wetherell remarks, affect must be equated with "*embodied meaning-making*" (4, emphasis is original), that is, it situates the subject in the constant process of constructing meaning through emotion.

In *Negative Space*, "meaning-making" is initially contextualised in Glasgow, an alienating space charged with emotions that have transformed Stella's embodiments radically. These emotions resituate her in the city and determine her interaction with the spaces she lives in, impeding her participation in what David Seamon defines in *A Geography of the Lifeworld* (1979) as "place ballets", namely, the choreographic movements performed collectively in our daily routines of work and leisure, as well as the meanings attributed to them. In spite of her distress, Stella does not remain secluded in the private sphere; rather on the contrary, she explores the city in search of anaesthetic experiences for her unrestlessness. These experiences are alcoholic or drug-related, frequently leading to detached sexual encounters, which do take place in the realm of the private, as will be explained in the next section of this article. Stella becomes an atypical *flâneuse* whose estrangement has a corporeal dimension projected on the city, that in its turn becomes "shaped" by her emotions, as suggested in Ahmed's model:

> I walk home that night, along a road I've walked hundreds of times before, all the buildings familiar (...). It's been a regular route for what feels like such a long time, and now I'm not certain when I'll take it. (...) I know this place like the back of my hand (...). The air's moving as if it's raining but I can't feel any drops, and this quiet sense of sadness that enfolds me is not a new thing, it seems as much part of this road as everything else. (174)

Grief has taken over Stella's other emotions, which have become an obstacle for her socialisation in many respects, but it has also enabled her to transcend many other boundaries. For instance, it has prevented her from feeling fear in the open spaces of the city, which has granted her the freedom to access any area, as demonstrated in her night walks in the darkest streets of Glasgow (106). This is an act of gender subversion in itself, given the fact that women, as Tonkiss explains, "are trained to use the street" since they are young and start accessing public spaces, because taking into account the gendered geographies of fear in the city, "having a female body can be a spatial liability," and some urban spaces "are experienced as a kind of conflict zone" (104) by women.

Stella's affective practices become particularly intense in relation with one public space in the city, the hospital where Simon died. In the chapter entitled "Seeing Inside," the relational construction of the siblings' identity acquires a spatial dimension when Stella is helped by a "sympathetic CPN" to relive "events as accurately as possible" (55), that is, when she decides to embody the spaces of the hospital from the perspective that Simon had in his final hours. After complaining about recurrent headaches as the possible symptoms of some "congenital weakness" (56), in reference to Simon's aneurism, but also to her emotional state, the doctors decide to scan Stella's brain. She then has to cross the same corridors, "filling [her] nostrils with the scent of the hospital," leading to the neurology area where she gets her scan done. This experience contributes even further to blurring the differences between "the inside and the outside," that is, of her body and Simon's, of her emotions and the spaces and times when they occur. When she is inside the scanner, a strong corporeal sensation caused by the heat given off by the machine makes her associate the space with another one, Simon's coffin in the crematorium. She imagines her emotional suffering physically, as a "huge knot in [her] brain, a lump. (...) the malign thing which had grown inside [her]" (57). While revolving on such thoughts and undergoing these intense emotional processes, her body reacts unexpectedly: "Maybe it was the vibration, or just the mixture of nerves and boredom through sensory deprivation, but freakily I ended up feeling quite turned on" (58).

Once more, her body takes over, connecting with the immediate sensorial experience, which temporarily liberates her from her emotional burden. Indeed, Stella's sexuality is her ultimate means of expression of the self, both in the private spaces where her heterosexual encounters take place in Glasgow and, later on, in her lesbian encounter in Orkney. Stella's body becomes not only a space of resistance then, but also a politicised space in itself.

4. UNHOMELY BODIES

Glasgow is full of oppressive spaces for Stella, but it still offers her the possibility of negotiating the meanings attributed to her body. This is in contrast with Kilmarnock, the town where her mother lives with her new family, and which Stella and Simon left behind to settle in the city when there was no more space for them in their mother's house. In fact, the lack of a stable home and the existence of dysfunctional ones is one of the main reasons for Stella's disorientation. As Joshua Price contends, "homes are painstakingly constructed and then ideologically maintained as 'given'" (40), to which it must be added that in this construction emotions are embedded to reinforce the heteronormative structure they represent. In the novel, there are no positive affective family bonds left for Stella nor does she partake in the symbolic space of care that her mother's house could represent. In this vein, when she returns to Glasgow the Christmas after Simon's death, she tries to "excise" the time she has spent there from her "consciousness as meticulously as a doctor with a scalpel removing an unsightly cyst" (152). The corporeal comparison is relevant because Stella's embodiment of the private sphere reflects her spatial anxiety, chiefly associated with the flat she shared with Simon and his friend Ritchie briefly before his death, and which in the first part of the novel is presented as her home in Glasgow.

Elizabeth Grosz argues that "the body and its environment (...) produce each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other" (297). This is applied to urban environments in Grosz's study, but can also be extended to the private, where, as Price reminds us, the fact that "spaces are constructed intersubjectively" (41) becomes particularly evident, given the emotional attachments developed by the people who integrate these structures. In the novel, these embodied experiences are primarily associated with Simon's flat and his room, which Stella occupies after his death: "there was no Simon's room now, it was mine, my new room, completely different" (109). This intimate space is nevertheless still haunted by her brother and his belongings, which awaken contradictory feelings in Stella. On the one hand, she fears losing them, as they remain the only physical, tangible, evidence of his existence after the cremation, but on the other she "cannot bear leaving [them] untouched like some morbid shrine, as though he might walk back one day" (94). There is a direct connection between her physical body, as the receptacle of Simon's absent body, and his flat, now home for Stella. Emotions are projected on the space and reproduced by it, saturating her body to the extent that she cannot experience it in isolation. She leaves the flat to enter the realm of the public in search of company, yet her exploration is not motivated by the desire to fulfil heteronormative expectations and establish a romantic relationship; rather on the contrary, her incursions into the city are unplanned, erratic, a form of evasion from the flat and its suggestions, which again ends up being a highly physical experience, when she encounters a friend of Simon's, McCall, whom she takes home with her.

Stella's relationship with this young man, who is never given a first name in the novel, reverses gendered constructions of heterosexual romantic love and the power differences it reproduces. He is merely used to fill in the emptiness of the flat, that now seems "much fuller with two people in it, much more benign" (111). In line with her heavy ingestion of diverse drugs, sex represents a means "of distraction, gently manoeuvring Simon into the back of [her] mind" (51), another form of emotional anaesthesia mediated by her body. She does not have any feelings for McCall and, in fact, he is always reified in their occasional encounters. One of them, described in the chapter "Love Hurts," set in Simon's room, is especially important in this regard, also because it focalises on one of the "negative spaces" in the novel, the place where the incestual relationship that is never explicitly spoken about might have happened. The title immediately suggests a suffering subject that is troubled emotionally, as Stella is, by a love relationship. However, as the story advances, the interpretation of the title changes radically, when Stella and McCall's sadistic sexual intercourse is described. She takes control of the action transferring her emotional pain into his body: "It felt good. I moved more and more violently against him, clutching and pulling at the scant flesh of his chest. This was better, so much better than hurting myself. Why had I ever thought of hurting myself when the real joy was in hurting someone else?" (117). On the morning after, Stella is disgusted by this experience —"muttering filthy fucking filthy body in my bed" (118)— and so she starts cleaning the room and washing her body thoroughly, again showing a strong embodiment of the space. Yet, such physical decontamination will not be completed until she receives the morning-after pill, even if Stella confesses: "my womb felt far too inhospitable for anything to grow in" (128). Her body is conceived of as an unhomely space, incapable of hosting life, much less a new one, a new body, nor any positive emotions associated to it.

5. EMBODIED RHYTHMS

Leaving Glasgow for Orkney involves a radical change in Stella's relation with her body and her affective practices. This implies moving away from the masculine symbolic order that they city represents in its private and public spaces to a liberating environment that is perceived as feminine. Here, Stella and Alex are in the company of an all-female community of artists with whom they must share the little hotel where they will be staying, and which becomes an alternative and temporal home for Stella. The relation with the space is now natural rather than urban, and therefore her body starts to partake in new individual and collective rhythms accordingly. But above all, Orkney appears as a blank space, devoid of emotional attachments for Stella: "I try to imagine what Simon would have thought of it here,

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 55-72

if he'd have liked it or if it would have been too quiet for him. It's hard for me to admit to myself that I just don't know" (222). As Kirsty MacDonald explains, "the representation of the North of Scotland as redemptive is a convention again dating back to Romanticism" (146-7). However, Strachan's novel revisits the cliché introducing new perspectives, since this "redemption" requires discovering new affective practices which are related to Stella's self-realisation as a lesbian. Sexuality is again a crucial factor to understand her embodied spaces and affective practices, which become highly dependent on different yet interwoven rhythms.

In his 1992 study *Rhythmanalysis*, Henri Lefebvre situates rhythm at the core of his analysis of everyday life. He establishes a connection between natural and social rhythms in order to explain the different patterns that influence our embodied experience: "this human body is the site and place of interaction between the biological, the physiological (nature) and the social (often called the cultural), where each of these levels, each of these dimensions, has its own specificity, therefore its space-time: its rhythm" (89-90). Lefebvre's model concentrates on the body, as the primary "metronome" for measuring these intertwining rhythms, even when his analysis has a relational rather than individualistic focus: "the surroundings of bodies, be they in nature or a social setting, are also bundles, bouquets, garlands of rhythms, to which it is necessary to listen in order to grasp the natural or produced ensembles" (30). In *Negative Space* Stella's body is initially presented as alien to the social environment that surrounds it. It is not receptive to other people's individual rhythms either, especially to those of the men she is in contact with and who represent, as it has been discussed, a masculine order in which she is not ready to partake. Therefore, her corporeal reactions seem incoherent, out of place, while her body is perceived as pathologic, even arrhythmic, as Lefebvre would put it. A clear instance of such deregulation is her lack of control over her menstrual cycles, which makes her start bleeding unexpectedly in random situations.

Everything starts to change, though, when she reaches Orkney, "a place that's nearer to the Arctic Circle than it is to London" (193), namely, a space of socialisation that is more natural than urban, less contaminated by the rhythms and the affective practices that Stella needs to leave behind. In the isolated community of female artists, her role is unspecific; she is merely Alex's friend, an anonymity which grants her the opportunity to reinvent herself. Interestingly, she decides to carry on with the role of model she had in Glasgow, but Stella's perception of the part she plays in the process of artistic creation has changed, which enables her to gain more agency progressively. First of all, she feels less exposed to the others' gaze, which is now only feminine; and secondly, she volunteers to do the job and there is no economic transaction involved. Similarly, the fact that the women have to live together in the same reduced space eventually creates a sense of community and artistic interchange, a rhythm of their own in which Stella feels involved. For instance, a significant section of the book describes Alex and Stella after being hennaed, that is, after having their bodies painted upon. The ludic and innocuous effect of this body transformation on the two women is in clear opposition to the psychological consequences of Simon's painting of Stella's body in Glasgow. While in the city, especially in the confined space of domesticity represented by her brother's room, Stella's embodiments are systematically toxic, but in Orkney she learns to interpret her corporeal reactions more positively. This is why, after trying unsuccessfully to contact Ritchie in their Glasgow flat —interestingly the attempt comes after the description of waking up the night after being hennaed— she assumes: "I was glad I wasn't there. Even if it was a grey day here there seemed to be more to it" (216-217).

Such reflection is again motivated by her embodiment of the space. She starts to feel strong physical reactions to the natural stimuli she receives, which provoke in her positive sensations for the first time since Simon's death. Again, Lefebvre's study of rhythms becomes useful to analyse Stella's transformation. He identifies two main forces affecting our bodies collectively: the cyclical, which "originates in the cosmic, in nature" and the linear, which comes rather "from social practice, therefore from human activity." As Lefebvre contends, "time and space, the cyclical and the linear, exert a reciprocal action: they measure themselves against one another" (18). Stella's body is saturated while she lives in Glasgow, and cannot participate in the rhythms of heteropatriarchal socialisation. Similarly, it is imperceptive to the natural, cyclical rhythms affecting its individuality. By moving out of the city and into the island, Stella begins to recognise telluric rhythms, and feel their beneficial influence upon her body. In this vein, it is significant that Strachan's chapters in this second part of the novel allude directly to the elements, "Northern Lights," "Clay," "Under Water," which reinforces these associations.

What is interesting too is the fact that Stella's attachment to Orkney is, above all, grounded on an idealised, highly fictionalised, subjective reconstruction of life on the islands in times past. She imagines a more meaningful form of socialisation for the island's inhabitants, based on cyclical rather than linear patterns, which is closely associated with an idea of transcendence she had not considered before reaching the place: "these people all had belief systems in which death had its acknowledged, rightful place, without it being the absolute end of everything. A heaven, an afterlife, a return to the ancestors, whatever. Not just death, that's it, game over, the end" (233). The absent body, her obsession in the first part of the story, is no longer a source of anxiety once she accepts this paradigm, and therefore she can perform a final ritual for her dead brother in the chapter entitled "Memento Mori." In it, she accesses The Ring of Brodgar, a circle of Neolithic standing stones, where she initiates a ceremony consisting in carving her brother's name, as well as his birth and death dates on one of the standing stones. Added to this, she buries a pendant with the figure of St Christopher that Simon used to wear, and which she had tied to her necklace after his death. The interaction of natural, social and bodily rhythms is particularly relevant in this section. Indeed, as McCulloch contends, in order to understand Stella's ritual, it is essential to bear in mind the time of the year when it takes place, Easter, as well as the successive reinterpretations of historical systems of belief that are now embodied spatially by Stella: "Strachan revises Christian doctrine from a feminist perspective, as the spring's association with rebirth and growth are appropriated for Stella'self-development in a prehistoric pagan site" (34).

This personal ritual allows Stella to realise the transformation she has undergone, and in this regard it is significant that she decides to record "each step of the process" as she goes along (288); namely, she becomes the central agent in the scene, controlling the gaze and the representation of the moment: "It took me a little while, as I gently etched away at the stone, to realise that in this instance I was both the individual performing the ritual and the person doing the seeing; giving this event its meaning, and making any truth it contained all my own" (289). Such perception of the ritual is in contrast with the other two ceremonies performed to honour the memory of her brother: the first one being the cremation in the official funeral organised by their mother, and the second one the gathering of Simon's friends on an isolated beach on the West coast of Scotland to burn his personal belongings. In both cases fire is employed to destroy physical traces of his existence, but in the final ritual performed by Stella the element involved is the earth, with its symbolic association to life and regeneration, as well as the standing stone, which guarantees the longevity of the message, at least for its primary interpreter, Stella.

Yet, such an act of reaffirmation is not exclusively motivated by her new relation to the space she inhabits, where she feels "less of a woman, more of a person" (257). On the contrary, it is also deeply connected to rediscovering her own personal rhythms, which occurs after meeting Iram, a young woman of Pakistani descent, with whom she has an intense sexual encounter. If heteronormative intercourse was experienced as an anaesthetic to her suffering body in Glasgow, now sexuality appears as a healing practice, to the extent that Stella assumes that she has not "felt so good in ages" (280). She is deeply surprised by the acknowledgement of the holistic entity of her self, which makes her wonder "how I ever avoided this identification of self with body, why I've felt so dislocated" (272). Iram is a "mirror image" (277) for Stella, and their relationship is portrayed as equal, with no power asymmetries involved, even if the former is initially more active than the latter. For the first time in the story, Stella's body ceases to be Simon's receptacle when she decides to expel him from her new affective practices, and so when Iram returns to London, where she lives, it is her that Stella misses and not her brother.

From the point of view of representation, it is also remarkable that, apart from the photographs that Stella has taken in The Ring of Brodgar, the only recorded item in the diary that she brought to Orkney, in an attempt to register her experience, is Iram's telephone number in London. The final part of the story situates Alex and Stella travelling by train from Scotland to the English metropolis, in an e-motional interstice between the two nations. It is in these indeterminate coordinates that Stella gathers the courage to call Iram on Alex's mobile, significantly mentioning her name for the first time in the novel, while identifying herself spatially as "Stella. From Orkney" (294). The other relevant object in this journey is the folder containing Simon's drawings of Stella, placed on the seat next to her "like another passenger" (292). Although the images are still humanised, directly associated with her brother's imprint on her, Stella has managed to find an alternative form of attachment that allows her to create a distance, a negative space between them and her body, whose control is now in her hands, and the fact that this realisation takes place in the mobile space represented by the train must be connected to Stella's emotions once again. In this vein, and in reference to the etymology of the word "emotion," Sara Ahmed reminds us that its original *emovere*, in Latin, meant "to move" or "move out." She explains that emotions "are not only about movement, they are also about attachments (...). What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place. (...) [A]ttachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others" (Ahmed 11). At this stage, Stella has finally taken over the representation of her body and is ready to explore new possibilities in London, where her affective practices are imagined as less harmful than they were in Glasgow. The physical movement from one place to the other does not merely imply a geographical or even cultural transition but, above all, a readjustment of her positioning to the objects of her emotions and the parallel restitution of her bodily rhythms.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Zoë Strachan's *Negative Space* represents an attempt at incorporating alternative subjectivities in the tradition of contemporary Glasgow fiction. The novel is deeply grounded on Scottish culture and exemplifies the conflicting modes of representation available for women in the nation, especially for those voices speaking from the margins. As the author has explained, "you cannot deny the factors that influence your work (...). As Scottish writers we are coming from a place —an intellectual and emotional place" ("Is that a Scot or am Ah Wrang?" 56). Yet, by deciding to situate the body of her protagonist as the central element in the story, as well as by exploring the alternative affective and spatial practices she develops, Strachan introduces transversal concerns affecting concomitant conceptualisations of femininity in other transnational contexts. The novel delves into the reification of the female body in art, in sexual and romantic relationships, but above all, it explores gender asymmetries in their spatial and affective dimensions. As it has been discussed, the body appears as a space of resistance, and the successive spatial embodiments of its protagonist constitute an act of subversive "meaning-making," where emotions and their physical manifestation represent either a rejection of gendered power structures, or an assertion of a new form of empowered subjectivity. It has been suggested that Stella's escape from the several "negative spaces" in the novel implies rejecting masculine modes of representation and heteronormativity, which can only be achieved by rejecting toxic affective practices in contaminated environments. In sum, Stella's healing is only made possible by constructing an alternative and highly personal female order, which for her is only possible after her affective experience in Orkney. This is determinant to recompose her body's eurhythmia, once she has integrated the different rhythms established in Lefebvre's analysis (27), which are *secret* (physiological and psychological), as demonstrated by her biological and emotional recuperation; *public*, as shown in her reintegration into the social; *fictional*, when she takes over the representation of her body; and finally *dominating-dominated* rhythms, which she has learnt to negotiate throughout the story to finally create a positive affective space of her own.

Reviews sent to author: 8 March 2017
Revised paper accepted for publication: 13 March 2017

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*. Edinburgh UP, 2004.

Bisset, Alan. "The 'New Weegies': The Glasgow Novel in the Twenty-First Century." *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature,* edited by Berthold Schoene, Edinburgh UP, 2007, pp. 59-67.

Bondi, Liz. "Sexing the City." *Cities of Difference*, edited by Jane M. Jacobs and Ruth Fincher, Guilddford, 1998, pp. 177-200.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. U. of California P, 1993.

Duncan, Nancy. *BodySpace. Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality. Psychology*. Routledge, 1996.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "Bodies-Cities." *Sexuality and Space,* edited by Beatriz Colomina, Princeton Architectural Press, 2002, pp. 241-254.

Hind, Keir 2011. "Zoë Strachan: 'The Freedom to Try Things Out." *The Skinny*, 221 August. http://www.theskinny.co.uk/books/features/zoe-strachan-the-freedom-to-try-things-out. Accessed 24 July 2016.

Innes, Kirstin. "Mark Renton's Bairns: Identity and Language in the Post-*Trainspotting* Novel." *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, edited by Berthold Schoene, Edinburgh UP, 2007, pp. 301-309.

Leder, Drew. *The Absent Body*. U. Chicago P, 1990.

Lefebvre, Henri. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Bloomsbury, 2013.

MacDonald, Kirsty A. "From the Cairngorms to the Cordillera Real: Representations of the Highlands and Islands in Recent Scottish Fiction." *"What Countrey's This? And Whither Are We Gone." Papers Presented at the Twelfth International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation*, edited by J. Derrick McClure, Karoline Szatek-Tudor and Rosa E. Penna, Cambridge Scholars, 2010, pp. 135-148.

McCulloch Fiona. "'Cross that Bridge': Journeying through Zoe Strachan's *Negative* Space." *Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary British Fiction. Imagined Identities*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 21-44.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Visual and Other Pleasures. Language, Discourse, Society*. 1975. Palgrave MacMillan, 2009, pp. 13-26.

Nochlin, Linda. *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays*. Westview, 1988.

Orbach, Susie. *Bodies*. Profile, 2009.

Pittin-Hedon, Marie-Odile. "Millenium Babes: Female Urban Voices after James Kelman and Irvine Welsh: Laura Hird, Anne Donovan, Zoë Strachan and Alison Miller." *The Space of Fiction. Voices from Scotland in a Post-Devolution Age*. Scottish Literature International, 2015, pp. 1-32.

Price, Joshua M. "The Apotheosis of Home and the Maintenance of Spaces of Violence." *Hypathia* 17.4 (2002): 39-70.

Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience." *Signs* 5.4 (1980): 631-60.

Seamon, David. *A Geography of the Lifeworld*. Croom Helm, 1979.

Strachan, Zoë. *Negative Space*. Picador, 2002.

—— "Is that a Scot or am Ah Wrang?" *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, edited by Berthold Schoene, Edinburgh UP, 2007, pp. 51-56.

Tonkiss, Fran. "Embodied Spaces: Gender, Sexuality and the City." *Space, The City and Social Theory*. Polity, 2005, pp. 94-112.

Wetherell, Margaret. *Affect and Emotion. A New Social Science Understanding*. Sage, 2012.

RE-WRITING THE BODY: PORNOGRAPHY IN THE SERVICE OF FEMINISM

Vrinda R. Chanth
Sree Narayana College for Women, Kollam, India

Abstract

Angela Carter's musings on the female body dealing with representations, re-readings and re-writings of the conventions of the pornographic, published at the dawn of the "feminist sex wars," saw in pornography a potential critique of the existing relation between sexes and in the pornographer an "unconscious ally." This article attempts to explore the complex relationship between representation, gender and genre as delineated by *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, *The Passion of New Eve*, and "Black Venus." Carter enumerates the conventions of pornography, explicates its various tendencies and undermines them through re-reading, repetition, exaggeration, and parody to bring out the similarities between the treatment of women in pornographic literature and in institutions sanctioned and nurtured by the society.

Keywords: Pornography, Representation, Genre, Gender, Re-reading, Repetition.

Resumen

La representación del cuerpo femenino que hace Angela Carter cuando reescribe el género pornográfico desvelaba el potencial crítico de la pornografía a la hora de examinar las relaciones entre los sexos y hacía del pornógrafo un aliado inconsciente. Este trabajo examina la compleja relación entre representación, género sexual y literario explorada en *The Passion of New Eve*, *The Sadeian Woman* y "Black Venus," publicados al albor de las guerras feministas en torno al porno. Carter enumera las convenciones de este género, explica sus diversas acepciones y las desconstruye al re-leerlas, repetirlas o exagerarlas paródicamente para señalar las similitudes entre el tratamiento de la mujer en la literatura pornográfica así como en las instituciones sociales asentadas en el modelo patriarcal.

Palabras clave: Pornografía, representación, género literario, género sexual, re-lectura, repetición.

Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, 74; April 2017, pp. 73-96; ISSN: e-2530-8335

> ...the female body is a highly contested site—its flesh is both the recipient and the source of desire, lust and hatred. As a pawn of technology [in a capitalist society], it is sacred and sacrificial, bearing the politics of society and state. The body is our common band, yet it separates us in its public display of identity, race and gender [class and age] (Diana Angaitis, qtd. in 'Pro'Sobopha 117)

1. DOES THE BODY MATTER?

Mind-body dualism, with its privileging of the former, and its subsequent correlation with categories of male and female, respectively, has been at the heart of Western philosophical and theoretical tradition. The body with its ineradicable associations with the natural, the biological and the animal as opposed to the cultural, the rational and the human has been used to construct the feminine as the inferior other. The relegation of the female as the corporeal, the less privileged of the male-female dichotomy and its social, cultural, racial and religious ramifications have been a site of constant debate within the feminist circles. "Biological determinism," as feminists term it, has been used to validate the unequal treatment meted out to women down the ages. However, as Kathleen Lennon rightly argues in "Feminist Perspectives on the Body" (2010), early feminists chose to dwell on the rational capabilities of the female mind rather than to address the "deterministic link" between the female mind, body and social functions. Later feminists, as bell hooks states in *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000), realized that their war against sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression can only be materialized by ridding the female body of its negative associations and exposing the culturally determined nature of femininities and masculinities (1).

Simone de Beauvoir was the first to hint at the sex/gender distinction, but her descriptions of the female body cycles of menstruation, reproduction and nursing as hindering women's potential and freedom were considered derogatory. Feminist thinkers who sought to celebrate the female body as a site of difference and female bodily processes as a source of power doubted Beauvoir's allegiance to the feminist cause. There were others, as Barbara S. Andrew states in "Beauvoir's Place in Philosophical Thought" (2003), who claimed that the purported ambivalence in Beauvoir's writings on the female body was due to the inaccuracy of translations and the resultant failure to consider her writings as a descriptive phenomenology of the female body as lived in specific situations (30). Nevertheless, Beauvoir's notion of femininity as a "condition" brought about by society rather than a "natural" or "an innate entity" became pivotal to the feminist movement of the 1970s, opening up new avenues for challenge and change (Andrew 31).

The rise of a counterculture in the mid-to-late 1960s injected a renewed vigour into the feminist movement, which now focused on reproductive rights, sexual rights, and the representation of women in literature, media and popular culture. The closing years of the 1960s as well as the seventies saw myriad discussions in Anglo-American as well as the French feminist circles on the all-pervading logic of patriarchy, the representation of women in canonical literature, the prospect of an alternative tradition of women's writing, the possibility of a new women's language, a "feminine" text and so on. These discussions had a common denominator in their preoccupation with the body, bodily processes as well as the sex-gender distinction. Approach to the body became the axis along which the feminists became divided into different camps. This was the socio-political scenario that Angela Carter tried to negotiate through her writings.

2. SADE, CARTER AND PORNOGRAPHY

Angela Carter begins *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (1979) with an introductory note in which she appraises the writings of Marquis de Sade—an eighteenth-century French aristocrat, politician and libertine—for its reluctance to see "female sexuality in relation to its reproductive function" and the questions it broaches about the "culturally determined nature of women" and the resultant relation between sexes (1). In the polemical preface that follows, she explores the possibility of employing "pornography in the service of women" (3). Carter begins with Freud's notion of anatomy as destiny, moves on to the "anatomical reductionalism of graffiti" with its depiction of male as a positive aspiring '!' and female as a negative 'o' that exists in waiting, and then to the world of myths and archetypes where the "real conditions of life" are masked by historically determined archetypes, which equate "woman to the passive receptivity of the soil, [and] to the richness and fecundity of the earth" (4-8). Carter's endeavour all along is to point to the culturally determined and sanctioned "behavioural modes of masculine and feminine" and the "ineradicable sexual differentiation" that function in accordance with the false universals that have been handed down to us instead of the particular circumstances—historical, social and economic—of our lives (7, 4). She proceeds to explore how, "[f[lesh comes to us out of history" and accompanying it "the repression and taboo that governs our experience of flesh" (12). The overlooking of class, religion, race, and economic status as factors that come in between the "initial urge" and the final "attainment" of the "most elementary assertion of self" is what irks Carter and she considers the notion of "universality of female experience" in matters of gender and sexuality "a clever confidence trick"(13). It is against this backdrop that Carter places the genre of pornographic literature, enumerates its various features and functions, and delineates her concept of the "moral pornographer" as someone who might employ pornography to critique the current relation between sexes (22).

Pornography, to Carter, "is always [applied] art with work to do," its primary function the arousal of sexual excitement—by describing the sexual act in "purely inviting terms"—and its target consumer "a man who subscribes to a particular social fiction of manliness" (*SW* 13-15). By convention, the writer of pornographic literature is to refrain from describing the real conditions of sexual encounters, for instance, the living condition of a prostitute (who might be his heroine) or the hardships of her trade. His only job, writes Carter, is "to assert that the function of flesh is pure pleasure" (22). When pitted against the age old problem of female subjectivity being reductively defined in terms of reproductive function, Carter saw

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 73-96

in pornography a potential to critique the existing relation between sexes and in the pornographer an "unconscious ally" (25). Thus, she came up with the concept of the moral pornographer as someone whose

> ...business would be the total demystification of the flesh and the subsequent revelation, through the infinite modulations of the sexual act, of the real relations of man and his kind. Such a pornographer would not be the enemy of women, perhaps because he might begin to penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distorts our culture even as he entered the realms of true obscenity as he describes it. (22)

Sade as a writer who "creates, not an artificial paradise of gratified sexuality but a model of hell" where sexual gratification is an "expression of pure tyranny" by the hand that wields the whip and where "the male means tyrannous and female means martyrised, no matter what the official genders of the male and the female beings are" is of great significance in Carter's scheme of things (*SW* 27). She considers Sade's stories of excesses—of sexual aberrations, and sexual violence —as a critique of the myth of female castration at the heart of Western culture, which has for ages conditioned the attitude of men towards women and women towards themselves not as human beings but as wounded creatures born to bleed (26).

Carter was not the first to hold Sade's writings as valuable to the women's cause for their consideration of the body as "the exclusive source of everything that is human," sexual desire as paramount in all human behaviour, and "all sexuality as a political reality" (Philips 36-37; Carter, *SW* 31). Simone de Beauvoir in *Must We Burn Sade?* (1951) had expressed her admiration for Sade's treatment of sexuality as a social fact and his championing of female individualism as opposed to the pervasive logic of repressive universality (28). However, Beauvoir sidesteps Sade's excesses by pointing to the lack of evidence about his childhood days, which might hold the key to his random tendencies or aberrations. The truth about Sade will never be known, she writes, because we meet an already mature Sade. More than the aberrations, the manner in which he assumes responsibility for them is what fascinates Beauvoir and she attributes his "real originality" to this act of making "his sexuality an ethic" and expressing it in his works of literature *(Must We Burn Sade* 4). According to Beauvoir,

> He [Sade] subordinated his existence to his eroticism because eroticism appeared to him to be the only possible fulfilment of his existence. If he devoted himself to it with such energy, shamelessness and persistence, he did so because he attached greater importance to the stories he wove around the act of pleasure than to the contingent happenings; he chose the imaginary. (7)

She states that it was the society, with its denial of Sade's craving for absolute freedom and its attempt to have "undisputed possession" (7) of the individual, which caught hold of Sade's secrets and branded him a criminal.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 73-96

3. FEMINIST SEX/PORN WARS

Carter's *The Sadeian Woman* published in 1979 at the dawn of the feminist sex/porn wars, which was to divide the feminist movement into warring camps of sex-positive feminists and anti-pornography feminists for decades to come, invited the attention of a host of critics, writers and theorists. Beginning with the 1970s, feminists found themselves at opposite ends of the spectrum when it came to issues such as pornography and sex work—with one end applauding the opportunity and the other condemning the oppression involved. Pornography was defined differently by the two sides involved in the debate and each definition catered to their respective notions regarding the production and consumption of pornography.

Anti-pornography feminists or radical feminists were mostly activists like Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, who fought for legislation against pornography. They founded groups like 'Women against Violence in Pornography and Media' and 'Women against Violence against Women,' which included Susan Griffin, Kathleen Barry and Laura Lederer as founding members. These organizations sought to delimit pornography by opening up provisions for women harmed by pornography to file lawsuits against the perpetrators. Accordingly, Dworkin and MacKinnon drafted the Anti-pornography Civil Rights Ordinance, which was initially accepted by many city councils (of the United States), but later dismissed by the legal apparatus (law courts) on the grounds of going against the fundamental freedoms of speech and expression.[1]

Dworkin in her book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981) traces the etymology of the term pornography to the ancient Greek words *porne* and *graphos* meaning "whore" and "writing" respectively. She proceeds to state that in ancient Greece *porne* referred to the cheapest and least protected women in society, that is, the vile whore (not that all whores were considered vile) and thus, pornography meant "graphic depiction of women as vile as whores" (*PMPW* 199-200). According to Dworkin, pornography still adheres to its root meaning; the only change has been the increase in the number of methods of depiction of these whores (with the advancement in technology); the content and purpose of the pornographic as well as the status, value and the depiction of the women involved in pornography remain the same (200). She contends that the purpose of whores is to serve men sexually and that they operate within a system of male domination. Dworkin considers the "sexual colonisation of women's bodies" by men a material reality sanctioned and propagated by the institutions of "law, marriage, prostitution, pornography, health care," economy, "organized religion and systematized physical aggression against women (for instance in rape and battery)" (203). The hate, abuse, dehumanization, violence, and sadism depicted in pornography, their corresponding occurrences in

[1] See Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon's *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (1988). Here, Dworkin and MacKinnon explain the necessity of treating pornography as a violation of the civil rights of the women involved and the necessity to curb it.

the lives of women used in the production of pornography and the same hate and abuse in the lived experiences of women in general disturb Dworkin.

In an elaborate introduction to her book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, touted as one of the most important texts on pornography, Dworkin condemns it as an "orchestrated destruction of women's bodies and souls," "a violation of the civil rights of women," and a breeding ground of "insult and injury, rape and assault" (xxvii-xxx). She borrows the words of Kate Millet from *The Prostitution Papers: A Candid Dialogue* (1971) and uses it as an epigraph to her chapter on pornography: "Somehow every indignity the female suffers ultimately comes to be symbolized in a sexuality that is held to be her responsibility, her shame" (199). However, she contends that pornography has been, is and will be the root cause of all forms of oppression and violence against women and the key to women's emancipation is in the abolition of pornography. During the closing years of the 1970s, writers like Robin Morgan and Susan Brownmiller had already made a connection between pornography and sexual violence against women. For Morgan, pornography was the theory and rape, the practice (174). In *Going too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (1977), she labelled feminists who defended pornography as "Sade's new Juliettes" as they have aligned themselves with a sexual practice based on domination. Subsequently, Catharine MacKinnon condemned pornography as it puts real women in abusive situations (in the sex industry) and gives the consumers of pornography an opportunity to "act on" the women in pictures.

Sex-positive feminists or libertarian feminists, on the other hand, condemned the anti-pornography stance as it limited sexual freedom or choice, perpetuating a sense of shame around sex and women's own sexual fantasies, and because it was a threat to the already marginalized sexual subcultures. The early members of the group include Ellen Willis, Gayle Rubin, and Pat Califia who saw sex as an avenue for pleasure and pornography as an escape from the "repressions of bourgeois ideology"—romantic love, heterosexual monogamy and procreative sex. As Robin Ann Sheets states in "Pornography, Fairy Tales and Feminism: Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber"" (1991), they formed the 'Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force' to counter the efforts of Dworkin and MacKinnon (Sheets 638). Ellen Willis in "Feminism, Moralism and Pornography" (1979) wrote,

> A woman who is raped is a victim; a woman who enjoys pornography (even if that means enjoying a rape fantasy) is in a sense a rebel, insisting on an aspect of her sexuality that has been defined as a male preserve. Insofar as pornography glorifies male supremacy and sexual alienation, it is deeply reactionary. But in rejecting sexual repression and hypocrisy—which have inflicted even more damage on women than on men—it expresses a radical impulse. (464)

A closer look at both sides of the debate shows that the irreconcilable differences between the two spring from their attitude towards sex and sexuality. Radical feminists with their affiliations to the lesbian feminist community saw heterosexual practices as perpetuating male dominance and practices such as pornography and sadomasochism as validating male violence against women, whereas the libertarian feminists upheld the idea of pleasure, supported all kinds of consensual sexual activities and saw anti-pornography movements as validating the society's ideal of women's sexual needs and fantasies. Radical and libertarian feminists, as Ann Ferguson argues in "Sex War: The Debate between Radical and Libertarian Feminists" (1984), work with set assumptions regarding the nature of sexuality, power and freedom. Both are guilty of defining pornography in an exclusive manner (with respect to the opposing side's claims), "collapsing the positions of the opposition into a single extremist stance" (Purcell) and resorting to essentialist claims—one side mourning the loss of the essentially emotional female sexuality and the other mourning the denial of erotic pleasure to women (Ferguson 110). Though much was said about the mutually exclusive nature of the arguments of the two warring camps and the need for them to join forces in their struggle against different kinds of violence against women and other sexual minorities, the fissure remains

4. CARTER AND THE SADEIAN WOMAN

Angela Carter's re-reading of Marquis de Sade was of interest to the anti-pornography feminists as well as the sex-positive feminists, for Sade was an important figure when it came to discussions about the construction of sexual stereotypes and the representation of violence perpetuated by pornography. Dworkin in *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* devoted an entire chapter to discussions on Sade. She considers Sade as "the world's foremost pornographer," "a rapist and a writer twisted into one scurvy knot," and his life and writings as a "cloth soaked in the blood of women imagined and real" (70). She elaborates Sade's biography in detail and condemns him for the cruelties he inflicted upon women. Dworkin considers Sade as an "anti-Christ of feminism" and a perpetrator of unmatched violence and tyranny. For her, Sade's world functions around one's attitude towards male power and domination—you can either suffer its administrations or revel in them. His female characters Justine and Juliette, according to Dworkin, are prototypical of all types found in pornography—"they are wax dolls into which things are stuck," one suffers interminably while the other aligns herself with the perpetrators of suffering and becomes one among them (95). Dworkin states that Sade's biographers as well as other writers who chronicled his life and writings tend to trivialize Sade's crimes against women and dismiss them with "endemic contempt." Dworkin views such writings as a reflection of our misogynistic culture and brands writers such as Carter who attempts to employ Sade's writings in the service of feminism as "pseudo feminist" (84). Dworkin's sentiments about *The Sadeian Woman* were shared by many radical feminists who criticized Carter for reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes and disseminating the idea that women's sexual liberation is possible only through their participation in the male culture of violence.[2] Sex-positive feminists, on the other

[2] For more criticism on Carter, see Sally Keenan. "Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman*: Feminism as Treason" in *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism* (1997).

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 73-96

hand, saw Carter's treatise as an attempt at deconstructing and demythologizing essentialist assumptions underlying definitions as well as representations of femininity.

The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History enumerates the conventions of pornography and explicates its various tendencies. Carter's repetition and re-reading of the stories of Justine and Juliette as well as the exaggerations portrayed in them undermine as well as engage with the feminist use of the pornographic. It attempts to bring out the similarities between the treatment of women in pornographic literature and that of women in institutions sanctioned and nurtured by the inherently patriarchal society. For Carter, Sade's writings and its extreme tendencies act as a critique of the myths and archetypes used in circumscribing women and their sexuality. She begins her treatise *The Sadeian Woman* by stating that pornography in its present form is harmful to women because it does not show sexual relations as an expression of social relations or sex as a part of human practice, but as something unchangeable, exotic and inviting. Here, she refers to one of the main conventions of pornography, namely, to paint sexual relations in purely inviting terms with pleasure as its be-all and end-all. According to Carter, all pornography shows mythic versions of men and women, that is, any glimpse of "a real man or a real woman" cannot be found in these archetypal representations of men and women where the unique 'I' is sacrificed in favour of the collective sexed being (*SW* 6). Pornography assists the process of false universalizing and its excesses, she writes, "belong[s] to that timeless, locationless area outside history, outside geography, where fascist art is born" (13).

Other important features of pornography listed in *The Sadeian Woman* include the prostitute as the favourite heroine of pornography, since the pornographic texts have a gap for the reader to step inside and enact his own fantasies, and the narratives are written in first person as if by a woman (14-17). Here, the archetypes of negative female sexuality are successfully reinforced and the metaphor involved in sexual activity—as a representation of what people do to one another—is suppressed. Carter comes to the conclusion that as long as pornography serves to reinforce the ideas and values of a given society, it is tolerated, and once it steps out of its conventional functions and starts to comment on real life, it is banned (20). She cites this as a reason for Sade's writings being banned for more than two hundred years, and delineates how Sade flouted the conventions of the pornographic by describing sex in abominable ways and by presenting the violence, the cruelty, and the power dynamics involved. He renders all aspects of sexuality suspect, all tenderness false, and all beds minefields (28). Carter considers his writing subversive and hence, representative of sexual relations as a reflection of social interactions between men and women. The use of the "'grabbing' effect" of pornography to comment on the world is what Carter calls "moral pornography" and she sees it as having far-reaching effects since

---

In this article Keenan argues that the opposition to Carter was mostly due to her disagreements with some important aspects of the feminist movement of her times, namely, victim feminism and her opposition to the idealization of motherhood and maternal body.

> … the pornographer has it in his power to become a terrorist of the imagination, a sexual guerrilla whose purpose is to overturn our most basic notions of these relations … and to show that the everyday meetings in the marriage bed are parodies of their own pretensions, that the freest unions may contain the seeds of the worst exploitation. (*SW* 24)

Sade's writings are of importance to Carter, for he became a terrorist of the imagination "turning the unacknowledged truths of the encounters of sexuality into a cruel festival at which women are the prime sacrificial victims when they are not the ritual murderesses themselves" (24). And they were banned because he ventured into a previously unknown territory and portrayed the "erotic violence committed by men upon women" and that was "too vicious a reminder of the mutilations our society inflicts upon women" (25). According to Carter, Sade made use of pornography to make a "wounding satire" on mankind as well as the historical time in which the novels are set. He ventured further than most satirists and pornographers because he believed that a radical social transformation towards the ideal of freedom for all was possible (27). In this respect, Carter claims:

> He was unusual in his period for claiming rights of free sexuality for women, and in installing women as beings of power in his imaginary worlds. This sets him apart from all other pornographers at all times and most other writers of his period. … He put pornography in the service of women, or, perhaps, allowed it to be invaded by an ideology not inimical to women. (*SW* 41-42)

In The Sadeian Woman, every chapter is devoted to each of the major works of Sade, namely, Justine, or The Misfortunes of Virtue and Juliette, or The Prosperities of Vice. Philosophy in the Boudoir and The Hundred and Twenty Days at Sodom are also discussed at length. These discussions transpire within the context of the conventions of the pornographic as well as the eighteenth-century conventions of femininity and sexuality as laid down by society. Justine the titular hero/heroine of Justine, or The Misfortunes of Virtue is described as a woman "martyrized by the circumstances of her life as a woman" and incessantly punished for a crime that she has committed involuntarily—the crime of being "born a woman" (SW 43-44). Justine, a poor woman in a man's world, "a receptacle of feeling" and a "repository" of the feminine sensibility of the time, represents the eighteenth-century ideal of bourgeois woman whose honour and sexual reputation were inextricably linked (53-54). Justine considers "repression" and "abstinence" as ultimate virtues and she harbours a monstrous fear of her own sexuality (55).

Justine's poverty and femininity are described as threating her autonomy and reducing her to "the dupe of an experience," that is, "her innocence invalidates experience and turns it into events, things that happen to her but do not change her" as in the case of women in general, whose lives are "conducted always in the invisible presence of others who extract the meaning of her experience for themselves and thereby diminish all meaning" (57-58). Justine's virtue is a "sentimental response" to a world where she hopes that goodness will reap reward and her incompetence, gullibility, whining, frigidity, and "reluctance to take control of her own life" makes

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 73-96

her a "perfect woman" (62.) Justine is described as "the prototype of two centuries of women" who find themselves trapped in a world not made for them; unable to remake it for the "lack of existential tools" to do so; doomed to suffer till suffering becomes their second nature, and full of self-pity (65). *The Sadeian Woman* presents Justine as the pornographic personification of the aetiology of the female condition in the twentieth-century (65). She is hailed as the precursor of many literary heroines such as "the tearful heroines of Jean Rhys, Edna O'Brien and Joan Didion," and Hollywood icons of the twentieth-century such as Garbo, Dietrich and Marilyn Monroe, who propagate the myth of masochistic femininity (64, 70). As an exaggeration of the condition of women,

> Justine is the model for the nineteenth and early twentieth-century denial of femininity as praxis, the denial of femininity as a positive mode of dealing with the world. Worst of all, a cultural conspiracy has deluded Justine and her sisters into a belief that their dear being is in itself sufficient contribution to the world; so they present the enigmatic image of irresistibility and powerlessness, forever trapped in impotence. (*SW* 81)

In Sade's novels, as Carter rightly points out, the worst tortures are reserved for women of upper class who value their beauty and chastity (*SW* 84).Wives and mothers are objects of fury and are chastised. The notion of sex as sanctioned only in the service of reproduction is ridiculed (87). The idea of women's body as something to be ashamed of and the breasts and buttocks as inherently freakish are debunked in *Justine* when the girls imprisoned in the monastery are thrust face-down and the attention is turned to their arse. They are stripped of everything they value as part of their self-reverence and hence become "heroine[s] of a black, inverted fairy tale" (44). Thus, Sade's Justine becomes a parody of the eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood. The moral of the fairy tale of the perfect woman is "to be the *object* of desire is to be defined in the passive case" and to "exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case—that is, to be killed" (88). Thus, Justine paints the sad story of a sexually attractive woman who refuses to acknowledge her sexuality and sells it in a world which regards "good looks as a commodity" (65).

Sade's Justine treats her body as a temple and the "desecration of the temple" forms her story. She is an "angel-face on the run" (*SW* 43). The root-cause of Justine's misfortunes is her identification with the ideal of femininity equated to virtue, virginity and sanctity of her body. Sade's exaggerated portrayal of the struggles of Justine is read by Carter as an attempt to throw light on the idealizations of femininity, which are used to circumscribe women and curb their freedom. Carter's commentary on Justine is followed by a commentary on twentieth-century Justines "in the celluloid brothel of the cinema" (68). A beautiful face and a sexually attractive body as pre-requisites for a virtuous (asexual) heroine, resulted in the "Good Bad Girl"—erotic yet completely oblivious to her own eroticism. Hollywood idealizations of femininity such as "the pre-sexual waif" played by Mary Pickford, "the middle-aged woman, whose sexual life may be assumed to be at an end" played by Mae West, women who appeared in drag played by the European imports to Hollywood like Garbo and Dietrich and the "pretty dumb blonde" immortalized by Marilyn

Monroe are all new-age Justines exemplifying association of virtue with the denial of sexuality (68-71). *The Sadeian Woman* thus explores the new-age constructions of femininity as well. In the process, the fairy tale of the perfect woman as the passive woman is ridiculed and undermined.

Sade presents Justine's antithesis in her sister Juliette who acts according to the precepts and practices of a man's world, and hence does not suffer but inflicts suffering. Financial gain and "libidinal gratification" are what drives Juliette and her story is one about the prosperities of vice (*SW* 90). Juliette partakes of the vices of a world which values a woman as nothing but a commodity and presents herself as the best on sale. Juliette is a woman who succeeds in transcending her gender but not its inherent contradictions (98). She is like a hangman in a country where the hangman rules, i.e., only he escapes punishment (113). Carter says that Juliette thrives because she identifies with the interests of the ruling class (the patriarchy) and lives accordingly (114). If Justine is the "holy virgin," the archetype of the blameless woman who suffers or the predecessor of the suffering blonde, Juliette is the "profane whore" who stands for "world, worldly" and is the predecessor of the Cosmopolitan girl whose femininity is "part of the armoury of self-interest" (115-17).

Other aspects of interest in Juliette's story of excesses and transgressions involve her willing participation in anal intercourse—a capital crime in the France of her times; her participation in the "charade of sexual anarchy" (Juliette dressed as a man marrying a woman and dressed as a woman marrying man and Noirceuil, her lover, doing the same) showing the mutability of gender; and her unwillingness to bear children except a child from Count de Lorsanges who will ensure her inheritance. Even after giving birth, she undermines the mothering function because she refuses to nurture her child, neglects it and eventually, kills it. Sade's *Juliette* is a clarion call against feminine sexuality defined in terms of its reproductive and mothering functions. The repeated orgies and coprophagic activities throughout *Juliette* can be seen as a subversion of the allure of the erotic. Sade's novel, according to Carter, robs the world of the theory of maternal supremacy, of the concept of the sacred womb, of the imaginary construct of goddess and with it the concept of eternity. Carter traces people's fear of emancipation of women to the collapse of the concept of eternity because bereft of eternity we will be left with nothing but this world, and that will mean "the final secularisation of mankind" which the powerful and the dominant are scared of (*SW* 127).

Philosophy in the Boudoir, which describes the education of a Sadeian heroine and her "ambivalent triumph over the female principle as typified in the reproductive function," is also examined in *The Sadeian Woman* (137). Eugénie, a fifteen-year old girl, is educated in Sadeian ways with lessons on the anatomy of the male and the female bodies, the function of the clitoris in female sensual pleasure, the techniques of masturbating a male, and other allied activities. *Philosophy in the Boudoir* intersperses orgies with philosophical sermons on love, marriage, contraception, abortion, family, prostitution, and cruelty (*SW* 138). A political pamphlet called *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, if you Would Become Republican*, read out in the middle of an orgy, occupies a considerable length of *Philosophy in the Boudoir.* Many feminists have singled out this text, which expresses republican and atheist

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 73-96

opinions, as it speaks for the freedom of women. *The Sadeian Woman* also analyses *Yet Another Effort*:

> If we admit ... that all women should submit to our desires, surely we ought to allow them to fully satisfy their own ... Charming sex, you will be free; just as men do, you shall enjoy all the pleasures that Nature makes your duty, do not withhold yourselves from one. Must the diviner part of mankind be kept in chains by the other? Ah, break those bonds; nature wills it. Have no other curb than your tastes, no other laws than those of your own desires, no more morality than that of Nature herself. Languish no more under those barbarous prejudices that wither your charms and imprison the divine impulses of your heart: you are as free as we are and the career of the battles of Venus as open to you as to us. (*SW* 139)

Sade, according to Carter, envisions this hypothetical republic and is interested in forging a libertarian sexuality, which will guarantee "a certain qualified freedom" to everyone trained in the ways of this republic (*SW* 139).

Carter's commentary on *Philosophy in the Boudoir* is subtitled "The Education of a Female Oedipus" and its subsections are titled 'Mothers and Daughters,' and 'Kleinian Appendix: Liberty, Misanthropy and the Breast' hinting at psychoanalytic undertones. It advances a deep-rooted hatred for the mother and the mothering function. The body of the mother, which brings us into the world of pain, is hated and tortured. The cruelties inflicted upon Madame de Mistival (Eugénie's mother) by Eugénie and her instructors are discussed at length: Madame de Mistival is flogged by her husband, raped by her daughter (using a dildo—a mechanical phallus), is infected with syphilis and her sexual organ is sewn up. She is punished for repressing her sexuality, subordinating it to the reproductive function as well as for trying to suppress her daughter's sexuality. The highlight of Madame de Mistival's violation, according to Carter, is that she faints at the point when she almost reaches an orgasm. Carter is disappointed that Sade refuses an opportunity to let "pleasure to triumph over pain" and sidesteps the possibility of "constructing a machine for liberation" (154). Here, Carter points to the central paradox of Sade's pornography: he can only conceive of "freedom as existing in opposition," freedom as defined by tyranny, i.e., he remains within the philosophical framework of the time (151). The Sadeian woman, according to Carter, "subverts only her own socially conditioned role in the world of god, the king and the law" (155). For instance, Eugénie transgresses the socially approved limits of her sexuality but her father (Mistival's husband) engineers and approves of Eugénie's stint at the Boudoir as well as the atrocities she commits on Madame de Mistival. She, to use Carter's chess analogy, transforms from the "pawn" to the "queen," but the King is still the master.

The "Speculative Finale" of *The Sadeian Woman* discusses Sade's treatment of flesh as akin to meat. "Sade is a great puritan and will disinfect of sensuality anything he can lay hands on; therefore he writes about sexual relations in terms of butchery and violence," states Carter (162-63). Thus, we see that Carter is not oblivious to the violence inherent in Sade's portrayal of sexual relations. Her attitude alternates between appreciation and criticism. She, like Barthes in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola,* notes the absence of eroticism in Sade as well as the mythic quality of Sade's writings. Many critics have discussed Carter's treatment of Sade's writings as a myth and its relationship with the fairy tale genre.[3] However, *The Sadeian Woman* can be better described as an exploration of the debates surrounding the feminist sex/porn wars. Carter's analysis of Sade's Justine delineates the problems surrounding the "repression of sexuality," and the identification with "victim" status. It also warns against allying femininity with purity, virginity, sacrifice and sanctity. Alternatively, the story of Juliette analyses the limitations of libertarian sexuality. Just as the female libertines "ingest" signs of maleness but do not "integrate" them within themselves (103), the libertarian sexuality and allied practices such as pornography do not guarantee the liberation that sex-positive feminists advocate. The boundary between pornography as a source of oppression and violence and pornography as a tool for liberation seems fluid; hence, the feminist use of pornography and the pornographic occupies an uneasy middle ground. Apart from *The Sadeian Woman*, which is an explicit commentary on the use of the pornographic in the service of feminism, Carter's oeuvre is replete with references to the pornographic. For example, Honeybuzzard in *Shadow Dance* poses for pornographic photographs; the Marquis in "The Bloody Chamber" is a connoisseur of pornography and enjoys emulating it; and *The Passion of New Eve* has elaborate discussions on the pornographic as delineated in the following section.

5. EVELYN/EVE: THE MASCULINE AND THE FEMININE

The Passion of New Eve discusses the pornographic in its portrayal of the various relationships of the titular Evelyn/Eve. The novel follows Evelyn's travel to New York and his encounter with Leilah, a woman of colour. Evelyn meets Leilah at a drugstore and is attracted to her. From the moment he sees her, he is determined to have her and is led on by Leilah to her abode. The chase appears to be a scene lifted from a pornographic novel where there is luring, striptease and finally the act. Leilah's black leather shoes with six-inch high heels, her black mesh stockings, her red fur coat, her short white dotted-cotton dress, her peeking purple-painted nipples underneath, and her luring of Evelyn deep into the labyrinth of the heart of the city, dropping her dress and her crotch-less knickers on the way, are reminiscent of a porn movie scene (*PNE* 19-29). Evelyn's description of the chase and the act is noteworthy. He states:

> She dropped her fur on the floor, I stripped, both our breathing was clamorous. All my existence was now gone away into my tumescence; I was nothing but cock and I dropped down upon her like, I suppose, a bird of prey, although my prey, throughout the pursuit, had played the hunter. My full-fleshed and voracious beak

[3] For instance, Aidan Day in *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass* discusses in the chapter entitled "*The Passion of New Eve*" Carter's engagement with myths and archetypes in *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Sadeian Woman* (123).

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 73-96

tore open the poisoned wound of love between her thighs, suddenly, suddenly. Leilah, the night's gift to me, the city's gift. (*PNE* 25)

Though Leilah is the hunter during the chase, the chase ends with Evelyn overpowering her. Here, the metaphor of the hunter and the bird of prey, and the sexually charged language refers back to the age-old conventions of the pornographic.

Moreover, Leilah is described as having soft black skin and a voracious sexual appetite. She is a naked model, a naked dancer at the bar and an occasional participant in simulated sex shows who lives in a dingy apartment which becomes Evelyn's own "domestic brothel"(*PNE* 29). Leilah's yearning for more and more carnal pleasure and her act of thrusting Evelyn's tired and limp cock inside her are the only acts of sexual autonomy she performs. However, Evelyn punished her for such transgressions by tying her to the bed with his belt and leaving her in the room all day long. She submitted to such indignities with the curious ironic laughter of a "born victim" (28). In the evenings, when Leilah dressed up to go to work, she took hours transforming herself to a "seductive apparatus" and Evelyn liked to watch her getting dressed (29). He observed her painting her face and her body, and transforming herself to an "erotic dream" (30). Evelyn saw Leilah as inevitably trapped in a "solipsistic world of the woman watching herself being watched in a mirror" and doing her best to concur with the image of every man's sexual fantasy (30). Eventually, Evelyn gets bored with Leilah and she becomes an irritation of flesh, an itch that must be scratched (31).

However, Evelyn's desire for Leilah vanishes the moment he learns that she is pregnant with his child, and she becomes an embarrassment and a shocking inconvenience to him. The pregnant Leilah, on the other hand, turns obedient and submissive in order to make Evelyn love her and marry her. Nevertheless, Evelyn convinces her for an abortion, and it leaves Leilah sterilized. Evelyn blames Leilah for all that has transpired between them—the seduction, the pregnancy and the disastrous abortion, and leaves her. Leilah's sexuality and fecundity are her crimes, and she is punished for them. The encounter between Evelyn and Leilah vacillates between the scripting of pornography and a critique of its conventions.

Evelyn, who flees from Leilah, is captured in the desert by an all-female sect and is taken to Beulah—the home of a woman who calls herself "the Great Parricide" and "the Grand Emasculator." The grotesque mother-figure of Beulah—an enormous form with two tiers of nipples—rapes Evelyn, forcefully castrates him to his "diminutive Eve" and programmes him to be a woman. The new- Eve/Evelyn is housed in a womb like structure and is subjected to psycho-surgery, in anticipation of impregnating her with his own sperm collected before castration. Evelyn's capture, rape, and castration represent the dangers of a feminist utopia where the masculine is replaced by the feminine as the powerful constituent of the binary. Carter, through parody, points to the dangers of a simple inversion of the *status quo* as advocated by certain strands of feminism.

The programming of Eve or the "psycho-surgery" is performed by exposing the newly formed Eve to the movies of Tristessa (Hollywood's version of femininity), to innumerable portraits of Virgin and child, and to videotapes designed to

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 73-96

instil maternal instincts. The programming of Eve acts as a metaphor for the social programming of women and men into their respective gender roles. Eve's response to her new form highlights the constructedness of gender: "They had turned me into the *Playboy* centrefold. I was the object of all the unfocused desires that had ever existed in my own head. I had become my own masturbatory fantasy. And—how can I put it—the cock in my head, still, twitched at the sight of myself" (*PNE* 75). Fashion-magazine and media propagated images as the model for the creation of new Eve—"every man's perfect woman" is highly ironical. The role of media-generated images in the production and sustenance of the feminine and the masculine are scrutinized through Eve, the techno-created new woman. Eve, having been created and nurtured to bring forth the "Messiah of antithesis," is repeated throughout this section of the novel (*PNE* 67).

The Passion of New Eve also discusses psychoanalytic theories, the biblical myth of creation of Eve and the virgin birth of Christ. The influence of psychoanalysis on feminism was a major point of contention throughout the Second Wave feminist struggle and here Carter engages with the feminist use of the psychoanalytic. For instance, Evelyn's rape by the grotesque Mother figure is carried out in the midst of incantations such as "Kill your father! Sleep with your mother" (*PNE* 64)—an unmistakable inversion of the psychoanalytic tale of Oedipal transgression and incest.

Eve, however, escapes her captivity and the impending motherhood by fleeing to the desert. She is then captured by the "one-eyed and one-legged poet" called Zero, and is taken to his harem. The treatment of women in Zero's ranch house illustrates the dangers of pornography as listed by the anti-porn feminists, namely, the perpetuation of sadomasochist tendencies, and the resultant degradation and humiliation of women. To begin with, Zero believes that women are made of a different, more primitive, more animal-like soul stuff than men and that they do not need the paraphernalia of a civilized society (*PNE* 87). Therefore, he housed his harem in a filthy dorm and treated them like slaves. He forbade them from communicating in anything but animal sounds and allowed them to wear nothing but dungarees. He had their hair cut short with a straight fringe and their front teeth removed. He demanded complete subservience and humility from his wives. They were to kiss his bare feet every morning, work on the ranch throughout the day, perform wifely duties to him on the assigned night of the week, dress up or undress for him in a high pornography style and dance for him as and when he pleased. The slightest of transgressions were penalized with brutal assaults and bullwhip lashes. Zero acted like a godhead whose position depended on the obedience and the devotion of his wives, and they "dedicated themselves, body, heart and soul to Church of Zero" (*PNE* 99). Gender essentialism as justifying the violence against women and women as willing accomplices in their oppression are scrutinized through the interactions between Zero and his wives. Moreover, the denial of language and volition to the women in the harem can be aligned with the feminist fight for a new women's language free from phallocentric tendencies. Just as the women in Zero's harem were denied the right to speak, the women writers of the time were denied a tool free from the clutches of patriarchy to voice their opinions and express their concerns.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 73-96

The night when Eve is brought to the harem, she is raped twice in a span of two hours and is made Zero's eighth wife. Eve compares Zero's sexual savagery to "vandals attacking Rome" (*PNE* 91) and she states: "I was in no way prepared for the pain; his body was an anonymous instrument of torture, mine my own rack" (86). However, she later admits that the mediation of Zero turned her into a woman; his peremptory prick turned her into a savage woman (*PNE* 108). Here, violence as an inextricable aspect of all male-female relationships is brought to the fore. Zero functions as a representative of the patriarchal archetype—a disabled as well as an impotent version and his harem as a miniature model of the patriarchal world order. Zero's capacity for cruelty, his wives' capacity for suffering, and their consent to be treated as less than human are reminiscent of the Sadeian scenario. Zero's hatred towards Tristessa (a Hollywood screen icon), his belief that she had performed a spiritual vasectomy on him and his tireless quest for Tristessa to avenge his condition are part of the narrative. After months of scouting around the desert, Zero manages to find Tristessa's abode and takes his harem along to destroy her dwelling and punish her for "sucking dry" his virility.

Tristessa, having retired from Hollywood at the age of forty, is living in the solitude of the desert when Zero and his harem raid her. She lives in a glasshouse, which was her own mausoleum—a mausoleum filled with wax works in coffins of the "unfortunate dead of Hollywood" (PNE 117). Eve discovers Tristessa in a coffin trying to pass off as one of the wax figures. The moment she discovers Tristessa, Eve journeys back to her days as Evelyn, and is overcome with regret that she can no longer possess Tristessa the way Evelyn wanted to have her all through his life. Evelyn had always fantasied "meeting Tristessa, she stark naked, tied, perhaps to a tree in a midnight forest under the wheeling stars" or on a suburban golf course, as it happened in many pornographic narratives (7). He loved her only because "she was not of this world" (8). Evelyn's reveries of Tristessa and Zero's hatred for Tristessa, for being desire incarnate, undergo an anti-climax when Tristessa is revealed to be a man—a transvestite, "the greatest female impersonator in the world" (144) .The most beautiful woman in the world, every man's perfect woman, is revealed to be a "sensuous fabrication of mythology" and Eve responds:

> That is why he had been the perfect man's woman! He had made himself the shrine of his own desires, he had made of himself the only woman he could have loved! If a woman is indeed beautiful only in so far as she incarnates most completely the secret aspirations of man, no wonder Tristessa had been able to become the most beautiful woman in the world, an unbegotten woman who made no concessions to humanity. (128-29)

Here, Carter anticipates Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance. Butler states in *Gender Trouble* that the gendered body is performative, that is, it "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (185). Carter's new Eve states that Tristessa had "no function in this world except as an idea of himself; no ontological status, only an iconographic one" (*PNE* 129). Tristessa functions as an iconography of the ever-suffering woman as well as the ever-desirable sex symbol of the childhood, adolescent and adult fantasies of all the men in the novel. The link between male desire and female suffering is evident in the case of Tristessa, as in the case of Evelyn and Leilah, and Zero and Eve. If the transvestism of Tristessa points to the performativity of masculinity and femininity, his ensuing affair with Eve offers a potent critique of heteronormativity. For instance, Eve states, "He came towards me. I know who we are; we are Tiresias" (146). Together "we had made the great Platonic hermaphrodite" (148). Here, Carter invokes Tiresias the prophet, who was blinded as a punishment for obtaining the forbidden knowledge of the sexual pleasure as enjoyed by both the sexes. The union of Tristessa and Eve, unlike the other unions in the novel, is described as a meeting place of love, tenderness, passion and pleasure. Eve comes out of the union with the realization:

> Masculine and feminine are correlatives which involve one another. I am sure of that—the quality and its negation are locked in necessity. But what the nature of masculine and the nature of feminine might be, whether they involve male and female, if they have anything to do with Tristessa's so long neglected apparatus or my own factory fresh incision and engine-turned breasts, that I do not know. Though I have been both man and woman, still I do not know the answer to these questions. Still they bewilder me. (149-50)

Gender as opposed to sex and a negation of biological determinism form the crux of *The Passion of New Eve*, but, as usual, there are no binding conclusions.

A band of conservative Christian boys captures Eve and Tristessa from the desert, kills Tristessa and takes Eve along. Eve, who escapes from the Christian army, is saved by Leilah—now the leader of a resistance group fighting in the civil war that forms the background to the novel. Leilah is revealed to be Lilith, the daughter of 'the Mother of Beulah' who, all along, had been acting on her orders. Evelyn/Eve was part of Mother's grand project to create a perfect 'feminine' archetype. Lilith informs Eve that Mother, having failed at constructing a perfect archetype, suffered a nervous breakdown and has now retired to a womb-like cave by the seas. Carter's commentary on the subversion of archetypes attains its high point in the novel when Lilith states, "And when there was a consensus agreement on the nature of the symbolic manifestations of the spirit, no doubt Divine Virgins, Sacred Harlots and Virgin Mothers served a useful function; but the gods are all dead, there's a good deal of redundancy in the spirit world" (175).

On their way to meet the Mother, Eve and Lilith encounter a mad, old woman on the beach. The woman with her canary yellow dyed hair, scarlet lipstick, maroon rouge, painted face, high heels, and red and white two-piece bathing suit was all covered in dirt and her flesh was all wrinkled, ravaged and sagged from her bones (177). She sang songs from the thirties and lived on canned food and vodka. This old woman is a representative of the social and cultural milieu that was past its prime. At this juncture, Carter asks a very pertinent question: how will the old ones fare in the post-apocalyptic world? It seems that she is referring to the myths and archetypes rather than the people. The apocalypse, then, becomes a reference to the deconstruction of myths of sex/gender used to contain and constrain woman and her sexuality. The story narrated from the perspective of Eve, who was once Evelyn, also points to the performative element in pornography. Tristessa, Leilah and Eve validate their femininity through performance, be it the Hollywood's version of the most beautiful woman in the world, the porn movie version of a prostitute or a Playboy centrefold version of what it is to be a woman. Evelyn and Zero also perform their masculine roles to perfection and alert one to the dangers of subscribing to the various strands of femininity in circulation, including the pro- and anti-pornography feminisms. The male gaze in relation to the pornographic as well as the construction of femininities are issues explored in *The Passion of New Eve*.

Towards the end of the novel, Eve visits Mother in her new abode, travels through the caves and is expelled from the mouth of the inner cave as if in a rebirth. Then she meets Lilith by the seashore, who offers her the genitals which once belonged to Evelyn, preserved in a small portable refrigerator with the words, "You can have them back, if you still want them" (*PNE* 187). Eve, however, refuses them and they are engulfed by the waves. Thus, we see that *The Passion of New Eve* concentrates more on identifying the processes that create and sustain the archetypes or stereotypes of femininities and masculinities rather than on merely subverting them. In doing so, Carter goes further than most satirists and feminists, and debates, deconstructs and re-writes the framework she herself employs. In her hands, feminist theory becomes akin to a myth, which is subjected to its own share of re-reading, re-writing and demythologizing. Carter's brand of moral pornography serves to undo many gender archetypes, and she achieves it by engaging with the conventions of the pornographic as well as the feminist use of the pornographic. Carter, true to her postmodernist influences, tries to advance the feminist cause without subscribing to any macro-narratives.

6. THE BLACKNESS OF VENUS: 'OTHER' VOICES IN ANGELA CARTER

Carter's critique of the feminist use of the pornographic extends to her discussions on race as well. In "Black Venus," Carter deals with the representation of colonial bodies, and the life and writings of Charles Baudelaire. It narrates the tale of Baudelaire and his "mulatto mistress" Jeanne Duval. On this occasion Carter focuses on the racial, exotic, and gendered Other. She juxtaposes the poetic colonization of Duval, her relegation to the status of a muse and "the European colonization of other peoples and other parts of the world" (Day 154).[4] Carter engages with the writings of postcolonial theorists like Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, who argue that the act of representing the Other has significant resonances within the context of colonization: on the one hand, the asymmetries of representation enacted as well

[4] As quoted in *The Fiction of Angela Carter* edited by Sarah Gamble. It is a compilation and analysis of the essential criticism on Angela Carter published in 2001.

as reproduced; on the other, the asymmetries of power in the world. The "Black Venus" also interrogates the complexities of representing difference. Carter first explicated the sexual stereotypes associated with a racialized body in her 1968 novel *Several Perceptions*. In this work, the general association between the black body and excessive sexuality is made explicit in a casual conversation between Kay, Joseph and Sunny. It states, "Did you ... see old ma Boulder's beau, black as your hat, blacker? ... 'Big black bugger!'... 'What a size! Of course, women go for niggers on account of their choppers, it's well known, what a size!'"(*SP* 142). Carter's engagement with the racial Other exposes how a world obsessed with black man's sexuality fixates him at the level of his genitals. As Fanon states in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), "One is no longer aware of the Negro, but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis" (170).

In "Black Venus," Carter examines how the colonial narratives construct the female black body. As Sandra Ponzanesi accurately argues in the essay "Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices" (2005), the image of the Black Venus,

> ... allegorically rendered and vindicated the position of the white male colonizers expanding their authority and property over the virgin soil of the imperial territory, of which the black Venus is the quintessential emblem of the other, both in racial and in sexual terms. The appropriation and subjugation of the female exotic body was sustained by a meticulously constructed racial grammar in which the Other was represented as infantile, irrational and prey to primordial sexual lust, and consequently as mysterious and inherently subversive. The representation of local women as black Venuses by Western colonizers was strongly eroticised and often overtly pornographic, though often disguised as ethnographical work aimed at classifying and categorising the different races of the empire. (Ponzanesi 166)

Carter employs the trope of Black Venus to expound the scripting of black feminine body in colonial narratives. The dark Venus narrative expresses the "contaminated" and "highly asymmetrical relationship between the ruler and the ruled" (Ponzanesi 166). Carter's Black Venus, as in other narratives on this character, "was a woman of immense height, the type of those beautiful giantesses who, a hundred years later, would grace the stages of the Crazy Horse or the Casino de Paris in sequin cache-sexe and tinsel pasties, divinely tall, the colour and texture of suede ... But vivacity, exuberance were never [her] ... qualities" (*BV* 3). She constantly "coughs and grumbles" and is full of resentment. On days "nipped by frost and sulking... she looked more like an old crow with rusty feathers in a miserable huddle by the smoky fire. ..." (2). Here, the narrative technique of disappointment is employed to de-eroticise the exotic Black Venus by presenting her as grumpy, irritable and prone to sickness.

The constructedness of the Black Venus narrative as well as the story of a people (the colonized) robbed of their history is explicated through a description of Jeanne Duval as having no documented date of birth, no fixed name or place of birth. Her story, just as the story of the colonies and its people, starts with the year she met Baudelaire:

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 73-96

Nobody seems to know in what year Jeanne Duval was born, although the year in which she met Charles Baudelaire (1842) is precisely logged... Besides Duval, she also used the names Prosper and Lemer, as if her name was of no consequence. Where she came from is a problem; books suggest Mauritius, in the Indian Ocean, or Santo Domingo, in the Caribbean, take your pick of two different sides of the world. (Her *pays d' origine* of less importance than it would have been had she been a wine.) ... She had been deprived of history, she was the pure child of the colony. The colony—white, imperious—had fathered her. (*BV* 7-8)

"Black Venus" presents Jeanne Duval as robbed of her tongue and as an abode of unlimited sexuality, ignorant, rash and available. She spoke, "as though her tongue had been cut out and another one sewn in that did not fit well," Jeanne "did not understand her lover's poetry... his eloquence denied her language. It made her dumb ... an ignorant black girl, good for nothing: correction, good for only one thing..." (*BV* 9). The ideological construct of black women as penetrated, silenced, possessed, and as "static, frozen, [and] fixed eternally" is brought to the fore in the aforementioned description (Said, *Orientalism* 208). The narratives of Black Venus as constructed through the writings of Baudelaire are further scrutinized in the lines, "[s]he looked like the source of light but this was an illusion; she only shone because the dying fire lit his presents to her. Although his regard made her luminous, his shadow made her blacker than she was, his shadow could eclipse her entirely" (*BV* 4). This is a commentary on the violence inherent in the construction of Jeanne Duval as Baudelaire's muse as well as the colonial narratives on the exotic Other. Here, the stereotypical representations of the feminine as goddesses and muses are seen as attempts to tether them with flattery.

The element of the pornographic in the relationship between Baudelaire and Jeanne Duval is highlighted in Jeanne's dance performances for her keeper, who, "liked to have her make a spectacle of herself, to provide a sumptuous feast for his bright eyes that were always bigger than his belly"(*BV* 9). He made her dance naked except for the bangles and beads he had given her. She was to "undulate rhythmically" in a "series of voluptuous poses"—a dance devised specifically for her and in his taste (*BV* 3). The associations of the feminine and the masculine with nature and culture are also highlighted through an exaggerated representation of the dance performance:

It is essential to their connection that, if she should put on the private garments of nudity, its non-sartorial regalia of jewellery and rouge, then he himself must retain the public nineteenth-century masculine impedimenta of frock coat (exquisitely cut); white shirt (pure silk, London tailored); oxblood cravat; and impeccable trousers. ... Man does and is dressed to do so; his skin is his own business. He is artful, the creation of culture. Woman is; and is therefore, fully dressed in no clothes at all, her skin is common property, she is being at one with nature in a fleshy simplicity that, he insists, is the most abominable of artifices. (*BV* 10)

"Black Venus" abounds in references to the social constructedness of gender and race. Prostitution, another important point of contention within the feminist

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 73-96

movement, is also discussed in "Black Venus." For instance, Jeanne wonders about the distinction between dancing naked in front of one man who paid and in front of a group of men who paid, and she comes to the conclusion that "somewhere in the difference, lay morality" (*BV* 4). Prostitution, to her, "was a question of number; of being paid by more than one person at a time. That was bad. She was not a bad girl. When she slept with anyone else but Daddy, she never let them pay. It was a matter of honour. It was a question of fidelity" (*BV* 4).These ruminations clearly elucidate that values, ethics as well as oppression mean different things to women in different situations.

Justine, Juliette, Leilah, Eve, and Jeanne Duval have their own unique struggles and responses. Consequently, the futility of trying to find commonalities between women in varied circumstances as well as their problems is emphasized. Pornography as linked to disputes over sex/gender distinction, where "sex and gender are either collapsed together, and rendered both analytically and politically indistinguishable, or . . . are severed from each other and seen as endlessly recombinable in such figures of boundary crossing as transsexualism, transvestism, bisexualism, drag and impersonation," find expression in Carter's writings (De Lauretis, "Feminism" 28). Eve, created by Mother in Beulah after the moulds of feminist utopia through the castration and psycho-surgery of Evelyn, and Tristessa, a transvestite and "the greatest female impersonator in the world" in *The Passion of New Eve,* enact the collapse and the endless re-combination of the sex/gender distinction, respectively. Carter's tales, which are replete with references to the pornographic in language, style and motifs, examine the pro-pornography as well as the anti-pornography positions, and caution against a relapse into the essentialist distinction between the phantasmatic and the real. Carter's critique of the feminist use of gender and genre also problematizes the cause and effect pattern such attempts rely on. Yet Carter's writings, instead of choosing sides, reveal and revel in these contradictions and practice a self-reflexive feminist theory. Her writings perform the feminist theory as posited by Teresa de Lauretis:

> A feminist theory begins when the feminist critique of ideologies becomes conscious of itself and turns to question its own body of writing and critical interpretations, its basic assumptions of terms and the practices which they enable and from which they emerge. This is not merely an expansion or a reconfiguration of boundaries, but a qualitative shift in political and historical consciousness. This shift implies ... a displacement and a self-displacement... [to] a place of discourse from which speaking and thinking are at best tentative, uncertain and unguaranteed. (de Lauretis, "Displacing" 138-39)

However, Carter does not propose an annulment of political struggle for the emancipation of women. Instead, she endorses a change in the focus of the struggle, that is, to engage with the current scenario and expose the latent oppression and its underlying power dynamics. And without resorting to any foundationalist claims about race or gender, she offers a constructive critique of the problems plaguing the feminist use of the pornographic. Thus, pornography, pleasure and violence are

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 73-96

discussed through narratives that are an amalgam of the gothic, the pornographic and the fantastic, and the resultant ambivalence is embraced as an integral part of postmodernist writing.

Reviews sent to author: 11 March 2017
Revised paper accepted for publication: 02 April 2017

WORKS CITED

Andrew, Barbara S. "Beauvoir's Place in Philosophical Thought." *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir,* edited by Claudia Card, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 24-44.

Barthes, Roland. *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*. Translated by Richard Miller, U of California P, 1989.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *Must we burn Sade?* Translated by Annette Michelson, Nevill, 1953.

—— *The Second Sex*. Translated by H.M. Parshley, Vintage, 1989.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.

Carter, Angela. "Black Venus." *Black Venus*. Vintage, 1996.

—— *The Passion of New Eve*. Virago, 1982.

—— *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*. Virago, 1979.

Day, Aidan. *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass*. Manchester UP, 1998.

De Lauretis, Teresa. "Displacing Hegemonic Discourses: Reflections on Feminist Theory in the 1980's." *Inscriptions* 3/4 (1988): pp. 127-44.

—— "Feminism and Its Differences." *Pacific Coast Philology* 25.1/2 (1990): pp. 24-30.

Dworkin, Andrea. *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. Plume, 1989.

Dworkin, Andrea and Catharine MacKinnon. *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality.* Organizing against Pornography, 1988.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, Pluto, 1986.

Ferguson, Ann. "Sex War: The Debate between Radical and Libertarian Feminists." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society.* 10.1 (1984): pp. 106-112.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. Norton, 1963.

Gamble, Sarah, editor. *The Fiction of Angela Carter*. Palgrave, 2001.

Hooks, Bell. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics.* South End, 2000.

Keenan, Sally. "Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman*: Feminism as Treason." *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*, edited by Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton, Addison, 1997, pp. 132-148.

Lennon, Kathleen. "Feminist Perspectives on the Body". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zatla. Fall 2014 ed., 11 Sept. 2014. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-body/.

Millet, Kate. *The Prostitution Papers: A Candid Dialogue*. Avon, 1973.

Mitchell, W.J.T. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. U of Chicago P, 1994.

Morgan, Robin. *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist.* Random, 1977.

Nicol, Bran. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*. Cambridge UP, 2009.

Phillips, John. *The Marquis de Sade: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2005.

Ponzanesi, Sandra. "Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices." *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, edited by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, Lang, 2005.

'Pro'Sobopha, Mgcineni. "The Body: Gender and the Politics of Representation." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity Journal* 19.63 (2005): pp. 117-130.

Purcell, Natalie. "Feminism and Pornography: Building Sensitive Research and Analytic Approaches." *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality* 12 (2009): n.p. http://www.ejhs.org/Volume12/Feminism%20and%20Porn.htm.

Sade, Marquis de. *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*. Compiled and translated by Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse, Grove, 1990.

—— *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*. Compiled and translated by Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver, Grove, 1994.

—— *Juliette*. Translated by Austryn Wainhous, Grove, 1994.

Sage, Lorna, editor. *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*. Virago, 1994.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Vintage, 1979.

Selden, Raman, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. 5th ed. Longman, 2005.

Sharpley-Whiting, Denean T. *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears and Primitive Narratives in French*. Duke UP, 1999.

Sheets, Robin Ann. "Pornography, Fairy Tales and Feminism: Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber." " *Journal of the History of Sexuality 1.4 (1991)*: pp. 633-657. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704419?seq.

Willis, Ellen. "Feminism, Moralism, and Pornography." *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, Monthly Review, 1983, pp. 460-467.

MISCELLANY

DETERRITORIALIZED ANGLOPHONE ARAB WOMEN: LIMINAL SELVES BETWEEN HOME AND DIASPORA (CASE STUDY OF FAQIR'S *MY NAME IS SALMA*)

Dalal Sarnou
Abdelhamid Ibn Badis (Mostaganem) University

Abstract

An unprecedented rise of calls to voice ethnic, religious and sexual minorities has marked the last few years. Muslims, Arabs and women are considered as one of the most marginalized of all liminal selves. In this respect, giving voice to oppressed minorities and unveiling the dreariness of immigration often seen as a brutal process of deterriteriolization have become a commitment for many Arab Anglophone women writers who not only aim to reveal the state of liminality Arab women may confront in their societies, but they also verbalize how Arabs and other immigrants are liminalized in the Diaspora. The present article questions the multiplicity of a liminal state experienced by Salma in Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* (2006).

Keywords: liminality, double-voicedness, Anglophone Arab women narratives, deterritorialization, marginalization.

Resumen

Últimamente hemos asistido a un aumento sin precedentes de llamamientos a las minorías étnicas, religiosas y sexuales. Los musulmanes, los árabes y las mujeres figuran entre los más marginados de las distintas instancias del yo liminal. Por ello, dar voz a las minorías oprimidas, así como desvelar la tristeza de la inmigración—a menudo considerada como un brutal proceso de desterritorialización—se han convertido en una preocupación importante para muchas escritoras árabes anglófonas empeñadas no sólo en desvelar el estado de liminalidad de las mujeres árabes en su sociedad sino, también, en verbalizar cómo los árabes y otros inmigrantes experimentan la liminalidad de la diáspora. Este trabajo cuestiona la multiplicidad de liminalidades vividas por Salma en la novela de Fadia Faquir, *My Name Is Salma* (2006).

Palabras clave: liminalidad, doble voz, narrativas de mujeres árabes anglófonas, desterritorialización, marginación.

Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, 74; April 2017, pp. 99-108; ISSN: e-2530-8335

0. INTRODUCTION

Liminality is a term related to the English word 'limit'. Some scholars have traced this concept to the Latin word *limen* (Shields 84) while others have traced it to *limes* (Cowart 211; Froman & Foster Jr. 3). However, in the context of this paper, we side with those critics who have traced it to both (Moran 5). The meanings of both words are quite overlapping; *limen* refers to 'threshold', literally and figuratively in the sense of limit, and *limes* in particular refers to 'boundary', 'frontier', and 'limit'.

In fact, the limen, as a space, was not given any notice until the second half of the twentieth-century when the two terms "liminal" and "liminality" gained popularity through the writings of Victor Turner (1967). Turner notes that "the subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (95). That is, the status of liminal individuals is socially and structurally ambiguous. He developed this idea further by arguing that "[l]iminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (97). In *Liminality and Communitas*, Turner defines liminal individuals or subjectivities as "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (95). Adopting the concept from anthropology to use it in literary studies, more scholars and literary critics got interested in zones like limens, thresholds, margins and borderlands—Anzaldúa, Said, Bhabha and others—to give voice to those living on the threshold of a society, gender, ethnicity, etc. To explain further, *liminality* as a term is used in cultural and literary theory to designate a space or state which is situated in between other, usually more clearly defined, spaces, periods or identities. The threshold or the limen is that space between the inside and the outside, between Home and Diaspora, between the masculine and the feminine. As for postcolonial theory, the concept has been used to consider how the contact zone exists as a cultural space in between that of the (ex-) colonizer and the (ex-) colonized; in this liminal space, the subaltern (as defined by Spivak) may find resources and strategies for self-transformation that upset the fixed polarities of colonial/orientalist discourse (Said 1).

Subsequently, liminality may refer to the state of being limited by and in a particular marginal zone. This zone is where minorities are caught. The gender-based, colour-based, religious-based and language-based minorities are examples of *liminal* selves. In this perspective, Arab women have always been considered as archetypal figures of *liminality*. Because of the long standing patriarchal oppression and discrimination in most Arab countries, Arab women are still represented in Western academia and art as liminal selves. In fact, women are a semiotic object that is produced according to the law of supply and demand to serve various political and ideological ends (Lamya Ben Youssef Zayzafoun). Women in Middle East and North African (henceforth MENA) countries suffer, in Faquir's words, a "double jeopardy" (In the House 9) since they challenge patriarchal societies and totalitarian regimes. They are not only marginalized by religious-cultural norms, but are also excluded by domineering male-manipulated regimes. The censor, eventually, is common and is one: patriarchy.

Arab women writers are fully conscious of the almighty Arab censor who drags to the threshold whoever represents the consciousness of democracy and equity. Although contemporary Arab women writers are still in general restricted by socio-political constraints imposed by a masculine authority, many female authors have managed to voice their rage against oppression of all kinds that has become a chief aspect of the MENA region. Those writing in Arabic–Nawal Saadawi, Hoda Barakat, Zhor Ounissi, Liana Badr, Salwa Bakr, Allia Mamdouh, to name just very few–have been furiously fighting to defeat the common censor in their fiction. I quote Faqir's interesting description in *My Name is Salma* (2006) of how the act of writing can overpower censorship:

> Within theocratic, military, tolitarian and neopatriarchal societies, the writing of a [autobiographical] text becomes an act of defiance and assertion of individual identity. It shows that censorship, in its attempt to turn a nation into a herd, may silence the herd but never the individual. (9)

In the light of the above quotation, I will explore how contemporary Arab women writings portray the *liminalization* of women in the most conservative and patriarchal society: the Bedouin community. Through the story of Salma, Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* represents a genuine fictionalization of how women and immigrants alike are marginalized. The novel portrays annoying facts based on gender-based discrimination and liminalization in two different, opposing social contexts; it represents a liminal Bedouin Salma in Hima, and it also represents a marginalized Arab British Sally in Exeter. What follows is a focused introductory section which aims at introducing both the novel and its author to better localize the theme of liminality in Faqir's work.

1. ANGLOPHONE ARAB WOMEN WRITERS AND THE *LIMEN* BETWEEN ARABNESS AND ENGLISHNESS

To write in English about contentious issues related to women status and social conditions in Arab countries is a risky choice for Anglophone Arab women writers like Ahdaf Soueif, Leila Aboulela, Diana Abujaber and Mohja Kahf among others. In this light, Nouri Gana argues that the list of contemporary Arab novelists (authors) writing in English is expanding steadily given the phenomenal and continuing rise of début novelists[1]. Gana emphasizes the fact that more than half of Arab novelists writing in English today wrote their first novels after 9/11. He also

---

[1] Many Arab Anglophone writers have been recently internationally acknowledged after publishing their début works (first novels). Among these writers, women novelists like Leila Aboulela, Laila Lalami, Diana Abu Jaber and many others, were at the core of the interest of the Western readership.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 99-108

anticipates that the number of new novelists will continue to proliferate exponentially (2). In this respect, one would claim that most Arab English writers publish their novels, poetry, short stories and other texts primarily to denounce stereotypes, mis-representations and mis-conceptions of their Arab/Muslim origins that have dangerously spread shortly after a series of terrorist attacks–the 9/11, London bombings and other events. As for Arab Anglophone women writers, their English writings are dialogic—in a Bakhtinian sense—with both the Western and the Arab worlds. Their intent is to re-represent their mis-represented image in the Occident, and to escape the imposed censorship(s) in the Orient.

Fadia Faqir, in particular, has jeopardized her career as an author when she decided to venture into English as a foreign language, dare its culture, and challenge its people who are curious enough to face more unveiled truths about the Middle East, Arab-Muslim peoples, Arab women and Arab immigrants through their readings of Faqir's English writings which are skilfully woven with an Arab cultural essence. Faqir's choice of English as the language of her fiction is due to two main factors. Faqir's exposure to English as the language of her education and later profession is a first reason. Interviewed by the academic Lindsay Moore, Faqir did explain that:

> When I was young, I lived next to an English club—a remnant of the British Mandate—that Jordanians were not allowed to enter. East Amman was the place to be then (the late 1950s). I remember that colonial exclusive space very clearly. It reconfigures itself in my writing again and again. Salma, for example, [in *My Name is Salma*] is always looking into other people's gardens in England; she's always on the outside (Moore 1).

Faqir's words quoted above may explain that her choice of English may be a matter of fact for being exposed, and surrounded, by an English club. We also grasp her strong will to assimilate into this foreign space just like her protagonist, Salma, does in My Name is Salma, but both are always on the threshold of this language and its culture.

A second reason for which Faqir writes in English is that she is currently a British citizen. In fact, Faqir left Jordan because of her father's oppressive and patriarchal behavior. Like many liminalizing authorities in the Arab societies, Faqir's father wanted her to be someone she was not: a pious Muslim. He wanted to realize his dreams through his children, including Fadia herself. He deterriteriolized her to the West to be educated and wanted her to be relocated in her homeland to take on his masculine ideological battles. Nevertheless, her journey of dislocation and deterritorialization[2] in an ex-colonial country, Britain, has helped Fadia to move from the margin to the center as a woman, an Arab and a Muslim. She decided to be herself despite the many obstacles she faced in a diasporic space full of rejection, marginalization and hostility.

---

[2] *Deterritorialization* is defined by Gilles *Deleuze* and Felix. *Guattari* (1986) as the movement by which one leaves a territory, and then is dislocated.

Faqir's choice of English as the language of her fiction is due to a linguistic censorship she may have found in modern standard Arabic, which has become too masculine. Like many Arab Anglophone women writers, Faqir finds in English as a foreign language more freedom in dealing with taboo themes and controversial issues to escape a legitimized censorship attributed to Arabic. Her long stay in a Western country metamorphosed her to become a hyphenated woman of two worlds who stands at the threshold of two homes: Jordan and Britain; this position allows her to observe closely facts, events and people.

It is through her writings and the characters she imagines that Faqir embodies the different facets of her compatriot liminal individuals: Arab women living in conservative communities, and Arab immigrants living in the Diaspora, particularly in Britain. In this regard, Faqir explains:

> I spent hours in the kitchens of restaurants in this country, because my brother worked as a chef; people I knew held down very modest jobs in difficult circumstances. That is my milieu and what feeds my writing. I love that aspect of Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss (2)—her focus on the underworld of the USA and on immigrants sometimes marginalizing and mistreating other immigrants. That struck a chord with me." (Moore 8)

Thus, Faqir's experience is that of many immigrants who find it hard to integrate and assimilate in a space where they are always seen as *liminal* because of their religion, color of skin, and culture.

In *My Name is Salma*, Faqir exposes to what extent helpless, uneducated women are liminal in conservative and Bedouin societies. Also, she shows evidence of the race-based discrimination Arabs in the Diaspora confront. The protagonist of *My Name is Salma* provides archetypes of oppressed Arab women by going through a repeated experience of liminality and marginalization wherever she goes, even when she crosses the borders of her Bedouin society to arrive in England, which would represent later in the story both a refuge and exile. It is a refuge where Salma is reterritoriolized when being educated; however, it is an exile because Salma, even when she becomes Sally, is still excluded by many British native people. In the following section, I shall present a short summary of the novel focusing on the many scenes of gender-based and race-based liminality Salma/Sally was victim of.

2. SALMA: THE *LIMINALIZED* FEMININITY

My Name is Salma is the story of a young Bedouin unmarried woman. Salma, the protagonist, is from an unnamed country in the Levant, *Hima*. Growing up more attractive and keen to someone to love her and her femininity, Salma fell in love with Hamdan and became pregnant out of wedlock. In consequence, she had to flee the bullet of her brother who decided to kill her to restore the family's honour. Therefore, Salma started a long journey of dislocation escaping from one place to another, and from one country to another crossing borders but always standing at the threshold of these new spaces.

In order to save Salma from being murdered by her brother, her teacher took her into a protective custody. There, she spent several years in prison where she gave birth to her baby girl, Leila. Taken away from her immediately, Leila's image and moaning would haunt Salma for the rest of the coming years. Seven years later, Salma was then rescued and adopted by Miss Asher, under the name Sally Asher, and taken to England. Being a dark-skinned foreigner, Bedouin and Muslim, Salma faced in England another state of liminality. As she had to find a new identity and a life for herself in a society which is generally unsympathetic to head scarves, Salma's struggle doubled in Diaspora because she had to relocate an already liminal self in another liminalizing environment. At the end of the story, and despite the fact that Salma could metamorphose into an educated, successful Sally who got married to her professor, Salma's Bedouin roots dragged her back to Hima to look for her daughter. There, again femininity was liminalized, and this time exterminated as both Leila and Salma were murdered by Mahmoud, her brother, who represents patriarchy and masculine oppression.

Faqir's novel presents literary multiplicity. If it is to be considered as a feminist utterance, it can also be categorized as postmodern. What makes the novel postmodern is the disrupted narration via a first-person voice. The 'I' narrator which represents Salma's disrupted voice may be identified as unreliable because Salma recalls scenes and facts from her past while going through a psychological disorder, so Salma, in evoking images from her memory, may have missed to remember many other scenes and facts. Accordingly, there is an excessive use of flashbacks that disrupt and interrupt the linearity of the narration. Both techniques provoke a spiral shift of the narrative voice: from past to present and present to past; from Exeter to Hima and Hima to Exeter; from Salma to Sally and Sally to Salma.

Also, one may argue that *My Name is Salma* may be considered as a post-colonial novel both thematically and linguistically. The thematic node of the novel reflects some major characteristics of post-colonial writings: the preoccupation with identity, homeland, the diasporic experience and the issues of belongingness vs. homelessness. As for the postcolonial linguistic characteristics of this work, we argue that there is an excessive use of semantic and cultural translation. In addition, the blending of Salma's Arabic language with English is recurrent in chapters and parts where Salma is in Exeter. This echoes Bhabha's view of postcolonial writings, which are linguistically hybrid as much as postcolonial subjects are culturally hybrid:

> [...] 'the immigration officer had asked me and I did not know how to answer. 'Muslim no Christian.'
> 'Name? Nome? Izmak? He said
> '*Ismi? Ismi?* Saally Ashiir'?
> [...]When I woke up my mother said, 'Nothing. It is still clinging to your womb like a real bastard.'
> My Mudraqa was soaked with blood, my dirty hair was stuck to my head and my face was burning with tears." (41-2)

In the above lines quoted from the second chapter of the novel, '*Vines and Fig Trees*', we present three examples of fusing Arabic with English in what Bhabha identifies as hybrid texts (88). "*Ismi*" is a textual integration/translation of the Arabic word ismi (اسمي) which means name. "It is still clinging to your womb like a real bastard" might be considered as a semantic translation of what can be said in Arabic "*lissatou mit'ali 'bibaTnik ibni lharam*"[3], and many other similar examples are recurrent in the novel.

In point of fact, the hybridization of Faqir's novels is due, from a Bakhtinian perspective, to the mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor. There is, in the novel, a mixture of English and Arabic at different levels: lexical, semantic and inter-lingual.

However, hybridity has had its own mesh of social and cultural clashes for hybrid non-native immigrants identified by Spivak as subalterns. For those coming from ex-colonized countries to the West, their displacement is a unique diasporic experience which is often interwoven with some *liminalising* behaviours: islamophobia, Arabophobia, racism and rejection. This state of liminality may lead these individuals to a constant feeling of foreignness, inferiority and being on the threshold of the host culture and its mainstream people.

In this regard, *My Name is Salma* represents Salma or Sally as a discriminated Arab British citizen who confronts racism in England. For instance, when Salma is first displaced to Exeter and finds a room to inhabit, we read:

> Using his master keys, the porter opened the door and let in a short, thin, dark young woman ... when she looked at me she could only see the slit of my eyes and a white veil so she turned to him. 'Where does she come from?' 'Somewhere in the Middle East. Fucking A-rabic! She rode a camel all the way from Arabia to this dump in Exeter,' he said and laughed. 'I am not going to share a room with an Arab,' she spat [...] I looked at her straight hair and long fringe and turned in my bed. The smell of hurt and broken promises filled the brightly lit room. (15)

The above lines demonstrate the hostility and humiliation Salma had to face at the very beginning of her journey of dislocation to a foreign Western society. Elsewhere in the story, a doctor refuses to treat Salma only because she is dark skinned (54). This orientalist representation fundamentally based on a biased and stereotyped imagination is repeatedly displayed to the readers all through the novel to shake their awareness of such eliminating and liminalising attitudes. Besides this Western oriental behavior Sally/Salma had to confront in Exeter, she had long suffered from what I may call *internal orientalism*[4] —to be explored in the following section—, that is, an orientalist social and cultural representation of Salma's feminine identity.

---

[3] Arabic transcription: ليساتو متعلاً بيطنك ابن الحرام.

[4] See Dalal Sarnou. *Rebellion and Creativity in Arab Women Writings*. Lambert Publishing. 2011.

3. THE ARAB WOMAN'S BODY: THE *LIMINALIZING* SILHOUETTE

In Hima, Salma suffered from a state of *liminality* among her family members and tribe because she was a woman growing sexier and because she fell in love and had an affair with Hamdan. Inexplicably, Salma was socially excluded for being a beautiful, sexy woman, who was seduced by her lover; this condemned Salma to death: a metaphorical death when being disowned by her father, and a literal death when being haunted by her brother, Mahmoud, who is in charge of killing her to restore the family's honor. We read:

> 'Your breasts are like melons, cover them up' my father haj Ibrahim said.
> 'Your tuft of wool is red,' my mother said, 'you are impulsive.'
> My brother Mahmoud kept an eye on me while brushing his horse; I started hunching my back to hide my breasts, which were the first thing Hamdan has noticed about me... I fell in love instantly when I was the reflection of his shoulders in the water. When I started watering the vegetables beds three times a day and fondling the horse my mother shouted, 'Salma, you stupid child, are you in love?' (12).

In the above extract, we spot three situations of gender-based *liminality* that is the very 'product' of the patriarchal nature of Salma's Bedouin society. First, we see the father denying Salma's growing-woman body and disclaiming the appearance of her very feminine traits, the breasts. Her mother, too, accuses Salma of being impulsive because of showing the feminine beauty of her body, her hair. Mahmoud's resentment is expressed through his hatred and rejection of his sister's feminine body. As for the last part of the extract, it shows that love, a natural need for any human being, was denied to Salma by her mother. Salma's foreignness among her family and tribe, in this case, is a gender-based exclusion of Salma, an exclusion followed by a cruel punishment when falling in love and having an affair with Hamdan, who was the first punisher by giving up on her.

Soon after being condemned by her family and tribe, Salma's female body—which was already smuggled outside her native patriarchal society—was also *liminalised* in Exeter. "I was smuggled out of the country. I held my cloth bundle tight" (56) as if her aim was to protect her body. Salma's journey towards liberating her femininity in a Western society is confusing to her Arab identity that she still sticks to. For instance, after the night she spends with Jim, a British gentleman, she speaks to her consciousness rebuking herself for liberating this body*:* "You stay in bed next to him all night pretending to be content, asleep and all you wanted to do was to jump up and wash your body with soap and water including your insides, do your ablutions[5] then pray for forgiveness." (71) This female body was also the target of sexist old men in the bar where she works: "... Allan saw me pushing the

[5] This refers to an Islamic practice of washing the limbs so that one can perform prayer. Muslims call this a '*wuduu'*.

hand of an elderly man away from my backside. He didn't like the liberties the old man was taking." (159).

In the last part of the story, Sally or Salma decides to face every state of liminality that has drawn her to the margin of this world. She succeeds to get an MA degree, get married to her professor, have a baby boy and have a normal life. However, unable to bear the moaning and echoes of her baby girl she left behind in Hima, Salma eventually chooses to go back home to save Leila, her child, from the social and cultural and patriarchal state of liminality the innocent child had to face alone. The child, unfortunately, was killed by her uncle Mahmoud. In facing the horrors of the socio-cultural liminality that identifies many Bedouin societies, Salma is shot dead in the last scene of the novel:

> Suddenly, I heard voices behind me. A woman was pleading with a man not to do something. A young man saying 'it's his duty.' He (Mahmoud) has to hold his head high. *Il 'aar ma yimhih ila dam*: dishonour can only be wiped off with blood' [...] I thought I heard my mother say 'You can have the farm, everything I own, she has a suckling now, I beg you...' When I turned my head I felt a cold pain pierce through my forehead, there between my eyes, and then like blood in water it spread out. (285)

CONCLUSION

In a world growing global, more liminal spaces are created to locate individuals condemned for being different from the mainstream. Women, transgender people, Muslims, Arabs, Black people and other minorities are seeking to carve out a niche for their liminal state to be voiced in academia. Faqir's protagonist, Salma, represents many aspects of the state of being *liminal* and marginalised in different contexts. All through this paper, I have presented various scenes where Salma faces liminalisation whether as a woman or as an Arab immigrant. By creating such an archetypal character, Faqir has managed to voice many silenced people: immigrants going through a diasporic experience where they have to face racial discrimination and thus total marginalisation, and oppressed naïve women whose destiny is drawn by the patriarchal rules dominating the Bedouin societies. Therefore, Salma represents many unvoiced, silent people: ethnic minorities and gender-based minorities. In fact, Salma evidences a multiple self: she is the oppressed woman, the marginalized Arab British citizen, the foreigner, and the lover loser. Salma embodies the state of liminality any one of us may face once being dislocated or being different.

Reviews sent to author: 13 March 2017
Revised paper accepted for publication: 20 March 2017

WORKS CITED

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute, 1999.

Bakhtin, M.M and P.N. Medvedev. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. The Johns Hopkins UP, 1978.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. U Texas P. 1981.

Ben Youssef Zayzafoon, Lamia. *The Production of the Muslim Woman: Negotiating Text. History, and Ideology*. Lexington Books. 2005.

Bhabha, Homi. "Third Space: An Interview with Homi Bhabha." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 207-221.

—— *Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Cowart, David. *Trailing Clouds: Immigrant Fiction in Contemporary America*. Cornell UP, 2006.

Faqir, Fadia. *In the House of Silence*. Garnet Publishing. 1998.

—— *My Name Is Salma*. Doubleday. 2006.

Froman, Walter J. and J.B. Foster Jr. "General introduction." *Thresholds of Western Culture: Identity, Postcoloniality, Transnationalism,* edited by W.J. Froman & J.B. Foster Jr., Continuum, 2002.

Gana, Nouri, editor. *The Edinburgh Companion to the Arab Novel in English: The Politics of Anglo-Arab and Arab-American Literature and Culture*. Edinburgh UP, 2013.

Moore, Lindsay. *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film*. Routledge, 2008.

Moran, D. *An Extract from Questions of the Liminal in the Fiction of Julio Cortázar*. Legenda, 2000. http://www.mhra.org.uk/Publications/Books/Legenda/files/.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Penguin Books, 2003.

Sarnou, Dalal. *Rebellion and Creativity in Arab Women Writings*. Lambert Publishing, 2011.

Shields, R. *Places On the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. Routledge. 1991.

Turner, Victor. "*Liminality and Communitas." The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. 1969. Aldine Transaction, 2008, pp. 94-130.

Young, R. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*. Routledge, 1995.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 99-108

A SENSE OF LOSS IN HILARY MANTEL'S *A CHANGE OF CLIMATE*

Silvia García Hernández
Universidad de Alcalá

Abstract

In *A Change of Climate*, Hilary Mantel portrays the life of the Eldred family both in England and Africa. In this novel, as in many others, Mantel deals with some of the topics she is more concerned with: religion, faith, displacement and identity; however, there is another protagonist in this novel apart from Anna and Ralph Eldred: loss. In this paper, it is shown how the Eldreds move from one loss to another and how, in a very autobiographical manner, Mantel deals with the loss of dreams, faith, children, or roots. Following different interpretations of psychoanalytic theory, this article explores the way the Eldreds deal with loss, the different processes of mourning they go through and their attempts to overcome the grief produced by the most important loss in their lives: their son.

Keywords: loss of children, loss of faith, displacement, mourning, Hilary Mantel.

Resumen

En *A Change of Climate*, Hilary Mantel nos muestra la vida de la familia Eldred, tanto en Inglaterra como en África. En esta novela, como en muchas otras, Mantel trata algunos de los temas en los que más suele interesarse en su producción literaria: la religión, la fe, el desplazamiento y la identidad. Sin embargo, en la novela hay otra protagonista además de Anna y Ralph Eldred: la pérdida. En este artículo se muestra cómo la vida de los Eldred les lleva de una pérdida a otra y cómo, de manera muy autobiográfica, Mantel retrata la pérdida de los sueños, la fe, los hijos o las raíces. A través de distintas interpretaciones de la teoría del psicoanálisis, se muestra también el modo en que los Eldred se enfrentan al sentimiento de pérdida, los distintos procesos de duelo por los que pasan y sus intentos por sobreponerse al dolor que se produce por la pérdida más importante de sus vidas: su hijo.

Palabras clave: pérdida de los hijos, pérdida de la fe, desplazamiento, duelo, Hilary Mantel.

Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, 74; April 2017, pp. 109-124; ISSN: e-2530-8335

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1985, Hilary Mantel published her first novel, *Every Day is Mother's Day*. Since then, all her novels have received praise from both critics and readers, and have been awarded a number of literary prizes, being Mantel the first woman to receive the Booker Prize for Fiction twice, once for *Wolf Hall* (2009), and another for its sequel *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012). Mantel has been described as one of the authors that contributed to the emergence of a new generation of writers in the late '80s and early '90s and considered as a writer who was part of the reinvigoration of women's fiction during those years (Bradbury 445-446). In the same line, other critics such as Garan Holcombe have defined Mantel as one of the most interesting novelists writing in English today; and even other peer writers like Maggie Gee, Fay Weldon or Margaret Atwood have praised her work.

Hilary Mantel is a rich and versatile writer indeed: she has written social novels, historical novels, she has dealt with postcolonial and feminist issues; she has done travel writing, has written short stories and collaborates with specialised publications with reviews and articles. That is the reason why it seems impossible to classify her in a main literary trend or genre. Her own life has been complex and has no doubt contributed to this variety in her writing and as a source for numerous ideas for her books. Actually, *A Change of Climate*, published in 1994, can be considered as a novel which includes several autobiographical elements and a great variety of topics Mantel is more concerned with in her writings. When this novel was released, it was defined in a review in the *Daily Telegraph* as a "complex and highly intelligent portrayal of injustice, bereavement and the loss of faith" (Blake 7); these and other complex topics as the nature of good and evil are discussed in this novel, and it is probably because of the way in which Mantel deals with these difficult themes that the novel was very well received and praised by critics.

A Change of Climate tells the story of the Eldred family in two different moments: their life in South Africa and Botswana as missionaries and their life in Norfolk, England, twenty years later, during the 1980s, where they still do charity work for the community. When Ralph has to renounce to a career as a geologist due to his father's opposition —he considered it against God and religion— he escapes from his town to South Africa with his wife, Anna, soon after their marriage. When they get to South Africa, they discover, little by little, the horrors and injustices of the apartheid system and they work hard to help as much as they can; however, it is impossible for them not to get involved with the situation that the black South Africans were living, and when they denounce it, they get jailed and then deported to another mission in Botswana. It is in this new placement where they suffer the most horrific event of their lives: the loss of one of their children. After this tragic experience, they go back to England, never to talk about it anymore, to escape the pain of the past. However, with the passing of time and the new events taking place in their lives in England twenty years later, such as Ralph's infidelity, we discover what really happened in Botswana and how it marked their lives forever.

As for the autobiographical elements, apart from the possible influences that Hilary Mantel may have had from other writers, or the links she or the critics can find with them, it is probably her own life that has exerted a most relevant influence on her writings. Her novels are not totally autobiographical, but she undoubtedly writes from personal experience. In the case of *A Change of Climate*, many autobiographical details are to be found: in the late 1970s, when she was in her twenties, Mantel lived during five years in Botswana, because of her husband's job as a geologist, which is what Ralph wanted to be. As she has acknowledged, her stay in Africa was very influential in her life, since, as she explains, "what I did do was changing quite a lot as a person, changed the way I thought about things, and therefore by an indirect route it made me into a different kind of a writer from the one I would have been" (Arias 286). Moreover, after the first three years, she had to go back to England because of her illness, endometriosis, which resulted in her impossibility to have children. This is something that marked her life and was very influential in her writings, and *A Change of Climate* is indeed a clear example of her obsession with lost children.

At the same time and also related with autobiographical details, in this novel Mantel deals with religious concerns, as well as with displacement and identity questions, which are two topics that are key components not only in this novel, but also in Mantel's literary production. Albeit considered a mainstream writer, and despite the fact that she was born and raised in England, Mantel comes from an Irish Catholic family, which is why she has acknowledged to feel out of the definition of what being "English" means, both because of her Catholic background, which has been very influential for her as a writer, and because of the feeling of non-belonging that she felt both as a child in England and during the time she spent abroad.

A Change of Climate deals in fact with some of the main topics Mantel is concerned with in her literary production. Interestingly enough, the key components in this novel —religion and faith, displacement and identity questions, and the disappearance of a child— are all autobiographical elements, which are also interconnected by a feeling of loss. The experience of loss has been largely discussed in literature, and narratives of loss appear very frequently in contemporary writing: loss of one's childhood in memoirs, loss of identity and freedom in postcolonial literature, loss of loved ones in literature of the wars, etc.

At the same time, the concept of loss is a key element for the theory of psychoanalysis, and has been widely explored from Freud to more contemporary interpretations of Freud's ideas by a number of experts such as Watkin, LaCapra, Lacan, Derrida, Kristeva or Butler[1]. Loss, the responses to it and the working through to get over it were firstly defined by Sigmund Freud, who, throughout his career, tried to develop a theory on how loss was an essential part in the development of the subject. In his most influential study about loss, *Mourning and Melancholia*, he established a distinction between two different responses to loss. On the one hand,

[1] For a more complete study and a deeper analysis of the concept of loss, see David L. Eng and David Kazanjian's *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* and Amy Prodromou's *Navigating Loss in Women's Contemporary Memoir*.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 109-124

he defined mourning as the reaction to the loss of something or somebody so that, once it has been got over, the past is declared resolved and the person suffering from that loss can move on. On the other hand is melancholia, which could be defined as a persistent struggle with lost objects and a consequent inability to resolve the grief caused by loss as well as refusal and failure to accept it.

However, despite this clear distinction, in a revision of his own subsequent studies of the concept of loss, he acknowledged at the end of his career that melancholia is not a pathological disorder suffered by those who do not know how to get over the phase of mourning; as Tammy Clewell explains, Freud redefined both concepts: "mourning assumes the status of 'an interminable labor', constantly engaged in working through the subject's past attachments" whereas "melancholia, in turn, becomes recuperated as 'normal' condition which, instead of threatening to dissolve the ego, plays an important part in its constitution" (Clewell 13).

Despite this last redefinition of both concepts, in more recent studies of loss other psychoanalysts and researchers such as Watkin or LaCapra agree on their criticism of Freud and claim that there is no good or bad mourner but varieties of the same response, since, to them, there are more nuanced responses to loss than those offered by Freud. With poststructuralism, Derrida offered a new way of dealing with the process of mourning, whereby the best way of overcoming loss is by applying the notion of "semimourning". In the words of Derrida, "I cannot complete my mourning for everything I lose, because I want to keep it, and at the same time, what I do best is to mourn, is to lose it, because by mourning, I keep it inside me" (Weber 151-2). Together with these, there have been many other interpretations of loss in the construction of the self and in the way it can be overcome, exploring the concepts of grief, loss, mourning or melancholia from different perspectives.

After these brief theoretical considerations, it can be acknowledged how *A Change of Climate* is clearly a narrative about loss. In this case, loss appears in different aspects of life, both symbolic and real ones, and all of them based on autobiographical losses for Mantel. Along their lives, the Eldreds will suffer from loss, moving from one loss to another and being some elements lost because of a previous loss. A disparity of elements such as the dreams of a young man, family, place and identity, a child, or faith, are lost in this novel. The aim of this paper is to study how most of these losses are linked with Mantel's life in some way, as well as to explore how loss affects the protagonists, how each loss changes their lives and the way they respond and try to overcome them.

2. ESCAPING FROM ENGLAND: THE LOSS OF A DREAM

A Change of Climate begins in England, in the 1980s, with the funeral of Felix, the lover of Ralph's sister, Emma, although we are immediately taken to the description of the Eldreds' house and family. Anna and Ralph Eldred have been married for 25 years and have four children: Katherine, Julian, Robin and Rebecca. Ralph works for a religious charitable trust and Anna takes care of the house and the

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 109-124

children and, sometimes, she is also in charge of some youngsters that Ralph brings home from the trust when the social services cannot do anything else for them.

From the different scenes in the funeral and the narrator's comments on what others think and say, we learn how Ralph and Anna Eldred were seen by the people around them. Hence, the first impression we get about Ralph is that he is "a man who thought only of work, God and family" (*A Change of Climate* 9), and that his life had always been under his parents' influence and control, so much that "he had never freed himself from his parents" (20). In the case of Anna, she is seen as a wife who "was worn to a shadow slaving for his [Ralph's] concerns" (9)

In this first part of the book, and very often through the main characters' dreams, we know about the reasons that took Ralph to leave England to work as a missionary in Africa. Ralph's dream of his father and grandfather when he was only three years old takes us to the description of his family, and later, to a town on the Yorkshire coast, where he spent some summers as a child, to a landscape and a setting which reminds of those in John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and where his interest in geology began from the discovery of a fossil in the coast. In secret he keeps his discoveries, and he is encouraged by a school teacher to go on studying. The moment he decides to study geology at university and tells his father, there is a large dispute: Ralph's father, Matthew, had other plans for his son. Matthew was a very conservative and religious man, and when he learns about Ralph's ideas, he begins to behave, in Ralph's words, "like a caricature of a Victorian patriarch" (49). Matthew defends Creationism, and consequently rejects any Darwinist theory of evolution categorically; that is why he tells Ralph, when he knows about his son's decision, that if he decides to go on with his ideas, there will be no money to support him. At the same time, his mother also reminds him that appearances are highly important to her; she was very worried about what other people could say about him and the family if he was to study geology, even blackmailing him saying that Emma, Ralph's sister, would not be allowed to get to medical school if he went on with his plans. When Ralph finally decides not to go on with his dream, the feeling of sadness and disappointment he begins to have will not disappear in the rest of the novel. This is also the first time that the feeling of loss appears in the novel: the loss of a dream that brings Ralph's frustration and the subsequent decision of going away.

From his choice of escaping his father's imposed norms comes the second feeling of loss: the loss of family and identity. It is because of this dispute with his family that he decides to go away from England after his National Service and his wedding with Anna, since he thinks that the best way to do that is to follow his uncle James's experience as a missionary in Africa. James offers them a job in Dar-es-Salaam, as teachers of English, and Ralph immediately accepts it, thinking that, by doing this, he would be in charge of his own life: "from now on I shall take control, I shall order my own life, just as I like. I am going to Africa because I want to go, because Anna wants it. When I return I shall be my own man" (58). But with this decision he was just trying to convince himself, as the only reason why he wanted to leave was because he did not fit in the environment of his family, and because he wanted to go away from his father to show him that he was able to lead his own life, to take his own decisions. However, as Ralph's uncle puts it, when you go to Africa "out of your own need, not out of the need of the people you were supposed to serve" (95), things usually do not go as one expected, and after a period living in Africa, the Eldreds realise that they were not ready to go there.

Anyway, after a process of mourning in which Ralph feels sadness and rage, it seems that the only way to overcome this lost dream and go on with his life, is going away from what makes him suffer —family— and trying to show that he is able to run his own life by moving to Africa. Ralph loses his dream and his family, but, by moving, he would also lose his roots. From now on, he would feel out of place and the feeling of loss will only increase and never abandon him.

3. LIFE IN AFRICA: LOSS OF IDENTITY, LOSS OF A CHILD, LOSS OF FAITH

After Ralph and Anna get married, they travel to Africa, but not to the place they were supposed to go. Apparently, they were needed in another place, in Elim, a town in South Africa near Johannesburg. Anna accepted this change of placement, although before abandoning England she was not very sure about what she would find in Africa, and her ideas about how it would be were totally illusory and unreal. When they arrive in Africa and have to face the situation that people are living, they realise that life there is not as they saw it from England. The part of the novel that takes place in South Africa is set in the fifties —the Eldreds leave for Africa in 1956— when the apartheid main laws were imposed. As Ralph and Anna went to South Africa to participate in the mission as teachers of English, their lives and jobs were mainly affected by the passing of the Bantu Education Act in 1953, which was implemented from 1955 to 1966. This law segregated even further the already racially separated system of South Africa, where black people had already been deprived of citizenship, they had no political representation and segregation had been established in education, medical care, beaches and public services in general. Throughout this part of the story we are told about continuous raids that were taking place in the cities, and it is at this point that their feeling of displacement is more clearly perceived. During this period in Africa, they realise they have lost their identities: they are out of place since they are not in their country of origin, and they do not belong to any group in the host country. They are seen as suspicious by both black and white people; they are considered as dangerous.

Despite the fact that they belonged to the mission and they had gone to Elim to help, the apartheid laws and the consequent segregation had led black people to distrust them because of the white colour of their skin, up to the point that "Ralph no longer allowed Anna to go out alone. Where people knew them, they were safe enough. Where they were unknown, a white face had become a provocation" (108). However, neither were they defended or even respected by other white citizens or by the representatives of the authorities, because with Ralph's denounce of the situation that people in Elim were living, they were considered as a menace for the apartheid system. Because of that, the police came back to their house one night, looking for a person they thought the Eldreds could be hiding, and warned Ralph not to go on speaking about what the police were doing in town: "You wrote a letter to the Pretoria news, Mr Eldred. Don't do that again" (110). Some days after this warning, they are imprisoned and then they are invited to leave voluntarily from the mission, better than being deported. They agree and are sent to Botswana.

Very soon after having arrived in Botswana, they realise that their presence will not be of much help. This is the moment when, apart from feeling displaced, they begin to lose their faith and to question the nature of their mission. We can clearly see it in a conversation between Anna and Ralph, when they are commenting on a talk they had previously had with one of the servants, in which, apparently, the servant was defending the advantages of polygamy:

> – I think we have denatured these people, Anna said. Everything old is condemned, everything of their own. Everything new and imported is held up to them as better.
> – Soap and civilisation, Ralph said. That was the idea. Oh, and God.
> – Oh, and God, Anna said. I begin to wonder what Christianity has to offer to women. Besides a series of insults, that is. (214-215)

However, this loss of faith will very much grow later on in the novel. It is also in Botswana where the event that will mark their lives takes place. Anna finds that she is pregnant with twins. During the first months, everything went fine, their lives were calm and they found a nanny for the kids, Felicia. However, one of the servants, Enock, who was in charge of the garden, began to create problems and he was fired by Anna.

Despite this, and far from bringing peace to their lives, sacking Enock brings awful consequences for the Eldreds. Firstly, their dog is poisoned by the gardener, but it is that night when things would change forever in Ralph and Anna's lives. It is a very stormy night when Ralph hears a woman's voice asking him to let them in. He doubted whether he should open the door. On the one hand, he thought, "it is our visitors, the poor people in their shacks; they are panic-stricken, their houses are carried off, they want shelter" (237); but, on the other hand, the opposite thought crossed his mind: "your dog has been poisoned today, there is a man with a grudge against you, you are not entirely safe" (237). But when he hears the voice again, he decides to open. Behind the door was Enock, with a small hatchet in his hand. He hit Ralph, who began to bleed, then fainted, and Enock went to Anna's room. The gardener took all the money he could find and went out. Then Anna went to the kitchen and saw her husband bleeding, but it is when she goes to the children's room that she receives "her own deathblow; the one that will leave no mark on her skin, but will peel and scalp her, part the flesh of joy from the bone of grief" (239-240). Then she saw the room was empty and that her son and daughter were not there. Their nanny, Felicia, had packed all her things and had escaped with the children during the fight. The morning after, Anna found her daughter, but her son would never appear.

After this event, their lives will never be the same again: both Anna and Ralph, as most of Mantel's characters, will totally lose their faith. We had already seen Anna questioning God, but not Ralph; however, in this letter, Ralph tells his uncle James:

> I wish we had never left England. I do not believe that any good we have done here can compensate for a hundredth part of what we have suffered, and for what we will suffer as our lives go on (...) Don't advise me to pray, because I don't feel that prayers meet the case. I wonder about the nature of what I have been praying to. (244-245)

In the same way, after they decide to go back to England, for there was nothing else they could do for their missing child, Anna talks to James and she tells him she does not believe in God anymore, as God had not done anything when she needed him: "I asked God for comfort when I came home to Elim every night, and saw these beaten people (...) but God kept very quiet, James. God did nothing" (247). Anna was very angry, even to James, for he had been the one who got them a job in Africa. Yet, she told James not to worry:

> You leave me alone, James, and I'll leave you alone. You don't come at me with your theology, and I won't stop Ralph doing his job (...) It doesn't matter what I think, inside myself. Nobody could imagine or know what I think, inside myself. But I promise you I won't stand up in church and bawl out that it's all a sham. We're professional Christians. (248)

Therefore, even though the loss of faith had started some time earlier when they realised the situation that people in Africa were suffering from, it will increase after their boy's disappearance, and the loss of their child is subsequently followed by a total loss of faith.

In connection with autobiographical details, Mantel also "lost" her children at the time she was in Africa. She had already lost her faith, but three years after her arrival in Africa, at the age of 27, she had to go back to England to have surgery because of her illness, endometriosis, with which she lost the possibility of having children. This was one of the reasons why she decided to become a writer, and, actually, the issue of childlessness is something that she explores in her books, mainly in her autobiography, *Giving up the Ghost* (2003), although we can also see in her narratives her obsession with lost children (*A Change of Climate*, 1994), dead babies (*Every Day is Mother's Day*, 1985), or children who cannot recognise their mothers ("Lippy Kid", 1995). As she has explained in "Clinical Waste", childlessness is "something I explored gradually, and am exploring still, as I reach an age when (in nature) my chances of conception would be slight. The impact of childlessness, for me, has been subtle and long-delayed" (21). This was, for Mantel, a traumatic experience, as well as it was for Anna to have her child kidnapped. For Anna, it was more than a mere loss: her child had been abducted and she never knew if he was dead or alive, and therefore the process of mourning was impossible to overcome. Sunk forever in a state of melancholia, Anna is unable to resolve the grief caused by this dreadful event.

In her article "On Grief", Mantel herself has reflected on the process of loss, mourning and overcoming the grief caused by the loss of a loved one and, as she did in this novel, has connected it with loss of faith. To her, "[mourning] undermines rationality. It frequently undermines any religious faith we may have". In her words, "the pain of loss is often intensified for a believer, because he feels angry with his god and feels shame and guilt about that anger; this being so, you wonder how the idea began, that religion is a consolation". This connection between loss of a family member and loss of faith had been previously made by psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud, who also linked trauma derived from loss with the rupture with religion. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud, as Kajsa K. Henry explains, expounds how a person suffering with trauma may have physical symptoms as well as losing emotional stability, for one can "experience any number of external and internal disruptions, such as depression, illness, changes in self-perception, or breaks from home, culture and religious beliefs" (Henry 4-5). All these symptoms can be perceived in Anna throughout the novel. Apart from losing her faith, she suffers from depression, anxiety attacks and even a heart complaint. Furthermore, at a point in the novel we learn that Anna does not want to live for the children she has, since, in Ralph's words, "it's the one we don't have that dominates our life, it's what's missing that shapes everything we do" (*A Change of Climate* 257).

As Mantel herself explains, when losing a loved one, in this case a son, "the process creates panic and guilt" since one asks oneself if they are remembering properly or enough; and they may even feel that recovery "can seem like a betrayal" ("On Grief") and this is also what she portrays in Anna. Actually, according to new interpretations of the process of mourning, it is not anymore seen as a finite process which can be gradually overcome, but, as Christopher Craft affirms, "the work of mourning is more accurately a work of remembering" (quoted in Prodromou 16), and this is also true for Anna: when she loses her child, "she fought to keep her hold on the past, on every detail of it. She had been afraid to forget anything; to forget seemed a betrayal" (*A Change of Climate* 254). What is more, we can see how there were times when Anna "had wished to erase her husband and children, her whole biography" (305), but "there had not been a day, in twenty years, when she had not thought about her lost child" (305). Here we can see it is only through remembering that she had overcome those ideas of "erasing" her and her family from this world and how, in remembering, she had found a way to go on with her life. This coincides with William Watkin's idea that "to remember means to give a permanent materiality to someone or something that has been lost. The purpose of this is not only to preserve that lost, beloved thing, but also to lay ground for our own survival" (Watkin 9)

Therefore, after this time in Africa where their lives have changed forever, Anna and Ralph have lost their child and therefore their faith, and one month after the children's abduction, they decide to go back to England, to go back home for comfort. However, they will find that people "at home" in England will not welcome them as they expected.

4. BACK IN ENGLAND. BACK HOME?: LOSS OF ROOTS

Many of Mantel's characters suffer from a sense of displacement, as the author herself did at certain stages in her life, and it is for this reason that many of the autobiographical elements that she includes in her novels make reference to it. Mantel has defined herself as an in-between. She has felt that she does not belong to any place, as well as many of her characters. Her Irish roots and her Catholic upbringing have made her feel not identified with what being English means and, as she has explained in several interviews, she has always felt "socially marginalized", which meant that she had to invent a new identity for herself (Galván 31).

It is for this reason that Mantel, together with other writers who have very little or no direct connection with the postcolonial experience, has explored concepts such as displacement or non-belonging, which have been usually related with postcolonial literature. In the case of *A Change of Climate*, the action takes place in England and Africa (Botswana and South Africa), and the protagonists will suffer from this aforementioned displacement.

Going back to the place where once one belonged is something that very often happens in postcolonial writings. As Tobias Wachinger puts it, in postcolonial literature "the migration to the metropolis thus finds inevitable ending in the place of departure, reconfirming the origin —home— as the space to return" (Wachinger 68). In the case of the Eldreds, it could be said that their experience fits in this definition, even though their situation is reversed, for their journey was from the old metropolis to the former colony. In the same line, Elleke Boehmer also argues that "indeed, the culminating event in the journey narrative is that of homecoming" (Boehmer 192), but she adds that the moment in which the characters go back home may appear "under a range of moods, extending from celebration to disillusionment" (*A Change of Climate* 192). In the case of Anna and Ralph, their going back home is one of total frustration. As happened to the protagonist of David Dabydeen's *Disappearance*, who, as Wachinger points out, "turns back to Guyana in complete disillusionment, looking for a 'space to forget' that seems to be offered in his country of birth Guyana, a country he desperately wished to abandon" (Wachinger 61), Ralph experiences the same feeling. In his case, Ralph flees from his mother country —England— to escape from parental control, in a desperate act of showing his father that he could lead his own life, but in the end he has to go back home in absolute distress both because of the loss of his son and because his father had somehow "defeated" him for he had not taken the right decision nor had been able to find happiness in life while he was away from home.

However, even though with his homecoming Ralph was also looking for that "space to forget," he knew it would be very difficult to forget the horrible event that had taken place in Botswana. Despite this, we see how things in England are completely opposite from what he thought, for they return to a place that had somehow ceased to be "home", since what they found in England was hostility and indifference. Therefore, it is when the Eldreds go back to England that they feel more displaced than ever.

Their return was obviously very difficult: apart from the pain of coming back with only one of their children, they thought how their lives would be in England, and how their neighbours would react to what had happened:

> So now, where should they begin? How should they coordinate their slow crawl back from the desert? What should they say? What could they tell people? Who was entitled to the whole story, and who could be kept at a distance with a half-truth? (*A Change of Climate* 250)

Ralph was afraid that if they told people the truth, their prejudices would spread to the entire continent and they would think that all Africans were savages. He was also afraid of the questions they would be asked, but soon he learned that these preoccupations were not necessary, for when they came back it was as if their neighbours and acquaintances did not care about them, as if they had forgotten them, as if Ralph and Anna somehow did not belong there anymore:

> Ralph feared intrusive questions, but instead there was an indifference that he felt as an insult. He made a discovery, common to those who expatriate themselves and then return: that when he and Anna went abroad they had ceased to be regarded as real people. Out of sight, out of mind. Nobody, even the most generous donor to mission appeals, wanted to hear anything about Africa. (252)

On the one hand, this could be considered as a positive point, since if people did not want to know about what had happened in Africa, Anna and Ralph would be able to overcome faster their grief for the loss of their son and the way they lost him, as they would not be constantly reminded of it every time someone asked. However, the fact that people were not concerned about how they felt or with the details about the difficult situation they had gone through, made them feel out of place, as if they had not returned home, but to a different place where nobody cared about them. Therefore, they considered this lack of interest or curiosity as a kind of "punishment" for having left the country[2]. In fact, they did not feel they belonged to England completely either: Africa had changed them, and they were not the same persons as when they went out of England. Their past in Africa is what dominates their lives now, and their secret of what happened there is what keeps Anna and Ralph together.

---

[2] This experience of coming back to what one believed was home and feeling out of place is also seen in many other postcolonial narratives, as well as in the other novel Mantel wrote about an experience abroad. Apart from living in Africa, she also spent some years in Saudi Arabia, and she wrote a novel in which she reflects her own experience there and analyses the concepts of home and abroad: *Eight Months of Ghazzah Street* (1985). Here, one can also find that the protagonists feel that England is not "home" anymore, and this is yet another autobiographical detail Mantel reflects in *A Change of Climate*: as she has explained, when she went back to England, she was "struck by how nullified your experience was by the people at home" and she asked herself "what was the point in trying to share with them something they couldn't and had no desire to try to understand" (Garner 10).

The only ones who commented on what took place in Africa were Ralph's father and Anna's mother. The former had a conversation with Ralph just the day before he died. Matthew asked Ralph why he had to go to Africa, and they had another argument, like a continuation of the one that began years ago: "The missions must be staffed, but you needn't have one, you shouldn't have gone, there were plenty more experienced people to go. Pride made you do it, I think — pride, and being above yourself, knowing better than other people. That's always been your fault, boy" (251); but Ralph, instead of hiding from the truth, admitted in front of his father for the first time in his life in a very straightforward way: "You want to know why I went to Africa? I'll tell you. I went to get away from you" (249). As for Anna's mother, she also finds Ralph guilty: "But although I don't say so, of course, I blame him for taking her there in the first place. He could have had a nice job with his father, there was no need to trail half-way across the globe" (251). Therefore, despite his attempt, Ralph could never show his father that he was in charge of his own life and that he was able to take decisions on his own, since his idea of going to Africa had had terrible consequences.

Little by little they went back to routine. When Anna came back from Africa, she was already pregnant again, and a few months after, she gives birth to a boy, Julian. They had decided never to tell Katherine or any of their children about what had happened in Africa and made their families promise they would not do it either, so that "the secret was sequestered and locked away" (252). But Ralph felt that, confined as it was, the secret became more potent, so he tried to keep himself busy, "burying the past under a weight of daily preoccupation" (253). Ralph and Anna had to start again in England, but they were not the persons they used to be before they went to Africa. It is interesting how now it is the protagonists who define each other, and their descriptions are similar to the ones offered at the beginning of the novel. Plus, after we know the events that took place in Africa, we can understand the reasons for these changes.

Ralph became, according to Anna, "an exacting, demanding man, who gave her only glimpses of the gentleness of those early years" (253). Indeed, he became someone who, in order to keep his mind busy and so as not to think in what had happened in Africa, was married to his job. Ralph worked for the charitable Trust. He tried to help young people who were lost in life, who had, as he had done in Africa, taken the wrong decisions. He even took home people from the Trust or from the Social Services for some time. The summer the events take place they have a girl with them, Melanie, who eventually escapes from their house and who will be key in the ending of the novel.

Actually, Ralph's job and new identity also marked the relationship with his own children. He was so concentrated in his job and in helping others that his children complained that he was more worried about the kids who went to the Trust than about themselves. Emma, Ralph's sister, tried to spend as much time as she could with her nieces and nephews since, according to her, "it was not easy being Ralph's children" (124). In fact, in a passage of the novel Robin and Julian's complaints about his father are presented: to Robin, "Dad's supposed to be good with young people, but it's other young people he's good with. Not us" (124). Similarly, when Julian leaves university, he thinks that his father "has not bothered about me (...) He's only worried about those spotty kids with carrier bags" (147). However, if Ralph acted like this with his children was not because he did not care about them, but because he wanted them to make their own choices and take their own decisions about their futures as they considered best, so as not to destroy their lives like his father had done with his; as he says: "I will never be party to bullying and hectoring my children as my father bullied and hectored me" (148). Contrary to Ralph, Anna becomes overprotective with her children and, for instance, we are told how she kept Julian sleeping in their bedroom for one year and a half, till Robin was born, or that she woke to check if he was in his room many times during the night.

The relationship between Ralph and Anna also changes because of the losses they have experienced. Even though their marriage could not be considered, in Anna's words, as a "romance" after all they had gone through, to her, "when you have suffered together as they had (...) you are not partners, but the survivors of a disaster. You see each other and remember, every day. So how can you live together? But how can you not?" (305). In the same way, when Ralph is asked if he loves Anna, he says that "it is not the right question. It goes far beyond that. You see, when we met, we were children. We made an alliance against the world" (332) and what held them together was the loss of their child. Moreover, their children see their relationship as "the exception to the rule", since, as a couple, they never had an argument: "We think, me and Robin, that they must have had a big row about something, but we can't work it out, because they never have a row, never" (167). Actually, it is because of their parents' secrecy that there are many things that the children "can't work out". Throughout the novel we come across a few passages in which they talk about their parents' past lives; but probably the most significant one is a conversation between Kit and Robin about Anna and Ralph's time in Africa. Even though they had been told stories about their parents' lives in Africa, including their imprisonment, Anna and Ralph were never totally open with their children, and they never told them about the reasons why they were imprisoned or about the events that took place when they were attacked and the twins were abducted.

But despite all their efforts to keep the secret, once Ralph reveals it, the past comes back to haunt them all and they are forced to deal with it in the present. That summer, Ralph has an affair with Mrs Glasse, the mother of his son's girlfriend, and he tells her about what happened in Africa. When Anna learns about Ralph's affair, she feels the past has come to change the present and to destroy their lives as they had been destroyed in the past, so Anna, as she did in Africa with the people who robbed her child, sees herself unable to forget nor to forgive Ralph. This is the last loss in the novel: Anna loses Ralph's fidelity. She feels betrayed and reflects on "the nature of betrayal", which, to her, "not only changes the present, but that it reaches back with its dirty hands and changes the past" (304). And it does. For the first time in her life, she feels that she has made her own decision and she tells Ralph to take his things and go away. At the same time, it is also the first time that Anna confronts with her past and voices that she has never forgotten Ralph for having taken her to Africa and, more than that, for opening the door that night; as she tells Ralph, "I am no good at forgiving (...) don't you know that? It doesn't matter

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 109-124

if the action is to be deferred. I can't do it. The years pass and they don't make a difference. I know, you see. Because I've been betrayed before" (324). When Ralph says he was also betrayed, we know that Anna is not referring to the people who robbed her child, but to Ralph himself, since, as she tells him, "after all, you opened the door to them" (325).

After all the events have taken place in the novel, it seems that the Eldred's life together has finished forever: Anna ends up blaming Ralph for everything that happened in Africa, and feeling that there is no place for forgiveness after all the things she has lost because of him. However, there is still a chance: even though Anna says that "I've never forgiven anybody. I've had no practice. I don't know how to do it." (335), she also admits that "I have always thought (...) that before there is forgiveness there must be restitution" (335), and it is in these words that there could be a possibility for forgiveness, since, somehow, there is that restitution that Anna was talking about.

That summer, Ralph had brought home a girl from the Trust, Melanie, and she had gone away from their house and disappeared; they were worried, as they did not know where she was or what could have happened to her. But the moment Ralph takes his things and is abandoning the house as Anna had asked him, they see something moving in the garden: "A creature moved into their view, at a distance. It came slowly over the rough ground, crawling. It was a human being" (340). When they realise it is Melanie, they run to help her, because they see her fall, like a dying animal. When they reach her, she begins to breathe again, and they get her inside the house. This could be, somehow, the restitution Anna was asking for, since, after all, and although she is not their lost son, they find Melanie alive and take her home, as they did with Katherine years ago, so that, in the end, there is restitution, since a child is given back to them, and the secret is still unknown by their other children.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, *A Change of Climate* is a story of loss, displacement, and disillusionment with life. In a very autobiographical manner, Mantel talks about different aspects she is very much concerned with, all of them connected to loss: loss of children, because of her own impossibility to conceive; loss of faith, as religion has been very influential in her life and writings because of the Catholic education she received, which she later rejected; and loss of place and identity both when moving abroad and when coming back.

In this novel, Mantel takes her protagonists, the Eldreds, to the limit after a series of dreadful events related with loss and betrayal in their lives. They abandon their home country because of the lack of understanding and narrow-mindedness of Ralph's family. In Africa, they are doubly displaced both by the African inhabitants who thought they came to impose their rules and by the authorities, who considered them a menace for their socio-political system based on separateness and racial control. When the darkest and more tragic event takes place with the abduction of their children and the loss of one of them, they go back to England only to find themselves displaced again, since as they had spent a long time in another country, they were not considered as "real English citizens" anymore.

The way Anna and Ralph deal with their most important loss, their son, is different. Even though they both suffer from it, Anna blames Ralph for what happened, and she suffers from a profound state of grief which seems impossible to overcome. Meanwhile, Ralph tries to overcome his sorrow by looking for other children that he can "save" by working with them in the Trust and even taking them home. It is only when they actually find one of these girls Ralph was helping and who had escaped from home that a possible turning point is found in the Eldred's lives to help them deal with their lost son.

In relation with both characters' responses to loss, they could be linked with the concepts of mourning and melancholia as Freud first defined them. Ralph would be the example for mourning, as he seems able to overcome his grief when he encounters loss and go on with his life after a period of mourning. On the other hand, Anna might have been sunk in a pathological state of melancholia in which she was unable to accept and resolve her loss. However, as Freud himself, as well as some other experts (Derrida, Lacan or Watkin) pointed out, both mourning and melancholia work together. Anna and Ralph remained together after their most significant loss, and it is only through remembering and being in a constant process of mourning, as Watkin suggests, that they are able to deal with their loss.

Reviews sent to author: 24 February 2017
Revised paper accepted for publication: 30 March 2017

WORKS CITED

Arias, Rosario. Interview with Hilary Mantel. *Atlantis: Revista de la Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo-Norteamericanos* 20.2 (1998): 277-289.

Blake, Fanny. P.S. Section in Hilary Mantel's *A Change of Climate*. Harper Perennial, 2005.

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford U P, 2005.

Bradbury, Malcolm. *The Modern British Novel*. Secker & Warburg, 1993.

Clewell, Tammy. *Mourning, Modernism, Postmodernism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Eng, David L. and David Kazanjian, editors. *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. U of California P, 2003.

Fiorini, Leticia G., Thierry Bokanowski and Sergio Lewkowicz, editors. *On Freud's Mourning and Melancholia*. Karnac Books, 2009.

Freud, Sigmund (2009). "Mourning and Melancholia". *On Freud's Mourning and Melancholia*, edited by Leticia G. Fiorini, Thierry Bokanowski and Sergio Lewkowicz, Karnac Books, 2009, pp. 17-34.

Galván, Fernando. On Ireland, Religion and History: A Conversation with Hilary Mantel. *The European English Messenger*. X/2 (2001): 31-38.

Garner, Clare. Creatures of the Secret. Rev. of *A Change of Climate*, by Hilary Mantel. Section. pp. 9-11. Harper Perennial, 2005.

Haynest, Jane and Juliet Miller, editors. *Inconceivable Conceptions. Psychological Aspects of Infertility and Reproductive Technology*. Brunner-Routledge, 2003.

Henry, Kajsa K. *A Literary Archaeology of Loss: The Politics of Mourning in African American Literature,* 2006. https://fsu.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fsu:182305/datastream/PDF/view.

Holcombe, Garan. "Hilary Mantel: Critical Perspective." *British Council Literature*, 2004. https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/hilary-mantel.

Mantel, Hilary. *A Change of Climate*. 1994. Harper Perennial, 2005.

—— "Clinical Waste." *Inconceivable Conceptions. Psychological Aspects of Infertility and Reproductive Technology*, edited by Jane Haynest and Juliet Miller, Brunner-Routledge, 2003, pp. 19-26.

—— *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*. 1985. Penguin, 1989.

—— "On Grief." *The Guardian Online* 27 December 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/27/hilary-mantel-rereading-cs-lewis-a-grief-observed.

Prodromou, Amy-Katerini. *Navigating Loss in Women's Contemporary Memoir*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Wachinger, Tobias A. *Posing In-Between: Postcolonial Englishness and the Commodification of Hybridity*. Peter Lang, 2003.

Watkin, William. *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature*. Edinburgh UP, 2004.

Weber, Elisabeth, editor. *Jacques Derrida. Points... Interviews 1974-1994*. Stanford UP, 1995.

SHE A RICAN OR SOMETHING? MAKING A (LITERARY) CASE FOR DANZY SENNA'S AFRO LATINIDAD

Carolina Fernández Rodríguez
Universidad de Oviedo

Abstract

In this paper I aim to argue for a lax definition of Latino/a identity, one which would be justified by a constructionist approach to race and by the pitfalls of strict identity politics, as well as by the demographic fact that multiracial Latinos in the U.S. are on the rise, which has moved experts to foretell a future when fewer and fewer Americans will identify as Hispanic despite the existence of a Spanish-speaking ancestor in their family trees. Danzy Senna's life and work will be used to exemplify the complexity that Latino/a identity is acquiring in recent years, to explore the benefits of defining Latino/a identity in a broad way and of claiming, more specifically, for Senna's Afro Latinidad.

Keywords: Identity politics, multiracial Americans, Latino/a identity, Afro Latinidad, Danzy Senna.

Resumen

En este artículo abogo por una definición laxa de la identidad latina que estaría justificada por un enfoque constructivista de la noción de raza, las dificultades que genera una política identitaria estricta y la realidad demográfica según la cual el número de latinos multirraciales que viven en los Estados Unidos está yendo en aumento, lo cual ha llevado a los expertos a predecir un futuro en el que cada vez menos estadounidenses se identificarán como hispanos pese a la presencia de antepasados hispanohablantes en sus árboles genealógicos. La vida y obra de Danzy Senna serán analizadas para ejemplificar la complejidad que la identidad latina está adquiriendo en los últimos años, para explorar los beneficios de definir la identidad latina de forma amplia y para defender, de manera más específica, la condición afro-latina de esta autora.

Palabras clave: Política identitaria, estadounidenses multirraciales, identidad latina, afro-latinidad, Danzy Senna.

Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, 74; April 2017, pp. 125-144; ISSN: e-2530-8335

1. BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION: LOOSENING IDENTITY CONSTRUCTS, FORMING NEW COALITIONS

There is a wide consensus that the 2000 census marked a great change in the way race is perceived and constructed in the United States, as it allowed informants to mark one or more races in order to best describe their racial identity (Harris and Sim 2002). The possibility of identifying oneself as belonging to more than one racial group seems to allow for a constructionist perspective on race. As opposed to the essentialist perspective that dominated the 19th century and a great part of the 20th century and that was based on the presumption that race was biologically determined, the most recent constructionist perspective sees race as a tool that has been and is still used by the status quo to reinforce and perpetuate social differences. Thus, within the constructionist perspective, racial group boundaries are understood as being subjective and racial identities as fluid, which would explain the fact that racial classifications have differed accross nations and historical periods, and can even vary in an individual's life (Harris and Sim 2002).

In fact, one given person may have multiple racial identities throughout his/her life, depending on a variety of circumstances that combine personal, social, and historical factors. Three dimensions have been pointed out as determining people's racial identity: first, their internal racial identity, or what they themselves believe their race to be; second, external racial identities, or what others believe about their racial identity; third, their expressed racial identity, or the specific ways through which people convey their beliefs about their racial identity, ranging from words they use to actions they carry out (Harris and Sim 2002).

American writer Danzy Senna—born in Boston in 1970—offers a good opportunity to test the fluidity and subjective nature of racial identity. The daughter of an Irish-American mother, poet and novelist Fanny Howe, and of an African-American and Mexican father, writer Carl Senna, Danzy Senna unequivocally identified herself as being black during her childhood and her youth. However, as time went by, she started to realize the problematic nature of identity politics, and by the mid-1990s she ended up embracing a more complex identity, one which allowed her to recognize herself as being multiracial (something she had despised in the past) and to shift her concern from dichotomous terms (black/white, man/woman, gay/heterosexual, etc.) to issues of power. Outside her closest circle, people have wrongly identified her as being Puerto Rican, white, or Andalusian, among other things, something that has also played an important role in her self-construction.

To that external racial profiling she has responded in various ways. In a number of essays and interviews (for instance in "The Mulatto Millennium," 1998, and in Milian Arias' "An Interview with Danzy Senna," 2002), she has recounted her initial self-identification as black and her later embracing of a more complex and profoundly multicultural and multiracial identity. Her literary responses, however, have been much more varied. She has constructed several protagonists whose lives closely resemble her own, such as Birdie in *Caucasia* (1998) or the narrator in *Symptomatic* (2004). The former is a biracial girl whose mother is, like Senna's, a descendant of the white New England elite, while her father is an African-American.

The protagonist of *Symptomatic*, for her part, is a biracial young woman who has moved to New York City right after college to work at a prestigious magazine, a job that Senna herself had after graduating. But both Birdie and the narrator in *Caucasia* have wished at one point or another they were Latinas, or they have been taken for Latinas by other characters. In other literary works, her main characters are actually Mexican, as in "Sugar Bowl" (2006), or they strive to find more information about a Mexican ancestor, as is the case in Senna's memoir, *Where Did You Sleep Last Night?* (2009).[1]

Therefore, there seems to be a mismatch between Danzy Senna's essays and interviews, on the one hand, and her fiction and memoir, on the other. The discrepancy arises from Senna's failure to ever identify herself as a Latina in the former, where she is consciously reflecting on her racial and/or cultural identity, while in her works of fiction she shows a deep interest in creating characters who wish they were Latinas, or are taken for Latinas, or are unambiguously Latinos. One could perhaps find an exception to that rule in "The Mulatto Millennium," in which Senna lists the different ways in which a person can be "mixed." Among them, she acknowledges the existence of a kind of mulatto, the "mestizo," who is, in her own definition, someone whose mixture includes a white and a black parent, and one of them claims a "third race in their background (e.g. Native American or *Latino*)" ("The Mulatto Millenium" 24; emphasis added); at the end of the essay, when she wonders where she fits into all those different mulattos she has listed, she admits that she has been "each of the above, or at least mistaken for each of them" (27). But certainly, she makes no specific mention of her Mexican ancestry in that particular text, just as she fails to acknowledge it elsewhere in her essays and interviews. Contrariwise, in her fiction works her Mexican (or, more generally speaking, Latino) ancestry finds multiple ways to conspicuously manifest itself, as will be shown later on.[2]

It is precisely this paradoxical relationship of Danzy Senna to her Latinidad that, I think, makes her case worthy of study, as such connection offers the opportunity to explore the benefits or potential shortcomings of identity politics for a collective, that of Latino/a writers and artists, that have historically been discriminated

[1] Throughout this paper, I am going to consider Danzy Senna's memoir, *Where Did You Sleep Last Night?* (2009), as both an essay and a work of fiction. In it Senna writes critically about issues of race, identity, gender violence, etc., which clearly situates the book in the realm of non-fiction. But, being an autobiography of sorts, it is inevitably constructive in nature, since it takes the "form of textual 'self-fashioning'" (Schwalm 2014). For this reason, I study her memoir as a text that moves along the blurred borderlines of fiction and non-fiction, and consequently I use it in the section devoted to Senna's essays as much as in the part that deals with her works of fiction.

[2] I am conscious of the fact that dividing the analysis of Senna's works into two sections (one for fiction, another one for non-fiction) is highly problematic, as most of her works present, to a greater or lesser extent, autobiographical elements. However, as pointed out, it is possible to affirm that in her non-fiction there is a tendency to avoid engagement with a Latino identity, while her fiction works consistently inscribe a variety of Latinidades. Besides, as it will be argued, the former tends to offer a celebratory attitude towards the hybrid, while the latter presents a less optimistic vision, one which often inscribes the frustration, anxiety, vulnerability or distress of the hybrid.

against in the U.S. on account of their cultural and racial background, immigrant status, etc. For that group, a shared collective identity, which they began to mold in the 1960s, became essential for their mobilization as a political entity. As any other social movement that develops and maintains a collective identity, Latinos have highlighted the differences between themselves and nonmembers, as the action of "tightening categories" has typically been considered by ethnic minorities as being essential "to contest institutional sources of oppression" (Bernstein 62). But, as Stuart Hall has explained, politics based on ethnicity usually show two distinct phases: after the period when groups rediscover their histories and erect boundaries between themselves and outsiders, there comes a stage which allows for more complex analyses and "a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference" (Hall 220); this new dynamic, in turn, permits the establishment of connections among different groups, the expression of solidarity across identities, and the forging of cross-movement alliances.

So, while essentialist identities have proved unmistakably necessary in the fight against oppression, it is no less certain that at given historical moments they may also be harming to certain interests, insofar as they may "inhibit the formation of coalitions" (Bernstein 63); in other cases, they may ban the inclusion of certain individuals in a particular group if their individualities fail to comply with the essential requirements of the group's identity construction. One such group would then be exposed to losing potential constituents, hence being drained of the clout of large numbers. In this sense, if the Latino community were to disregard possible members on account of their lack of self-identification as Latinos, or their multicultural background, or their remote connection with the Hispanic world, it would be preventing itself from engaging a larger number of people, and, consequently, it would be inevitably bleeding itself, constricting its full capacity. For that same reason, at this precise historical moment when the number of multiracial people in the U.S. is consistently increasing, just as the number of multiracial Latinos is permanently growing, it appears much more advisable to "loosen" the category of Latino identity.

Such a loosening might help contest cultural sources of oppression, as Bernstein has suggested (62) by allowing activists (in this case Latino/a activists) to deploy their identities strategically. This playful deployment of identity would be inspired by the notion, previously mentioned, that identity is fluid, complex, can be one thing if the individual's opinion is taken into account, a very different thing when he/she is seen by others, can vary over the course of a person's life, etc. Given this vision of identity, a group based on a certain identity formation might admit, over time, that some features of its identity have lost salience; other characteristics, instead, have been added to the mixture; new actors may then be admitted to the group, their participation made perfectly legitimate in this particular social movement even if, in principle, they do not seem to be "directly implicated" (Berstein 63).

Social and demographic studies recently carried out by the Pew Research Center have shown that the increase in the number of multiracial Americans has become a consistent trend: "the share of multiracial babies has risen from 1% in 1970 to 10% in 2013. And with interracial marriages also on the rise, demographers expect this rapid growth to continue, if not quicken, in the decades to come" (Pew Research Center, "Multiracial in America" 3). In fact, the Census Bureau projects that "the multiracial population will triple by 2016" (7). Like all other ethnic groups, Latinos, in particular, are similarly following this trend: "When asked directly about their mixed-race background, about one-in-three (34%) Latino adults say they consider themselves to be mixed race—defined as belonging to more than one racial group, such as mestizo, mulatto or some other mixed race" (Pew Research Center, *Pew Social Trends* 7). But the report confirms that "[w]hen considering these racial identities through grandparents, the share of Latino adults with these [mixed-race] backgrounds increases" (*Pew Social Trends* 9). Mark Hugo López, director of Hispanic Research at the Pew Research Center, succinctly summarizes this tendency with these words: "Today, one-in-four Latino newlyweds marries someone who is not Latino" (2015). Besides, he adds, "[i]mmigration is no longer the driving force of the Hispanic community's growth. Instead, births are" (2015). As López points out, the increase in multiracial Latinos and the decrease in the number of first-generation immigrants will certainly have "implications for what Hispanics call themselves in the future" and for whether or not "they consider themselves Hispanic at all." In fact, he warns, "[a]lready two million Americans say they are not Hispanic although they indicate their ancestry includes roots in a Spanish-speaking country," a circumstance that leads him to state that, in the future, "as the number of interracial and interethnic couples grows and immigration slows," labels such as "'Hispanic' and 'Latino' may be used less" (2015).

None of this would matter, in principle, if discrimination on account of a person's race or ethnicity stopped existing in the U.S. However, if that were not the case, forming coalitions and resorting to identity politics would continue playing a vital role in the fight for equality. But how will people of Latino ancestry form coalitions? With whom will they forge alliances if they cease to identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino? Will the categories "multiracial" or "multiethnic" be valid for all ethnic minorities and for each and every challenge? They seem to be too encompassing, much too large umbrella terms to serve all purposes.[3] As a matter of fact, my point is that even in that foretold future when fewer and fewer people with a Hispanic background identify themselves with a Latino identity, the latter

[3] In the U.S., there has been a bitter controversy over the validity of those categories for a number of years, especially since the 2000 census. It has been noted that the "sharp rise of interracial marriages in the U.S. parallels a growing number of multiracial organizations committed to promoting 'a positive awareness of interracial and multicultural identity'" (Dagbovie 93), but also that many of these multiracial organizations "have attracted criticism for disassociating themselves from minority issues and concerns" (Dagbovie 93). Thus, many African Americans, for example, have been afraid that the label "multiracial" might be, in reality, "an escape from 'black'" (Dagbovie 93). Other people, for their part, "embraced the mixed-race movement as they saw its challenge to existing categories of race as useful to arguments hailing the end of race" (Young 289), but this rationale might also assist those conservatives who wish to end programs of what they term "'reverse discrimination' against whites" (Young 289). For more opinions on the negative and positive consequences triggered by the changes concerning race in the 2000 census, see Elizabeth A. Bowman's 2001 article.

might prove very useful at specific moments, when facing particular trials. However, Latino identity would necessarily have to be understood in a flexible way, one which recognized that, over time, the rules of engagement with a certain identity group will shift; that activists can use their identity in a variety of ways to legitimize their participation in any social movement and that, in fact, any individual within a group may have multiple context-specific racial identities over the course of his/her life; ultimately, it would have to concede that the "we" of all movements is but "a public performance, an outward show of solidarity" (Siegel 59).

It is in this vein that I want to bring up the case of Danzy Senna, a multiracial and multiethnic writer who, when discussing her identity, has never actually acknowledged her Mexican ancestry as being particularly influential over her individuality; yet, in her literary works, she has often shown deep concern with it. Hence, her Latino identity is by no means conventional, monolithic, fixed, unified, or permanently performed. On the contrary, it has surfaced at some points, only to disappear soon after; it has given rise to the most stereotypical portrayals of Latinos and to idiosyncratic representations of said ethnicity; in short, it has shown that, inevitably, in the case of identity, "bordering" and "de-bordering" processes (Marotta 2008) or identity shifts are constantly, and necessarily, taking place.

2. DANZY SENNA'S NON-FICTION: IMPERSONATING THE *INTENTIONAL HYBRID*, CELEBRATING THE *ENLIGHTENED MULATTO*

Danzy Senna may have learnt a lesson in how to form coalitions across identities from her father, Carl Senna, a black intellectual of the Civil Rights Movement whose work has been especially related to the plight of African-Americans.[4] However, at one point in his life, as his daughter recounts in her memoir *Where Did You Sleep Last Night?* (2009), he spent some time in New Mexico, "doing political organizing for a Chicano group" (130). His own mother, Anna Franklin, was an African-American, but his absent father, Francisco José Senna, was a white Mexican pugilist who seems to have had little interest in Anna, other than using her to get admittance into the U.S.[5] For that reason, he soon abandoned his wife and son, which explains why Carl Senna has no memories of his father (Senna 28), but only recollections of living in "Spanish Harlem, of Spanish voices" (93). Those voices and the vague proofs of his Mexican father's existence were enough, nonetheless, to

[4] See, for instance, his work *Colin Powell: A man of War and Peace* (1992), about the African-American general and statesman; also, *The Black Press and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (1993), where he discusses the evolution of the black press from 1827 to the present, paying special attention to its role in African Americans' struggle for civil rights.

[5] In Danzy Senna's words: "Francisco briefly married Anna in the forties in order to stay in the country, mistreated her, and abandoned her while she was pregnant" (*Where Did You Sleep Last Night?* 192).

help him connect, as an adult, with the Chicano Movement, and to establish links between the African-American identity he received from his mother and the Latino one he built upon his father's perfunctory influence.

Carl Senna thus passed onto his daughter a model of hybridity that could be said to fall under Homi Bhabha's category of the "postcolonial" or "intentional hybrid" (Bhabha 1994). As opposed to the modernist or organic hybrid, who is unconscious of his/her liberating potentialities and bases his/her identity on a set of essentialized identities (white/black, host/immigrant), and also contrary to the hybrid appropriated by cultural industries, whose purpose is to reinforce hegemonic messages, Bhabha's hybrid subject is aware of his/her radical subjectivity and threatens the binary logic of the modernist hybrid. He/she will refuse to be simply black or white; like Carl Senna, he can choose to be black and Latino, which further complicates a dualistic classificatory logic.

Danzy Senna, for her part, saw herself in the 1970s as being black, despite her multiracial background, because, in her own words, that was the only logic that Bostonian society recognized in the post-Civil Rights Movement era: "Before all of this radical ambiguity, I was a black girl" ("The Mulatto Millenium" 15). And she continues elaborating on this: "Not only was I black (and here I go out on a limb), but I was an enemy of the people. The mulatto people, that is. I sneered at those byproducts of miscegenation who chose to identify as mixed, not black" (15). The reason for this strict self-identification, as already mentioned, is historical: "In Boston circa 1975, mixed wasn't really an option" (15). Identifying as mixed, in fact, was for her "wishy-washy, an act of flagrant assimilation, treason, passing even" (15).

However, in later works she has come to reject identity politics, its rigid boundaries, its failure—often—to recognize the power dynamics involved in any social interaction, and how those dynamics may go beyond concepts of race; after all, she has argued, "America has always been 'the land of miscegenation'" (Milian Arias and Senna 447). She has also learnt to accept and celebrate her multiracial and multicultural background, a recognition which for her has stopped being a "treason," an attempt at "passing." This evolution in her thought, she herself has pointed out, has paralleled changes the U.S. has undergone as a nation: "We've only recently begun to acknowledge this fact, and lately to celebrate rather than deny mixture" (Milian Arias and Senna 447-448). Besides, this shift has led her to explore other issues: "I'm not so much interested in categorizing further" (which—incidentally—she does, however lightly or ironically, in "The Mulatto Millennium") or, she continues, in "adding new groups, so much as I am interested in deconstructing the premise of race itself" (448). And as identity and identity politics become "a tool rather than a definition of who you are" (Ashe and Senna 133), the possibility of strategically positioning oneself across social movements is made viable. In her case, such possibility is actually almost limitless, as it is constantly expanding with each new family addition:

> My family is today, through blood and marriage, African American, Mexican, Polish Jew, Pakistani Muslim, Cuban, Chinese, Japanese, English, and Irish. We are wandering, spreading, splintering apart, all the time. We are trying to reinvent

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 125-144

> ourselves with each new generation. We are blending new races with each new union. (*Where Did You Sleep Last Night?* 196)

Thus Danzy Senna has come to position herself as the ultimate postcolonial or intentional hybrid whose mere existence highlights the instability and porous nature of cultural and social boundaries. Of the two possible visions of the hybrid self that have been envisioned—that which sees the hybrid as a cultural homeless who is estranged and existentially lost, and that which, instead, considers the hybrid as an enlightened being with a wider horizon inasmuch as he/she can be an interpreter between different races or cultures (Marotta 2008)—, Senna's celebratory attitude towards her all-encompassing and ever-spreading family appears to fall under the latter. Her family, or so it seems, is presented as being able to synthesize and have access to an almost "total perspective" of all the mixing possibilities existent in the American society, what Vince Marotta has described as the hybrid's supposed ability to transcend "standpoint epistemologies," his/her flexibility to develop a "double articulation," that is, "an alternative mode of thinking unavailable to those who are fixed within their particularistic framework" (Marotta 308). But Danzy Senna does not simply gloat over the positive consequences brought to her by her multicultural and multiracial family. In fact, as she points out, breaking free of identity politics, in her case, "has not resulted in political apathy" or a mere congratulatory attitude, I might add, but rather it has given her "an awareness of the complexity and ambiguity of the world we have inherited—and the very real power relations we must transform" (Senna 20). It is those power relations that she chooses to be concerned with, rather than the specificities of skin color, hair texture, sexual orientation and so on. She has expressed these views in "Passing and the Problematic of Multiracial Pride" (2005), where she affirms that, at worse, identity politics can be "a distraction from real questions of power" (86), and even more eloquently in "To Be Real" (1995):

> In our post-modern condition we should no longer speak in terms of "men and women," "blacks and whites," "gay and straight," but rather in terms of "powerful" and "powerless," positions which are themselves in a constant state of flux and can become obscured if we are not vigilant. Any of us, despite our biological traits, can hold and abuse power at any one moment. As my mother [Fanny Howe] says, "Whoever can, will." ("To Be Real" 19)

Given that human condition pointed out by Senna's mother, Fanny Howe, that makes us prone to abuse others if the opportunity presents itself, it seems highly desirable to further explore the ways in which identity can be deployed strategically. Such exploration may give us clues to avoid the dangers of essentialist identity politics, whose reductionist nature poses an inherent hazard, as they require both inter-group othering (those who belong are set against those who do not belong because they are outside the group) and intra-ethnic othering (taking into account gender, age, and other markers, the members that do belong to the group also establish differences among themselves). Eventually, the strategic deployment of identity may allow for activists' intervention in movements in which they are not, in principle, directly or obviously implicated, but whose ultimate aim—that of destabilizing the status quo and its abusive control of those subjected to othering processes—may nonetheless be their goal too. Hershini B. Young has referred to such coalitions as communities based on "strategic common politics" (302) and has further described them as unions that are "noncompulsory" (302), that is, they are not "biologically determined via the logic of sameness" (297), as she puts it, but instead are brought about by "more deliberate, engaged interactions based on common agendas and concerns" (297).

In my view, it is exactly with these noncompulsory coalitions in mind that one is to go back to Danzy Senna's paradoxical attitude towards her Mexican ancestry: so influential in a great part of her literary production—as will later on be shown—, yet so scarcely relevant in her non-fiction works. In the latter, as it has been discussed, her expressed racial identity ranges from her total failure to acknowledge her Mexicanness in her childhood and adolescent years, when she irrevocably identified herself as black, to her belittling it in her essays and interviews, where she stresses her multiracial and multicultural background, only perfunctorily referring to her Mexicanness, if at all, as simply one more ingredient of her identity stew.

3. DANZY SENNA'S FICTION: REVEALING THE MUTT'S "TRAGEDY," INSCRIBING LATINIDADES

In her autobiographical essay "The Color of Love," Danzy Senna (2001) recalls her Irish grandmother, actress and playwright Mary Manning, whom she loved despite her racist attitudes and words. In particular, Senna remembers how her grandmother used to encourage her to pass as white: "she told me that I needn't identify as black, since I didn't look it" (52), and she likewise recollects one especially painful statement the old lady once addressed to her: "The *tragedy* about you [...] is that you are mixed" (52; emphasis added). Senna admits having answered back with anger: "You don't know the first thing about me" (52). But, in truth, it seems her grandmother did hit her right where it hurt most, as elsewhere in her fiction and autobiographical writings Senna acknowledges the pain of not looking black, and, what is worse, of actually looking white.

This could explain her adolescent desire of being Puerto Rican: "I remember lying in bed at night and smelling Spanish cooking from the apartment downstairs; I would close my eyes and fantasize that I was actually Puerto Rican, that everything else had been just a bad dream, that my name was Yolanda Rivera, and that I lived in the barrio" ("To Be Real" 9). Danzy Senna's own mother had similarly wished she were Latina, as having mulatto kids she often felt censored by the inquisitorial look of those who disapproved of interracial marriages; among Puerto Ricans, instead, she felt at ease: "In neighborhoods where there were Puerto Rican families with a wide range of colors and hair types among them, I felt safe; I was addressed in Spanish" (Howe XIX). In these instances, then, Latinidad is seen as a safe haven where mixed people can fit in; it is an identity that offers both Senna and her mother a sense of belonging. With her father, Carl Senna, she too experienced that need to

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 125-144

possess a Latina identity, as she explains in her memoir, *Where Did You Sleep Last Night?,* where she recalls the occasion when they were both trying to claim a prize and pretended to be Puerto Ricans, since that would supposedly give them more chances of looking like a couple, rather than the father and daughter that they were. Yet, they had to resort to a stereotypical representation of Puerto Ricans inasmuch as they could utter practically no words in Spanish other than a few "phrases that had been swallowed up into the larger American culture" (139).

The haven that Latinidad could potentially offer Danzy Senna, her mother and her father, is therefore not within their reach for lack of command of the Spanish language, but that does not put a stop to their wishful thinking because they perceive that their mixed condition would perfectly fit into a community of Puerto Ricans. Neither does that lack prevent some of Danzy Senna's semi-autobiographical characters from expressing similar desires or from being erroneously associated with Hispanics by others. In *Caucasia* (1998),[6] for instance, when Birdie (the seemingly white daughter of a white mother and an African-American father) goes to a Black Movement school for the first time, her classmates are displeased by her presence. One of them expresses his irritation by pointing out that theirs "was supposed to be a black school" (43) and by wondering, too, whether "[s]he a Rican or something?" (43).[7] A few months afterwards, when prompted by her mother to write her first novel, which she will title "El Paso," Birdie imagines a cast of characters that are Mexican-American. But ignorant as she is of Mexican-American culture, she portrays them in the most stereotypical way one can think of: "a religious, perpetually pregnant mother; a banjo-playing, sombrero-donning papa"; their teenage son, for his part, "gets in knife fights, beats and impregnates his girlfriend, and fails out of high school"; the latter, as could not be otherwise, is "sexy" and "abused" (171-172). What is especially poignant in this construction is that Birdie had seen "such a family on a news show" and had decided that she wanted "to be Mexican" (171). In other words, the knowledge she has acquired about Mexican-American culture is a deeply biased narrative (self-servingly offered by Anglo media) that combines violence and ignorance in equal shares. However, it is significant to notice that Birdie, who sees herself on the outskirts of society on account of her mixed condition and her mother's involvement in revolutionary activities, relates to that marginalized cast of characters and does not just feel sympathy for them, but wishes she were one of them. She is learning here to put identity politics at quarantine and to build, instead, across-group alliances.

---

[6] This novel has been deemed "quasi-autobiographical" by critic Geneva Cobb Moore (108).

[7] This is precisely the question that I have used as part of the title of this paper. Indeed, both Birdie's and Danzy Senna's mixed-race condition and ambiguous look complicate other people's attempts at categorizing them, which at times is considered problematic by the two of them, as in the scene that is being described; however, on other occasions, that same ambiguity can allow them to engage with different groups and, as it is being argued, permit their engagement with a variety of movements.

In her second novel, *Symptomatic* (2004), Danzy Senna presents a young mixed woman who, like Birdie at an earlier age, is also taken for a Latina by Andrew, a man she meets on the subway and with whom she subsequently has a sentimental relationship: "he found the courage to cross the car and asked me if I spoke Spanish" (2), to which she angrily answers, "*What makes you say that?*" (2; emphasis in the original). Yet, as she will later on admit, she herself had once imagined, as a little girl who had got lost, that she was Mexican. When her family finally found her, sitting at a bus stop, she stood there staring back at her relatives and at the policemen who had been helping them search for her, as if she "were waiting not for them but for a bus back to Tijuana where my real family lived" (133). Once more, Danny Senna is making a non-Latina character self-identify as a Latina at a moment of vulnerability, thus probing into ways in which a black and white identity can come to embrace Latinidad, or Latinidad accept the black experience as one of its essential components. Rather than seeing these instances as the mere result of confusion on the part of the ignorant white character (Andrew, in this case), or the tired and scared mulatto girl (the narrator as a child), my opinion is that all these cases could more fruitfully be analyzed as occasions when the mixed-race person is learning to question strict identities, to probe into the porous nature of cultural and social boundaries, to find the cracks of said boundaries, to discover the opportunities for going through de-bordering processes and building cross-movement alliances. It is perhaps not entirely accidental that such occasions coincide with phases when the protagonist sees herself in a vulnerable situation, as she can then more accurately perceive how others, in this case Latinos, systematically find themselves in similarly disadvantaged positions.

But putting aside the circumstances that Dany Senna herself (like some of her characters) has been identified by others as looking Latina, and that she may have wanted to invest in a non-essentialist identity which would allow her to engage with movements and groups in which she is not directly implicated, the fact still remains that Senna does have Mexican ancestry, even if it is a tenuous one: "My father's full name is Carl Francisco José Senna. He grew up not knowing his father, the source of his Spanish middle name, aware of only what his mother told him: he was the son of a Mexican boxer who had abandoned his wife with three kids and was never seen again" (*Where Did You Sleep Last Night?* 16). Over the years, the boxer, a "white Mexican" (31), became "a character out of a novel," "a man of myth" (33), who despite his flimsy and discontinued presence in his American family managed to captivate the imagination of both his son, Carl Senna, and the granddaughter he never met, Danzy Senna. The former has actually devoted an important part of his life to tracing the steps of his Mexican father in America and in Mexico, though his search has been rather fruitless. Of her father, Danzy Senna has said that he is "neither fully black nor fully Mexican nor fully white" (123), and also "half of everything and certain of nothing" (124). But any reader of Danzy Senna's memoir can perceive the commitment with which Carl Senna has pursued his Mexican ancestry, and the daughter's respect for that search, which she has made hers both at a personal and at a literary level. In fact, Danzy Senna sets off on a quest for the Mexican grandfather in a desperate attempt to try and understand who her father is and why he is the way he is, as well as the reasons for his meandering life, at times promising and visible, often disappointing and inconspicuous.[8] Through that search, she discovers her connections with the Deep South and similarly comes to acknowledge the lineage that unites her with people of Mexican descent whose voices reverberate in her imagination. That must be the reason why she repeats, on two separate occasions, that her father has recollections of "Spanish voices" in Spanish Harlem (*Where Did You Sleep Last Night?* 93), of "Hispanic people, Spanish voices" (160); also, as it has already been pointed out, it is that lineage that she seems to be in need of highlighting when she recalls the fact that her father once went to New Mexico to do "political organizing for a Chicano group" (130).

In no place is that involvement in her father's pursuit of the Mexican forefather made more apparent than in "Sugar Bowl" (2006), if here the quest has turned fully literary. The text, published in *Ploughshares*, a literary magazine, has the length and one might say the nature of what could well be defined as a short story, though it is presented as an excerpt from *The Searchers*, a novel in progress.[9] As the short narrative text that it is in its actual published form, it presents many features that would straightaway inscribe it in the field of Chicano Literature, if one were to disregard the fact that its author has not ascribed herself to that domain. Among those characteristics, it is worth pointing out its main theme, that is, Mexican immigration to the U.S. The text, in fact, features Hector, a young man from Puerto Morelos (Mexico) who, like the Trojan hero of the same name, will be confronted with a tragic fate. Senna's Hector, in particular, decides to cross the U.S.-Mexican border and settle in San Diego with his mind set on pursuing the American Dream. This goal had been systematically encouraged by an American he had met in his hometown, a man who kept speaking wonders of the chances his country offered to entrepreneurial leaders and brave spirits. The title of the narrative itself, "Sugar Bowl," mirrors this fantasized construction of America as the land of opportunities: the bowl, used for holding sugar or sugar cubes, stands for the North. It represents the epitome of the sweetest dreams of personal fulfillment, economic advance-

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 125-144

[8] In my view, two reviews of *Where Did You Sleep Last Night?* fail to grasp the importance given in Danzy Senna's memoir to recovering the Mexican grandfather, finding the truth about his identity, and unveiling his mysteries. David Matthews, for instance, argues that the book's main purpose lies in documenting the search for the father, that is, Danzy Senna's father; he argues that the memoir "ostensibly sets out to answer another question—'Don't you know who I am?'—posed by the author's father, Carl Senna, early in the book" (44), but he bypasses the circumstance that the search for the father will necessarily turn into a quest for Anna Franklin, the African-American grandmother (which is pointed out in Kelly's review (44) *and* for Francisco José Senna, the Mexican grandfather. On the contrary, I would assert that it is the search for the latter that becomes the book's leading force. After all, though little is known of the grandmother's early life, it is the grandfather that remains an utter mystery. The fact that he might be either a Mexican pugilist or an Irish priest represents a terrible threat: he alone can potentially alter the whole family's identity and compel them to reevaluate their self-perception.

[9] To my knowledge, however, the above-mentioned novel has not been published yet, though whether this is due to lack of completion on the author's part or absence of publisher I do not know.

ment, social climbing, freedom from penury and hardship, and so on; it becomes the perfect metaphor to embody that Southern craving for the North, immigrants' uncontrollable desire for a place in the American paradise.

Nonetheless, as in many other instances of Chicano literature, Danzy Senna's American "sugar bowl" seems to offer Hector no appeasement for his appetite for sugary things. In fact, Hector's illegal status, his lack of a proper supporting network in the new country, his insufficient command of the English language, and, last but not least, Americans' rejection of immigrants, their actual racism, all contribute to his inability to succeed. Ironically, then, the U.S. ends up being portrayed not as a sweetly welcoming territory, but as an aggressive country that leaves Hector, by the end of the narrative, in "a strange trance" ("Sugar Bowl" 162). The latter represents his disorientation, a feeling which is boosted by his sense of unbelonging, of having lost his dreams, of being in a cultural chaos where "garbled words" are "neither Spanish nor English" (162) and where, consequently, meaning is impossible to achieve. Worse, yet, in this final scene Hector is compared to "a dog" (162), which stands for his loss of human dignity in this environment that self-interestedly exploits his vulnerability.

The critique of American society and, in particular, of its treatment of Mexican immigrants is therefore present in Danzy Senna's text in much the same way as other Mexican-American writers have made it their main preoccupation. Of special interest to me are the strategies used by Senna to show how American imperialism has commodified Mexico, purposefully constructing it as an exotic touristic destination for middle and low-class Americans. Thus, Puerto Morelos, Hector's hometown, is said to have received "a starred review" (144) in the tourists' guide, "as if it were a restaurant, calling it 'picturesque' and 'swimmable' and 'cheap'" (144). Gringos go there "to take snapshots of themselves and blow smoke in his face and laugh at his 'bobo sneakers' and talk to him like he was a village idiot" (144). Because it is cheap, because its people can easily be racialized, considered inferior, certainly poorer, Puerto Morelos can safely be turned into a touristic resort for Americans, this being the ultimate colonizing strategy. Simultaneously, when Mexicans enter the U.S., Americans denigrate them, but accept a commercial relationship with them as long as it keeps the balance tipped in their favor. In this sense, Gail Grinds, the owner of the Loma Lodge (an apartment complex in San Diego where Hector rents a room), confesses that she prefers Mexican guests to American ones, as the former are illegal and rarely complain about anything: "Half the motherfuckers in here got water dripping off their backs," she states, but she does not mind, she adds, "[l]ong as the money is U.S. Tender" (144). The disempowerment of Mexicans once they reach the U.S. is hence achieved by means of the previously mentioned exoticization of Mexico and its people, as well as by the adoption, on the part of the American characters, of a xenophobic and classist attitude which is revealed in their reductionist approach to Mexicans, who are collectively seen as "wetbacks" with "water dripping off their backs," that is, as poor illegal immigrants. Besides this, there is also a racializing process of Mexicans which, in the text, is subtly carried out through the dog allegory which structures the narrative from the beginning until the end.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 125-144

In his pursuit of the American Dream in San Diego, Hector has brought along his own pet, Ruby, a Mexican street dog. Ruby's mixed race contrasts sharply with the pit bulls and teacup poodles that Gail and her son raise in their complex: they "only got pure breeds" (145),[10] she boasts to Hector. In this way, she introduces a hierarchy of the races: at the top, the white and blond Anglos who raise pure breeds; at the bottom, the brown Mexicans and their mixed stray dogs, a parallelism that is emphasized in the final scene when Hector is said to resemble a dog himself. This racial hierarchy is systematically reinforced throughout the text in various ways. The dog allegory, for one, is a strong reminder of the power granted to each ethnic group, but not the unique one. Whites are the only people who possess property in the microcosm of the narrative (Gail owns the Loma Lodge; a white racist old man has his own detached house); they are commuters with office jobs; they are the policemen in charge of law and order; they are the bosses, the ones who distribute jobs or fail to do so. On the contrary, Mexicans are the wetbacks who will not dare to complain about injustices; the gullible workers who, despite having no citizenship rights, accept to canvass for an organization that is supposedly trying to protect American consumers' rights—and get no money after spending a whole day doing so; they are the "Indios" (159) that patiently wait for some Anglo to "hire them for day labor" (159). Theirs is the lack of rights, of jobs, of power, of dignity. Each day, Hector thinks, brings "a new degradation" (148) for him: soon after his arrival in San Diego, he is informed by Gail that most Mexicans living in the U.S. have swum across the Rio Grande, as was stated before; a few weeks into his stay in the U.S., he is exposed to the obnoxious racist comments of the old white man who shouts at him that Mexicans "[c]ome creeping like cockroaches into our country, can't speak a dime of English, poppin' out babies like there was no tomorrow" (154). Thus he sees himself falling from being considered a wetback to being called a cockroach. The downgrading is palpable.

Given this power dynamics between Anglos and Mexicans, it is then only normal to see white people's total disregard for Mexicans' feelings and welfare. When Hector arrives at the Loma Lodge, in fact, Gail welcomes him to San Diego (142), but her salutation is self-interested: it is her prospect of having one more guest that she is celebrating, while her concern with Hector's wellbeing is null, as demonstrated by the ironic circumstance that, as she spoke to him, her "[f]alse teeth moved in and out of her face" (142); hence her body, with its fake appendages, contradicted the words she had uttered. A similar disregard for Hector's welfare is observed in the scene in which he comes back to the lodge, after a day of unpaid

---

[10] It is worth noticing that these pure breeds do not merely suggest racial superiority when opposed to Hector's mutt, but also point out at two stereotypical representations of America. On the one hand, the teacup poodles could be said to stand for an America that has been idealized as the Promised Land—that is, the "sugar bowl" the title of the narrative ironically alludes to—; on the other, the pit bulls, a race popularly—if perhaps erroneously—viewed as being aggressive, can easily be associated with an America that relentlessly fortifies itself against the arrival of undesirable immigrants, i.e. those who are perceived as being difficult or even impossible to assimilate.

work as a canvasser, only to discover that Gail's son has let Ruby run away. The dog had been Hector's support until then, the unique comfort he had had in this careless and insensitive country; despite his lack of pedigree, he had been Hector's precious jewel. Gone is now that last proof of his own value and dignity, the one being that had enjoyed and cherished his company. His desperate efforts to find his dog are totally fruitless and, what is worse, the narrative points at two possible ways out of that desperation, both of which seem equally undesirable: on the one hand, he appears to be harboring a desire for vengeance against Gail which might result in his committing some crime (he recalls holding a tiny poodle Gail had once handed to him, and thinking how easily its legs would snap if he twisted them); on the other, he dangerously approaches and develops an interest in the members of a religious sect whose headquarters are right behind the Loma Lodge. The text appears to suggest that, in the mist of such an aggressive environment, Hector will never be capable of successfully moving forward, but will only be able to veer towards crime or a brainwashing organization.

The fact that Hector's dog was some stray dog, a mongrel that literally gets lost through Gail's son's carelessness (itself a proof of his racism), acquires an allegorical dimension in Danzy Senna's narrative: like Ruby, Hector is bound to lose his bearings, as well as his dreams and his sense of self-worth. Here the motif of the stray dog is used to portray Anglos' racism towards people of Mexican descent, but, interestingly enough, it is a recurrent motif in Senna's work, one, however, she has resorted to elsewhere to comment on the challenges faced by biracial people like herself. In *Caucasia* (1998), for instance, Birdie points out that her father had often stated that his kids "were going to be proof that race mixing produced superior minds, the way a mutt is always more intelligent than a purebred dog" (26).[11] And in the short story "The Land of Beulah" (2011) the protagonist, herself a mixed-race woman, learns from an acquaintance that "[f]ifty percent of all so-called purebred are actually mixed. The other fifty percent—the truly pure ones—are stupid and sickly, and susceptible to glandular problems" (53). This theoretical superiority of mixed-race dogs (and, by implication, of mixed-race people) is nonetheless put into question by the short story, which presents a nerve-raking unruly mongrel and a biracial dog owner who secretly resorts to violence against said dog to quell her rage. Despite their incompatibility, both have two important things in common. For one thing, neither of them looks mixed, so people can project their own fantasies onto them (35) or, in the case of the woman, as her ex-boyfriend suggests, she may decide

[11] This statement is, in fact, a commonly held belief about mutts. In "The Mulatto Millennium" (1998), Danzy Senna points out that she has read this same idea on a flyer on biracial superiority: "Ever wonder why mutts are always smarter than full-bred dogs?" (14). Throughout the essay, Senna shows her uneasiness with this kind of "mulatto supremacist" discourse and, consequently, adopts an ironic stance towards it: "According to the racial zodiac, 2000 is the official Year of the Mulatto. Pure breeds (at least the black ones) are out and hybridity is in. America loves us in all of our half-cast glory" (12). As a keen observer, she carefully considers various symptoms of this new trend, but is not quite sure whether she wants "to join or stay at the heels of this group" (13).

which identity she chooses to perform (40). More importantly, both characters have experienced rejection and abandonment, and both have proved all stereotypes wrong.

It seems clear, then, that throughout her works Senna uses the mutt vs. purebred motif to ironically comment on American society's racist attitudes and stereotypes. And just as being a mutt in her work, despite its alleged superior intelligence and health, does not result in having any luckier fate but may actually involve much more suffering, so too mixed-race people may fail to display higher moral values, but they have greater chances of ending up deeply scarred by the unwelcoming environment they live in. What I find especially noteworthy is the fact that Danzy Senna makes no difference between people who are the result of black and white parents (and are thus discriminated against on account of their biracial nature), and those who are in a position of disempowerment on account of their lack of citizenship rights, their immigrant status, or their low-class origin. By literally and metaphorically representing the dispossessed—the underdog—as the stray dog or the mutt, she reiterates her conviction that it is no longer convenient to adhere to strong identity constructs ("men vs. women," "blacks vs. whites," "gay vs. straight"), but it is preferable to speak in terms of "powerful" and "powerless" positions. From this belief may spring her concern with the Chicano cause, her participation in the enrichment of the body of Chicano literature, her realization that the black-and-white girl is in much the same vulnerable condition as Hector, the Mexican immigrant, and that both can therefore be represented through the metaphor of the stray dog.

4. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: CLAIMING THE SPACE OF THE AFRO LATINA, FOSTERING SOLIDARITY

I realize that, in this paper, by projecting a Latina identity onto Danzy Senna, I have acted just like the characters in "The Land of Beulah" (2011), who look at the story's stray dog and see what they want to see: "The bitch was a mystery. She didn't look mixed, more like some breed that hadn't yet been discovered. Strangers on the street were forever trying to guess her background. They studied her appearance and behavior for clues, but with each guess her identity seemed to shift. In the face of such uncertainty, people saw what they wanted to see" (35). Yet, I sincerely think that my projection is made on the bases of concrete traces: those non-Latino/a characters of hers that have fantasized about being Latinos/as; her obsessive search for the Mexican grandfather she never met; finally, the Mexican characters she has imagined and built up.

Besides, one is to concur with Lari Harrison-Kahan that race—and I would add ethnicity—"is not clear-cut and fixed, but multiple and 'in motion'" (Harrison-Kahan 45), a conclusion she reaches after stating that in "post-ethnic America," "identities are chosen, rather than assigned, voluntarily rather than involuntarily" (35), and also after recalling an anecdote from *Black, White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Shelf* (2001), a memoir written by Rebecca Walker, who happens to be a childhood friend of Danzy Senna's. In this book, Walker—the daughter of an African-American mother and a Jewish father—challenges received notions on race and ethnicity when she says that, walking in the Bronx, she feels as she truly is: "a Puertoriquena, a mulatta, breathed out with all that Spanish flavor" (Walker 197-198). For Walker, her specific identification with Hispanic identity is related to class consciousness (she feels closer to those who live in the Bronx than to her upper-class relatives on her father's side), but also with the fact that among Puertorriqueños her difference ceases to be relevant or to call for an explanation. That illuminates, in Harrison-Kahan's words, the reasons why "she ultimately defines her multiplicity through the representation of the 'mestiza' rather than that of the Jew" (Harrison-Kahan 37). And though it is true that Danzy Senna herself has never overtly engaged with an Afro Latina identity the way Rebecca Walker has done (which she might have rightfully done so, given her African-American and Mexican ancestry), she has *voluntarily chosen* to establish that connection in the various literary ways that this paper has pointed out. It rests now to justify the benefits of such association for the field of Latino Studies. I owe it to Danzy Senna, who has stated that when people ask her what she identifies with, instead of giving "a simple one-word answer" ("Passing and the Problematic of Passing" 86), she prefers to "turn the tables and ask them why they want to know", thus interrogating "their interest in [her] identity before answering" (86). Here is my answer to her, then; here are the reasons why I have chosen to build up a literary case for her Afro Latinidad.

First and foremost, searching for traces in Danzy Senna's works to make a case for her Afro Latinidad allows all those interested in the field of Latino Studies to question the existence of monolithic identities, and to avoid the dangers of essentializing *the* Chicano or *the* Latino experience, of reducing it, compartmentalizing it, defining it in exclusivist terms, leaving some people out of the club, including only those who abide by the strictest definition. Second, the above-mentioned search may trigger a fruitful discussion about the convenience of going through bordering and de-bordering processes depending on the particular goals a given group is set on achieving; in other words, it may help us reflect on the shifts that occur in any given identity, personal or collective, over the course of time, and therefore the need to constantly negotiate identities, symbols, actions and strategies of resistance. Third, it may hopefully bring to the focus the existence and challenges of the Afro Latino/a identity, which is often obscured, or discounted, in both the African-American and the Latino communities, as if a blending of those two identities were incompatible. In the 1980s Gloria Anzaldúa herself voiced this concern when she denounced, in *Borderlands* (1987), that, as Chicanos, "we hardly ever own our Black ancestry" (85). More recently, Afro-Latina writer Icess Fernández Rojas (2014) has denounced that many Latinos actually disregard her Afro identity: "It's as if for some of my hermanos y hermanas, one part of me, the Latina part, is worth more than the Afro part" (n.p.), which has made her wonder if being Latina excludes her from being black. "In some circles, yes," she has sadly answered (n.p.). Having strong voices that spoke from the Afro Latina standpoint would certainly help correct that imbalance that tends to make one scale, the Afro or the Latino, weigh more than the other. Though apparently unconscious of her power, Danzy Senna might well represent one such voice.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 125-144

Last, but not least, incorporating Danzy Senna into the Hispanic world may actually capture with greater accuracy the current sociological reality of Hispanics who, according to demographic studies, are becoming more and more multiracial, showing increasingly complicated identities, and are less frequently self-identifying as Hispanics. After all, as Rubén Martínez put it in "Technicolor," his autobiographical piece for the book *Half + Half. Writers on Growing Up Biracial + Bicultural* (1998), analyzing identity in terms of dualities is neither feasible nor realistic. "America is becoming a mestizo nation" (262), he claims, and binary notions are better discarded: "Some years ago, at a point where I was beginning to tire of the binary notion of cultural identity, I wrote a poem that included the line 'I am much more than two,' aping, of course, our bawdy bard, Whitman ('I am large, I contain multitudes'). And thus began what I see as the third phase of my cultural maturation, in which I'm exploring the interconnectedness of it all" (258).

Similarly, in her piece "A White Woman of Color," published, like Martínez's, in *Half + Half...* (1998), Julia Álvarez has strongly advocated a mestizo America, and has done so on the grounds that reductionism is both inexact and dangerous:

> I hope that as Latinos, coming from so many different countries and continents, we can achieve *solidarity* in this country as the mix that we are. I hope we won't shoot ourselves in the foot in order to maintain some sort of false "purity" as the glue that holds us together. Such an enterprise is bound to fail. We need each other. We can't afford to reject the darker or lighter varieties [...]. This reductiveness is absurd when we are talking about a group whose very definition is that of a mestizo race, a mixture of European, indigenous, African, and much more. [...] If we cut them off, we diminish our richness and we plant a seed of ethnic cleansing [...]. (148-149; emphasis added)

It is precisely that solidarity that I have sought to invoke by questioning the boundaries of Latino identity and strategically blurring its limits, thus allowing for Danzy Senna's works to enrich the corpus of Latino literature and, more specifically, to strengthen the body of Afro Latino literature. Ultimately, my goal has been to raise questions about the dangers, in Latino Studies and elsewhere, of falling prey to the crippling effects of both racial/ethnic monomania and all-encompassing categories, such as "multiracial," that may lead to the invisibility of certain identity threads. Senna's *Symptomatic* (2004) has been praised for articulating "the need for new models of community based on noncompulsory politicized identifications and strategies for redressing historical injustice" (Young 288). My contention is that she manages to do that in every single work: sometimes shedding more light on the injustices experienced by blacks and mixed-race people; at other times, choosing to stress the challenges faced by Hispanics, immigrants, and, even more generally, the disenfranchised. The remarkable feature is that, however she deploys identity, she always veers from the apolitical stance, plunging instead into highly politicized waters.

Reviews sent to author: 2 December 2016
Revised paper accepted for publication: 20 March 2017

WORKS CITED

Álvarez, Julia. "A White Woman of Color." *Half + Half. Writers on Growing Up Biracial + Bicultural,* edited by Claudine Chiawei O'Hearn, Pantheon Books, 1998, pp. 139-149.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Ashe, Bertram and Danzy Senna. "Passing as Danzy Senna." *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art* 36 (2002): pp. 125-145.

Bernstein, Mary. "Identity Politics." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): pp. 47-74.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture.* Routledge, 1994.

Bowman, Elizabeth Atkins. "Black Like Who? Young authors stir up the melting pot of racial identity." *Black Issues Book Review* 3.1 (2001). https://law-journals-books.vlex.com/vid/black-like-who.

Dagbovie, Sika Alaine. "Fading to White, Fading Away: Biracial Bodies in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*." *African American Review* 40.1 (2006): pp. 93-109.

Fernández Rojas, Icess. "Does Being Latina Exclude Me From Being Black?" *The Huffington Post.* 12 November 2014. https://icessfernandez.com/2013/06/21/does-being-latina-exclude-me-from-being-black/.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation." *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, edited by Houston A. Baker, Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg, University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 210-222. First published in: *Framework: The Journal of Cinema & Media* 36 (1989): pp. 68-82.

Harris, David R. and Jeremiah Joseph Sim. "Who Is Multiracial? Assessing the Complexity of Lived Race." *American Sociological Review* 67.4 (2002): pp. 614-627.

Harrison-Kahan, Lori. "Passing for White, Passing for Jewish: Mixed Race Identity in Danzy Senna and Rebecca Walker." *Melus* 30.1 (2005): pp. 19-48.

Howe, Fanny. *The Wedding Dress. Meditations on Word and Life.* University of California Press, 2003.

Kelly, Kathleen A. "Akin to One's Skin." *The North American Review* 294.1 (2009): pp. 44-45.

López, Mark Hugo. "Hispanic and Latino Identity Is Changing." *The New York Times*. 17 June 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/06/16/how-fluid-is-racial-identity/hispanic-and-latino-identity-is-disappearing.

Marotta, Vince P. "The Hybrid Self and the Ambivalence of Boundaries." *Social Identities* 14.3 (2008): pp. 295-312.

Martínez, Rubén. "Technicolor." *Half + Half. Writers on Growing Up Biracial + Bicultural,* edited by Claudine Chiawei O'Hearn, Pantheon Books, 1998, pp. 245-264.

Matthews, David. "Searching for Father." *The New York Times. Sunday Book Review*. 6 August 2009. https://mobile.nytimes.com/2009/08/09/books/review/Matthews-t.html.

Milian Arias, Claudia M. and Danzy Senna. "An Interview with Danzy Senna." *Callaloo* 25.2 (2002): pp. 447-452.

Moore, Geneva Cobb. "Caucasia's Migrating Bodies: Lessons in American History and Postmodernism." *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 36.2 (2011): pp. 108-118.

Pew Research Center. "Chapter 7: The Many Dimensions of Hispanic Racial Identity." *Pew Social Trends*. 11 June 2015. http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/06/11/chapter-7-the-many-dimensions-of-hispanic-racial-identity/.

—— "Multiracial in America. Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers." *Pew Social Trends*. 11 June 2015. http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/06/11/multiracial-in-america/.

Schwalm, Helga. "Autobiography." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. 2014. http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/autobiography.

Senna, Carl. *Colin Powell: A Man of War and Peace*. Walker & Co., 1992.

—— *The Black Press and the Struggle for Civil Rights (The African-American Experience)*. Franklin Watts, 1993.

Senna, Danzy. "To Be Real." *To Be Real. Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism,* edited by Rebecca Walker, Anchor Books, 1995, pp. 5-20.

—— *Caucasia*. Riverhead, 1998.

—— "The Mulatto Millenium." *Half + Half. Writers on Growing Up Biracial + Bicultural,* edited by Claudine Chiawei O'Hearn, Pantheon Books, 1998, pp. 12-27.

—— "The Color of Love." *The Beacon Best of 2001: Great Writing by Women and Men of All Colors and Cultures,* edited by Junot Díaz, Beacon Press, 2001, pp. 49-54. First published in *O: The Oprah Magazine* 1.1 (2000).

—— *Symptomatic*. Riverhead, 2004.

—— "Passing and the Problematic of Multiracial Pride (or, Why One Mixed Girl Still Answers to Black)". *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture,* edited by Harry J. Elam, Jr. and Knennell Jackson, The University of Michigan Press, 2005, pp. 83-87.

—— "Sugar Bowl." *Ploughshares* 32.1 (2006): pp. 142-162.

—— *Where Did You Sleep Last Night? A Personal History*. Picador, 2009.

—— "The Land of Beulah." *Your Are Free. Stories*. Riverhead, 2011, pp. 35-65.

Siegel, Deborah L. "The Legacy of the Personal: Generating Theory in Feminism's Third Wave." *Hypatia* 12.3 (1997): pp. 46-75.

Walker, Rebecca. *Black, White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Shelf.* Riverhead, 2001.

Young, Hershini Bhana. "Black 'Like Me": (Mis) Recognition, the Racial Gothic, and the Post-1967 Mixed-Race Movement in Danzy Senna's *Symptomatic*." *African American Review* 42.2 (2008): pp. 287-305.

SHERMAN ALEXIE'S AUDACIOUS REVAMPS OF NATIVE AMERICAN IDENTITY IN *THE TOUGHEST INDIAN IN THE WORLD**

Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz
University of Deusto, Bilbao

Abstract

Sherman Alexie's collection of short stories *The Toughest Indian in the World* (2000) offers one of the sharpest and most touching renditions of the challenges faced by Native Americans in the new millennium. The reader soon realizes that Indians from different tribes are pigeonholed as representatives of a particular ethnic and/or social category, which reduces the complexity of their character and restricts their possibilities for meaningful transformation. Although the clashes are usually against white Americans, there are also instances in which their own people reject them or question their roots for various reasons. Alexie's stories can be said to have a liberating power as they poke fun at the pseudo-scientific discourses that attempt to classify human groups into closed categories.

Keywords: Sherman Alexie, *The Toughest Indian in the World*, Native American Literature, identity issues, trickster aesthetics.

Resumen

La colección de relatos *The Toughest Indian in the World* (2000) de Sherman Alexie ofrece uno de los retratos más agudos y emotivos de los problemas que asedian a los indios americanos hoy en día. Enseguida observamos que los nativos de diferentes tribus son encasillados como pertenecientes a categorías étnicas y sociales concretas, lo cual limita tanto la complejidad de sus personalidades y como la posibilidad de cualquier transformación significativa. Aunque sus choques son casi siempre con los blancos, hay también momentos en que se ven rechazados por su gente que pone en duda sus raíces. Los relatos de Alexie poseen un poder liberador ya que ridiculizan los discursos pseudo-científicos que intentan clasificar a los seres humanos en categorías estancas.

Palabras clave: Sherman Alexie, *The Toughest Indian in the World*, literature nativo-americana, cuestiones de identidad, la estética del trickster.

My father never taught me about hope. Instead, he continually told me that our salmon—our hope—would never come back, and though such lessons may seem cruel, I know enough to cover my heart in any crowd of white people.

The Toughest Indian in the World

Thomas: But...but, it's the United States.
Lucy: Damn right it is! That's as foreign as it gets. I hope you two got your vaccinations.

Smoke Signals

1. INTRODUCTION

As Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-the-Fire—the two protagonists of Chris Eyre's and Sherman Alexie's award-winning, all-Native film *Smoke Signals* (1998)—are leaving their Coeur d'Alene reservation in Idaho to travel to Arizona to retrieve the ashes and belongings of Victor's father, they bump into their friends and cousins Lucy and Velma driving their car in reverse on a reservation road. Velma asks where the odd pair of wanderers are going and whether they are carrying their passports, for, as she points out: "Yeah, you're leaving the rez and going into a whole different country, cousin" (Alexie, *Smoke* 40). Thomas, as the second epigraph above plainly shows, is quite surprised by Velma's comment, since they have no intention of crossing any international border. However, Lucy's ironic words make it clear that for many Native Americans the experience of leaving their reservation behind may be as trying as that of a migrant or an exile who, for whatever reasons, is compelled to abandon his or her homeland for an unknown place. Indeed, Lucy's witty remark begins to make sense later on in the movie when we watch the two young Indians repeatedly crashing against the huge barriers of prejudice and discrimination created by a context of "ongoing colonialism and [...] the history of Native American images in the media" (Hearne xx), primarily, among white Americans. Over a decade ago, I argued elsewhere that Eyre's and Alexie's film offered, besides the venturesome and entertaining journey of the two unusual "heroes," an invaluable opportunity "to investigate the potential of a variety of situations for the subversion of traditional stereotypes and the (re)presentation of a realistic portrayal of Native Americans as complete and complex human beings" (Ibarrola 152). Much the same thing could be claimed in regard to Alexie's 2000 collection of short stories *The Toughest Indian in the World*, which also introduces the reading public to the kind of Native Americans that readers have rarely encountered in fiction (and film) and who, despite the

* A shorter version of this article was presented at the EAAS biennial conference held in The Hague, the Netherlands, in April 2014. My sincerest gratitude to my co-panelists for their enlightening comments and suggestions to improve my original paper.

hard fact that they are Indians, still long for love, recognition, and trust. Duncan Campbell wrote in an article in *The Guardian* that in Alexie's writing,

> the native American characters are not particularly stoic or noble or tragic, as they have often been portrayed in 20th-century American literature. They may be gay intellectuals or thwarted basketball players, middle-class journalists or elderly movie extras, boozy rock musicians or alienated construction workers, or reservation girls whose cars only go in reverse because all the other gears are broken. (Campbell n.p.)

In spite of the immense variety of indigenous, white, and mixed-blood characters that we meet in *The Toughest Indian*, one question that seems to unfold diffusely in the nine stories of the collection—except for the concluding chapter, in which it is overtly formulated several times—is "What is an Indian?" and, also, the kind of exigencies that this identity dilemma poses for those concerned. In fact, the Native protagonists of all these narratives seem to be aware of the difficulties in remaining faithful to their roots in a country that constantly reminds them of their cultural difference and of the possible hazards and "advantages" that may derive from that condition. As novelist Jonathan Penner noted in a review of the collection, "Being Indian in America is not, for them, an easy condition. Race shapes their entire lives, including the search for love" (n.p.). Indeed, a pattern—or leitmotif—that underlies several stories in the collection is the inner struggle faced by half-assimilated Native Americans from different tribes when they realize that the lifestyle they have chosen is pulling them increasingly away from the values and traditions that their ancestors and co-ethnics would seem to cherish. More troubling still is the fact that they become convinced that their behavior is deeply influenced by the oversimplified perceptions that the mainstream society—or white America—has of them in particular situations. Thus, the protagonist of the opening story, Mary Lynn, justifies her outrageous decision "to have sex with an indigenous stranger" (*Toughest* 1) just because she wishes to transcend the expectations that others would have regarding her ethnicity and her marriage with a white man:

> [...] Yes, she was most certainly a Coeur d'Alene—she'd grown up on the rez, had been very happy during her time there, and had left without serious regrets or full-time enemies—but that wasn't the only way to define her. She wished that she could be called Coeur d'Alene as a description, rather than as an excuse, reasons, prescription, placebo, prediction, or diminutive. She only wanted to be understood as eccentric and complicated! (2)

Like the animosity felt by many of his characters, Alexie has often declared in interviews that much of his indignation comes from the tendency of both outsiders and insiders to perceive Indians in terms of a few essentializing features that reduce their complexity and trammel their possibilities of transformation: "There are more rules to being an Indian than inside an Edith Wharton novel about which fork to use at dinner" (Nelson 42). In the following pages, some of the injurious stereotypes and racialized representations of Natives that Alexie tries to combat in *The Toughest Indian* will be explored, as well as the kind of ethics and aesthetics that he develops in order to disrupt conventional ways of thinking about Native Americans and to foster a reevaluation of their place in current American society. Coulombe has identified various types of humor and a highly dialogical imagination as the key instruments that Alexie employs to allow his "Indian characters to connect to their heritage in new ways and [to encourage] non-Natives readers to reconsider simplistic generalizations" (12). As this scholar sees it, "Whereas humor can provide a method of self-defense in a divisive world, it also offers the opportunity to surmount the false distinctions that separate people and reinforce the connections that demonstrate our unity and equality" (Coulombe 138). However, it will become evident that Alexie's iconoclastic intervention in the politics of representation of Native identity is far from offering any easy answers to the challenges posed by the dissemination of flat or blatantly distorted images of Indians by the media and the mainstream culture (cf. Shanley 28-30). Ultimately, the attempt at "indigenizing" conventions of storytelling in *The Toughest Indian* proves particularly successful because, while subverting traditional stereotypes of Natives as brave warriors and nobly-vanishing communities, it presents a gallery of characters extremely human in their boldness and vulnerability, in their innate intelligence but also their common ineptitude.

2. NOXIOUS STEREOTYPES AND OTHER HAZARDS OF MAINSTREAM CULTURE

Stuart Hall has rightly argued that racialized regimes of representation—typical in imperialist and colonial contexts—have the effect of essentializing, reducing, and naturalizing a set of (mostly unflattering) features of the cultural Other. According to Hall, "Stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature" (257). Several critics and reviewers of Alexie's fiction have remarked that one of his main aims has been to counter the effects of what Gerald Vizenor has called "the Manifest Manners of domination" that Euro-Americans have practiced against colonized Others and to reconstruct "a sense of self and of community in the wake of conquest" (Andrews 49). As happens to Mary Lynn in "Assimilation," the opening story of *The Toughest Indian*, many other Natives see their ethnicity reduced to "an excuse, reasons, prescription, placebo, prediction, or diminutive" (2), so as to preserve certain mythologies that constrain their chances of developing more free and equal identity projects. Stultifying stereotypes such as the stoic warrior, the noble redskin, the doe-eyed princess or the vanishing Indian are seen to make it difficult for contemporary Native Americans to find a usable past that they can rely on to deal with their problems in the 21st century. In Vizenor's words, "postindian warriors" need to ensnare the contrived mythologies and stereotypes of the past by means of their new storytelling strategies in order to revamp their own "simulations of survivance":

> The postindian warriors bear their own simulations and revisions to contend with manifest manners, the "authentic" summaries of ethnology, and the curse of rationalism and modernism in the ruins of representation. The wild incursions of

> the warriors of survivance undermine the simulations of the unreal in the literature of dominance. (Vizenor 12)

In a discussion of Alexie's filmmaking ventures, I contended that he could easily be considered a "postindian warrior" of sorts since, apart from undermining many of those "simulations of the unreal," he managed to endow his art with various "palliative and integrative elements" that contribute to bearing out new cultural intersections and dialogues uncommon in the works of other minority writers (Ibarrola 154). In narratives such as "Class" or the title story of the collection, Alexie can be said to portray middle-class, urban American Indians who, like Mary Lynn, hope to salvage a sense of the tribal identity they gave up when they decided to cross certain ethnic boundaries to integrate into the mainstream society. Nevertheless, it soon becomes evident that this is not an easy task, for they are themselves "prisoners" of a number of assumptions that prevent them from seeing how they can regain their place in a community from which they have gradually drifted away. The protagonist of "The Toughest Indian in the World," for instance, is a Spokane Indian who has become a journalist on an all-white newspaper in Seattle, in which he gets "all the shit jobs": "[...] there is no journalism more soul-endangering to write than journalism that aims to please" (25). The first pages of the story are packed with flashbacks and symbolism relating to the lessons that the young reporter received from his father concerning the white man. As the first epigraph to this article shows, his progenitor was positive that, whenever white people "get the chance," they "will shoot you in the heart" just because "they'll still smell the salmon on you, the dead salmon" (21). Although the protagonist has grown estranged from his reservation and his people, he retains, out of some kind of nostalgia, a habit he inherited from his father: picking up Indian hitchhikers standing beside the road. The "expatriate" Native reporter is convinced that these rides accompanied by co-ethnics in his gorgeous Toyota Camry will allow him to keep some connection with his people, even if his colleagues at the newspaper think of the practice as dangerous and utterly absurd:

> At the newspaper where I work, my fellow reporters think I'm crazy to pick up hitchhikers. They're all white and never stop to pick up anybody, let alone an Indian. After all, we're the ones who write the stories and headlines: HITCHHIKER KILLS HUSBAND AND WIFE, MISSING GIRL'S BODY FOUND, RAPIST STRIKES AGAIN. If I really tried, maybe I could explain to them why I pick up any Indian, but who wants to try? Instead, if they ask I just give them a smile and turn back to my computer. My coworkers smile back and laugh loudly. (24)

The story takes an unexpected turn when the protagonist gives a lift to a tough Lummi boxer who has made a career of fighting other Indians around the reservations: "I felt as Indian as Indian gets, driving down the road in a fast car, chewing [deer] jerky, talking to an indigenous fighter" (27). The protagonist is seen to reconnect tenuously with his Native roots during his conversation with the deeply-scarred, muscular fighter, and the two decide, in a rather forlorn manner, to have a homosexual encounter in a motel room. Lisa Tatonetti has cogently argued that the central character's "search for indigeneity" is intertwined in this story with “a simultaneous exploration of queer desire” (206) for a co-ethnic whom he views as “a warrior in the old days” (*Toughest* 30). The ending of the story is rather ambiguous because, while it is true that the closing lines suggest an undeniable epiphany connecting his sexual experience to some sort of ethnic renewal, the narrator also wonders “what [is] going to happen next” (33) after his brief affair with the warrior:

> [...] I woke early the next morning, before sunrise, and went out into the world. I walked past my car. I stepped onto the pavement, still warm from the previous day’s sun. I started walking. In bare feet, I traveled upriver toward the place where I was born and will someday die. At that moment, if you had broken open my heart you could have looked inside and seen the thin white skeletons of one thousand salmon. (34)

Nancy Cahoon has observed that, like the title story, most of the other pieces in the collection “deal with urban Indians who are straddling two worlds: an intimate but indigent life on the reservation and an affluent but strange and sometimes hostile white middle-class existence” (n.p.). Predictably, caught in this double bind that often makes them uncertain about their identity and their relationships with others, Alexie’s Natives are driven to behave in preposterous ways that only show how arduous it is for them to function outside the preconceptions defined by others about Indians. Of course, in most instances those preconceptions are perceived as signs of oppression that impel them to look for some sort of contact with their “authentic” Native traditions. Yet, it is not unusual either to come across Natives who also use those preconceptions that whites entertain to their own advantage, as they can provide in that way easy solutions to their current ordeals and fulfill the expectations of their closest kin. This is definitely the case of Edgar Eagle Runner in “Class,” who decides to pass for what he is not in order to pave the way in his sexual relationships with white women, both to please his mother and to advance his career as a corporate lawyer:

> As for me, I’d told any number of white women that I was part Aztec and I’d told a few that I was completely Aztec. That gave me some mystery, some ethnic weight, a history of glorious color and mass executions. Strangely enough, there were aphrodisiacal benefits to claiming to be descended from ritual cannibals. In any event, pretending to be an Aztec warrior was a lot more impressive that revealing I was just some bright kid who’d fought his way off the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington State [...] (40)

Like many of the other bourgeois, city Indians in the collection, the Native protagonist of this story faces a severe identity crisis when he and his spouse, a white Catholic woman, lose their first child and he realizes that his wife had been faking her orgasms “probably since the first time we’d made love” (46). In an attempt to look for refuge from the rigid behavioral codes, expensive hobbies, and emotional obligations of his social sphere, Edgar escapes to a local Indian dive in Seattle where he hopes to find the understanding and recognition that he cannot find among his fellow lawyers. However, he is promptly assailed by Junior, a huge, herculean patron of the establishment, who eventually pummels him badly after the protagonist expresses his wish to fight. When he regains consciousness in the lap of the Native bartender, he tries to explain to her the reasons that had brought him to the Indian tavern to begin with:

> "I wanted to be with my people," I said.
> "Your people?" asked Sissy. "Your people? We're not your people."
> "We're Indians."
> "Yeah, we're Indians. You, me, Junior. But we live in this world and you live in your world."
> "I don't like my world."
> "You pathetic bastard," she said, her eyes swelling with tears that had nothing to do with laughter. "You sorry, sorry piece of shit. Do you know how much I want to live in your world? Do you know how much Junior wants to live in your world?"
> Of course, I knew. For most of my life, I'd dreamed about the world where I currently resided. (55)

As was the case with Mary Lynn in "Assimilation," who finally declares her love for her husband "across the [ethnic] distance" (20) in the concluding paragraph of the story, Edgar Eagle Runner also returns to his estranged wife after his failed attempt at building a bridge toward "[his] people." Alexie's stories often show that his Native characters are also victims of the stereotypes forged by the dominant culture and that their efforts to reconnect with their roots are profoundly troubled by those notions. Due to their misleading conceptions of their people and the strange intersections of their ethnic background with other identity features—sometimes sexual, others professional or related to class—, it is hard to predict how their identity crises are going to be solved. In Scott Andrews' opinion, "What works one time does not work another. What works for some does not work for others. Like life, it is complicated and just a little bit random" (51). Indeed, we have seen that, searching for one's identity under the potent influence of the mainstream culture's reductive myths and human types, it is quite difficult to find convenient answers to that quest—no matter how intense the search for one's self and one's community happens to be.

3. DARKLY-COMIC CONFRONTATIONS AND TRICKSTER STRATAGEMS

In her review of *The Toughest Indian* in *The New York Times*, Joanna Scott described Alexie as a "clever satirist" who "won't hesitate to attack racist idiocy and historical injustice" (n.p.). She also explained that "He's good at turning a plot in unexpected directions and making a sequence of events surprising" (Scott n.p.). Nevertheless, to conclude that Alexie's primary aim in these stories is merely to bewilder his readers by making his characters behave in "transgressive ways" at the critical moment is to miss other important objectives of the collection intimately related to ideas of Indian masculinity and, more broadly, to "mainstream American male culture" (cf. Grassian 158). Several critics and reviewers have maintained that Alexie's fundamental strength lies in his use of irony and sarcasm to criticize and possibly deconstruct the kind of standards of Indianness and masculinity primarily promoted by the dominant culture, but also by "primordialist" Natives reluctant to see their braveness or "spirituality" ever questioned. Author Joyce Carol Oates has observed that Alexie is "the bad boy" among the older generation of Native writers—Momaday, Silko and Erdrich—because his "mocking, self-mocking, unpredictable, unassimilable" (n.p.) voice is likely to unsettle some of the values and traditions that have been considered sacrosanct by some. A few Native scholars have gone so far as to accuse Alexie of being "utterly irreverent" and, even, of submitting to the old mythologies "taught by the oppressors" and colonial rulers (see Cook-Lynn). However, one needs to be a bit obtuse not to realize that, what Alexie is trying to do in his fiction by retrieving some of the historical grievances and racist attitudes of the majority group is to move away from the mainstream standards of a sweetened, sanitized version of Indian literature. As he has stated in several interviews, "You know, as an artist, it's not my job to fit in; it's not to belong. I'm not a social worker; I'm not a therapist. It's my job to beat the shit out of the world. I'm not here to make people feel good" (Capriccioso n.p.).

A great deal of the dark comedy readers hit upon in Alexie's stories derives from the unanticipated ways in which the author plays with ethnic, sexual, professional, and tribal boundaries. In most instances, those boundaries existing between members of a group and outsiders are reinforced by the emergence of ghosts from the past or some unconscious fears that haunt the characters. Thus, the protagonist of "Indian Country," Low Man Smith, a successful Coeur D'Alene writer of mystery fiction, experiences a significant degree of sexual and cultural alienation when, during a trip to Montana, he meets up with a former sweetheart, Tracy, who, after ten years, has become a lesbian and an aspiring writer herself. Although both of them have gained weight and Tracy clarifies to him that she has fallen madly in love with a Spokane girl, Sara Polatkin, whom she is planning to marry, Low Man still finds Tracy very desirable: "Forty pounds overweight, she was beautiful, wearing a loose T-shirt and tight blue jeans. Her translucent skin bled light into her dark hair" (137). After Tracy reveals to him that her reason for becoming a lesbian is that "[she's] running away from the things of man" (139), the key confrontation in the story takes place when the two girlfriends and the bestselling author meet Sara's homophobic and religiously-minded parents for dinner. Not only is Sid Polatkin offensive about his daughter's notion of marrying a white woman, but he also disparages Low Man's talents as a Native writer: "You're one of the funny Indians, enit? [...] Always making the jokes, never taking it seriously" (144). In spite of Tracy's and Sara's considerable efforts to put a lid on the explosive situation, the two men's ethnic and gender codes prove too indomitable to keep them under control:

> Sara looked at Low and wondered yet again why Indian men insisted on being warriors. *Put down your bows and arrows*, she wanted to scream at Low, at her father, at every hypermasculine Injun in the world. *Put down your fucking guns and pick up your kids*. (144, italics in original)

The story ends on a lugubrious note as it becomes clear that Low Man fails to convince Sara's dogmatic father that there are alternatives for love and happiness outside their narrow-minded views on heterosexual, endogenous marriage: "Sid, these women don't belong to us. They live in whole separate worlds, man, don't you know that?" (147). Sid's contentious and violent reaction toward his daughter only confirms Low Man's—and the author's—worst fears about this man's inability to communicate beyond his deeply-rooted sexual prejudice. Still, in Daniel Grassian's opinion, "gender codes aren't completely responsible for the violence; the impoverished conditions on the reservation also contribute to the rage that helps produce the violence" (159). Indeed, the closing scene of the story has been partly foreshadowed earlier on when Low Man recalls life on his Coeur D'Alene Reservation—a very wet and spiritually-monotonous place:

> The tourists didn't know, and never would have guessed, that the reservation's monotony might last for months, sometimes years, before one man would eventually pull a pistol from a secret place and shoot another man in the face, or before a group of women would drag another woman out of her house and beat her left eye clean out of her skull. After that first act of violence, rival families would issue calls for revenge and organize the retaliatory beatings. (122)

"Indian Country" concludes with the two male "warriors" crouching on the floor after fighting each other at the restaurant exit and Tracy towering above them, suggesting somehow her moral superiority: "The two Indian men sat on the ground as the white woman stood above them" (148).

In his well-known book *Native American Tribalism*, D'Arcy McNickle mused on the "surprising hardiness" (13) of Indian cultures despite the massive economic and socio-political forces moving them away from their roots and traditions. In order to explain their survival, McNickle quotes several passages from the work of Norwegian social anthropologist Fredrik Barth regarding the phenomenon of "ethnic boundaries":

> The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change—yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity. (Barth qted. in McNickle 14)

Stories such as "Indian Country" and "South by Southwest" make it evident that Alexie is fully aware of both the significant transformation and reduction of cultural difference that Native Americans have experienced—especially, since they began "to go urban" in the 1950s—and the ways in which boundaries have still been maintained between the majority and minority groups in the U.S. While "Indian Country" shows how boundary-maintaining processes are very much at work in the minds of whites and Natives alike, "South by Southwest" is a hilarious experiment to demonstrate the absurdity of such divisions. The story follows a white man, Seymour, and a fat Indian, nicknamed Salmon Boy, "on a nonviolent killing spree" (58) from Spokane in Washington State to Tucson, Arizona, which becomes a farcical quest for an authentic language of the heart. Of course, the deafening verbal noise of contemporary America does not seem the most hospitable environment for "romantic love" and a male-male relationship to flourish naturally (cf. Peluso n.p.). After robbing the patrons of an International House of Pancakes, the pair of "outlaws"—mostly following Seymour's extravagant ideas about the Gentlemen Bandits—head South on a journey that makes fun of many of the premises of films and narratives of criminals on the run:

> Do you think the police are following us? asked Salmon Boy.
> If they're not now, said Seymour, they soon will be.
> Well, then, said Salmon Boy. He asked, Do you think we should kiss now?
> It seems like the right time, don't it? asked Seymour. He licked his lips.
> Yes, it does, said Salmon Boy. He wished he had a mint.
> They kissed, keeping their tongues far away from each other, and then told each other secrets. (60)

Seymour's and Salmon Boy's affective relationship has a hard time consolidating due to the many boundaries—some of them racial, others related to gender and sexual codes, and still others linked to their status as fugitives—that society and history have set for them to cross before their feelings can materialize. When Seymour finally asks his partner whether he is learning how to love him near the end of the story, the latter can only show his doubts: "It's a difficult thing, Salmon Boy said after a long time. Salmon Boy whispered, It's a difficult thing for one man to love another man whether they kiss each other or not" (73). Although the narrative closes on an optimistic note, with the two "criminals" running out of the local McDonald's with their bounty "into all the south and southwest that remained in the world" (75), the author has made it clear that their adventure could be either a hopeful first step beyond social boundaries or a short-lived delusion: "They were men in love with the idea of being in love" (75).

Jeff Berglund has remarked that, in the best trickster fashion, "Alexie's inventive style conveys to readers his characters' suffering and anguish but also the enduring power of humor and imagination" (xvii). He is convinced of the power of dark irony and storytelling to connect the past, present, and future of the nation so that the most pathetic and the most hopeful facets of human nature—both Native and white—can be shared with readers of all backgrounds. Despite the burden of the traumatizing forces that his people have suffered (see "The Sin Eaters," *Toughest* 76-120), he believes in the capacity of humor and laughter to heal some of the psychological wounds and to build some productive exchanges with the mainstream culture. In this regard, it is no coincidence that he should resort to references to both the highbrow literary and historical discourse but also to the popular contemporary culture that his readers are more familiar with (cf. Berglund xxvii). In a similar vein to Vizenor, he is positive that Native trickster strategies still have an important role to play in resisting more conventional ways of thinking and forms of writing about "the Indian":

> The trickster is a comic discourse, a collection of "utterances" in oral traditions; the opposite of a comic discourse is a monologue, an utterance in isolation, which comes closer to the tragic mode in literature and not a comic tribal world view. (Vizenor, *Narrative Chance* 191)

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Judy Doenges noted in *The Seattle Times* that *The Toughest Indian* was "a short-story collection more mature, self-assured and witty" than his earlier work in the genre mainly because it portrayed a "community of endearing, odd characters" with great "emotional strength and humor" (n.p.). And she goes on to point out that Alexie is particularly skillful at drawing characters with which the reader can easily connect due to their human flaws and virtues. As my discussion above has shown, his Native characters' fragility and resilience derives primarily from the fact that they are restless people in motion, moving across various types of boundaries—ethnic, professional, sexual, etc.—that make it difficult for them to define who they really are. It is logical, then, that they should feel annoyed by the general tendency to categorize them under one-dimensional labels that betray the nature of their human dreams and aspirations. As another reviewer rightly explained,

> They are stories that let their characters live and breathe; they are stories that refuse easy answers; they are stories in which Alexie shows sympathy and compassion for his characters as people rather than as mere vehicles for his thematic concerns. (Peluso n.p.)

Alexie's overwhelming sympathy for his characters and his subtle revamps of their identities in tight situations becomes most evident in the last three stories of the collection: "Saint Junior," "Dear John Wayne," and "One Good Man." Interestingly, all of them tell the stories of Indians who, after having spent some time within the context of the mainstream society, decide to return to their reservations for reasons often related to their responsibilities to their community or their inability to find the relationships and lifestyle they wanted in urban milieux. Fixico has described at some length the serious problems that Native Americans faced in trying to adapt to urban environs during the Relocation Program launched by the Government after World War II (18-23). Like other scholars, this author also puts the blame of the early failure of many Indians to integrate properly in city contexts on the stereotyping and social stigmatization that they suffered those first two decades (Fixico 26-38). In "Saint Junior," Roman Gabriel Fury and his wife, Grace Atwater, live a fairly simple life on the reservation, he as a basketball coach and she as a fourth-grade teacher. Although both of them had the talent and intellectual potential to succeed in the mainstream world, they run into barriers along their way—in the form of prejudice and discrimination—that incite them to return to their birthplace where they come to believe in "one basic truth: It was easy to make another person happy" (177). Although the confined existence they lead on the reservation probably lacks

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 74; 2017, PP. 145-158

much of the excitement and glamour that they had enjoyed away from it, they are able to invent little rituals and ceremonies that help them stick together: "Damn, marriage was hard work, was manual labor, and *unpaid* manual labor at that. Yet, year after year, Grace and Roman had pressed their shoulders against the stone and rolled it up the hill together" (178, italics in original).

The closing story of the collection, "One Good Man," brings together many of the qualities we have seen represented in the other tales discussed in this article: there is the pain, the shame, the anger, and, of course, the humor. Once again, the protagonist—who also tells the story in this case—is an Indian urbanite who returns to his reservation to take care of his dying, diabetic father. The tone of the story is typically bittersweet because the narrator feels compelled to revisit his father's—and his own—past in order to contemplate his/their missteps and partial victories:

> I thought about my father's opportunities and his failures, about the man he should have been and the man he had become. *What is an Indian?* Is it a man with a good memory? I thought about the pieces of my father—his children and grandchildren, his old shoes and unfinished novels—scattered all over the country. [...]. I wondered if there was some kind of vestigial organ inside all of us that collected and stored our grief. (231, italics in the original)

Although the question "*What is an Indian*?" comes up several times in the story as some sort of refrain and is given different potential answers, in the end the narrator realizes that showing his love and care for his progenitor in his final days may prove more productive to his self-knowledge than any of the other features he comes to associate to his ethnicity.

Reviews sent to author: 23 November 2016
Revised paper accepted for publication: 5 February 2017

WORKS CITED

ALEXIE, Sherman. *The Toughest Indian in the World*. Grove Press, 2000.

—— *Smoke Signals: A Screenplay*. Hyperion, 1998.

—— *Smoke Signal*. DVD. Directed by Chris Eyre. Miramax Films, 1998.

ANDREWS, Scott. "Ceci n'est pas un Indien." *World Literature Today* 84.4 (July-Aug. 2010): pp. 48-51.

BERGLUND, Jeff. "'Imagination Turns Every Word into a Bottle Rocket': An Introduction to Sherman Alexie." *Sherman Alexie: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Jeff Berglund and Jan Roush, U of Utah P, 2010, pp. xi-xxxix.

CAHOON, Nancy. "Review of *The Toughest Indian in the World* by Sherman Alexie." *Publishers' Weekly*, May 2000. http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-87113-801-9. Web. March 3, 2014.

CAMPBELL, Duncan. "Voices of the New Tribes." *The Guardian*, January 4, 2003; Profile: Sherman Alexie. http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jan/04/artsfeatures.fiction. Web. March 3, 2014.

CAPRICCIOSO, Robert. "Sherman Alexie. Author Interview." *Identity Theory*, March 23, 2003. http://www.identitytheory.com/sherman-alexie-interview/. Web. March 3, 2014.

COOK-LYNN, Elisabeth. *New Indians, Old Wars*. U of Illinois P, 2007.

COULOMBE, Joseph L. *Reading Native American Literature*. Routledge, 2011.

DOENGES, Judy. "Of Reconciliation and Relationships; Sherman Alexie shows a more mature side in *The Toughest Indian in the World*." *The Seattle Times*, May 14, 2000. http://community.seattletimes.nwsource.com/archive/?date=20000514&slug=4020940. Web. March 3, 2014.

FIXICO, Donald L. *The Urban Indian Experience in America*. U of New Mexico P, 2000.

GRASSIAN, Daniel. *Understanding Sherman Alexie*. U of South Carolina P, 2005.

HALL, Stuart. "The Spectacle of the 'Other'." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage Publications in association with The Open University, 1997, pp. 223-290.

HEARNE, Joanna. "Introduction—'A Way to Sit at the Table': Indigenizing Popular Culture." *Smoke Signals: Native Cinema Rising*, edited by Joanna Hearne, U of Nebraska P, 2012, pp. xv-xxxiv.

IBARROLA, Aitor. "Forms of Native American Humor in *Smoke Signals*". *Exploring the American Literary West: International Perspectives*, edited by David Río Raigadas et al., Servicio Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco, 2006, pp. 151-161.

MCNICKLE, D'Arcy. *Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals*. O University P, 1973.

NELSON, Joshua. "'Humor Is My Green Card': A Conversation with Sherman Alexie." *World Literature Today* 84.4 (July-Aug. 2010): pp. 39-43.

OATES, Joyce C. "Haunted by Salmon. Review of *The Toughest Indian in the World*." *The New York Review of Books*, July 20, 2000. http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2000/jul/20/haunted-by-salmon/. Web. March 3, 2014.

PELUSO, Robert. "Review of *The Toughest Indian in the World* by Sherman Alexie." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 27, 2000. http://old.post-gazette.com/books/reviews/20000827review572.asp. Web. March 3, 2014.

Penner, Jonathan. “Review of *The Toughest Indian in the World* by Sherman Alexie.” *The Washington Post*, July 9, 2000. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/books/reviews/toughest-indianintheworld0710.htm. Web. March 3, 2014.

Scott, Joanna. “American Revolutions: Sherman Alexie Tells Stories of People Struggling against Sexual and Ethnic Oppression.” *The New York Times*, May 21, 2000. https://www.nytimes.com/books/00/05/21/reviews/000521.21scot.html. Web. March 3, 2014.

Shanley, Kathryn. “The Indians American Loves to Love and Read: American Indian Identity and Cultural Appropriation.” *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations*, edited by Gretchen M. Bataille, U of Nebraska P, 2001, pp. 26-50.

Tatonetti, Lisa. “Sex and Salmon: Queer Identities in Sherman Alexie’s *The Toughest Indian in the World*.” *Studies in American Fiction* 35.2 (Autumn 2007): pp. 201-219.

Vizenor, Gerald. *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. U of Nebraska P, 1999.

—— editor. *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures*. U of Oklahoma P, 1993.

PEER REVIEWERS FOR *RCEI* 74: APRIL 2017

Listed below are the referess who reviewed manuscripts for *RCEI* 74 (April 2016). We express gratitude to their work and generosity.

ULL REVIEWERS

Leslie Bobb
Manuel Brito Marrero
M.ª Concepción Brito Vera
Juan José Cruz Hernández
Aída Díaz Bild
Isabel González Díaz
M.ª Luz González Rodríguez
Beatriz Hernández Pérez
Pedro Ángel Martín Rodríguez
Juan Ignacio Oliva Cruz
M.ª Jesús Pérez Quintero
Yasmina Romero Morales

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

Alexandra Budrewicz (Pedagogical University of Cracow)
Fernando Galván Reula (Universidad de Alcalá)
Guillermo Iglesias Díaz (Universidad de Vigo)
Ewa Kowal (Jagiellonian University, Cracow)
Robert Kuseck (Jagiellonian University, Cracow)
Sandra Marrero Morales (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria)
Eva Méndez Blázquez (UNED)
Przemyslaw Michalski (Pedagogical University of Cracow)
Angelica Michelis (Manchester Metropolitan University)
Mª del Mar Pérez Gil (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria)
Julia Salmerón Cabañas (Universidad Autónoma, Madrid)
Susana Vega González (Universidad de Oviedo)

ANNUAL REPORT: *RCEI* EDITORIAL PROCESS

The average time that the *RCEI* editorial staff takes to publish an essay submitted to this journal is 12 months of straight work, from reading to accepting, editing, proofreading, and finally to print. Our reviewers are senior faculty, including members of *RCEI* Editorial Board, and those who have successfully been published in our journal or elsewhere.

Statistics

No. of essays submitted to *RCEI* 2017, n.º 74: 15.
No. of essays accepted for publication in *RCEI*, n.º 74: 8.
Average number of reviewers per essay: 2,3.
Average time between submission and acceptance: 6 months.
Average time between acceptance and publication: 2 months.

53% of manuscripts submitted to *RCEI* 2017, n.º 74 have been accepted for publication.

ULL

Universidad
de La Laguna

SERVICIO DE PUBLICACIONES
UNIVERSIDAD DE LA LAGUNA