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SPECIAL ISSUE

Bodies on [Dis]play: Female Corporealities in Contemporary Culture

INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding the political strides and notable successes of women in the English-speaking world on many levels and in many fields (not the least of which is the selection of Hilary Clinton as the first female U.S. presidential nominee, Theresa May as leader of the Conservative Party and hence Prime Minister of the UK, and First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon of the Scottish National Party), the depiction of women in the world at large and in particular in these "advanced" societies remains rife with contradictions and problematic portrayals, signaling the still difficult position of far too many women in contemporary society. Literature and film become modus operandi for the faithful reflection of both the achievements and limitations imposed on women, burdened with gender issues that range from the appropriation of their sexuality to the reinforcement of patriarchal stereotypes, from their physical restriction to their psychological battering and even their murder. Although the specifics may vary, it becomes clear through reading the essays included in this issue that gender inequality is still employed as one of the most wide-spread and insidious of justifications, often the structure upon which male hegemony lies, and that it is a cross-cultural phenomenon that is pervasively and perniciously woven into the very fabric of our societies.

While we may be able to lull ourselves into believing that these problems have been overcome and can be relegated to the past, beneath the surface of an apparently coherent structure (either real or fictional) hide the fissures and cracks that are far from sealed, and that have the potential to rend not only the personal lives of the protagonists, but also the very foundations on which patriarchy is raised. What becomes clear is that in order to grasp the complexity and pervasiveness of the continued abuse and misappropriation of female corporeality, relying on only one approach or genre is simply not enough. It is through the interdisciplinary that we begin to understand the vast and insidious nature of the problem. The eight essays included in this issue [dis]play different scenarios in both fiction and film, and encompass not only widely different locales (from Britain to India, from Ireland and Scotland to the US, from the transnational scourge of trafficking to the science of possible future worlds), but also a variety of genres including the psychological, the confessional, the detective, science fiction, and the sensational titillation of Bollywood. In general all the essays are supported by theoretical frameworks which include Julia Kristeva and Michel Foucault alongside other feminist authors and critics as they bring into play the multilayered combinations of embodiment with space, race, religion, or sexual orientation.

Auxiliadora Pérez Vides opens this section with an in-depth analysis of the scars left by the corporeal repression of the young Irish women forced to "atone" for various supposed "sins" in the Magdalene laundries. Pérez Vides explores the nature of the exploitation of the female body as "an outward and visible sign of an inner and spiritual [dis]grace," a corrupt social (and in this case, religious) system which is plagued with bigotry and abuse. Both *The Magdalen* (novel) and *Sinners* (film) explicitly represent the exploitation of the female body as "the apparatus of expiation," and thus reveal a deeper, psychological (even national) problem with a supposedly "sinful" corporeality, the religious condemnation evident in the very name of the Magdalenes. Elena Jaime de Pablos also interrogates four contemporary Irish novels, all linked by the unspeakable: incest. Sexually abused by their fathers, and neglected or silenced by their mothers, these protagonists confront their trauma in different ways, often through "dislocation," which eventually leads them to a split self, maintaining their minds independent of their bodies. Jaime de Pablos recurs to a psychoanalytic feminist approach and specifically to Julia Kristeva's formulation of "subjects in process" to understand these modes of survival, not all of which are successful, yet speaking the unspeakable is crucial for healing, both of the individuals and of the wider society that chooses to ignore the physical violation of many of its devastated young women.

In an examination of the appropriation of female corporeality for a more subliminal undergirding of the status quo, Antonia Navarro Tejero turns to the novel *Strange Obsession* and to the film *Girlfriend* (2004), to reveal just how both the author and the director use the lesbian relationship not to respectfully illustrate a loving relationship between women, but rather to titillate the audience and reader. In depicting the "lesbian predator" of a young uninitiated friend, these cultural artifacts mine lesbianism for a sensationalist exposé of female bodies, which not so covertly reinforce heteronormative attitudes. Through the manipulation of stereotypes they ultimately satisfy a misogynist and patriarchal imagination. Rocio Carrasco Carrasco delves into the realm of science fiction (in *The Hunger Games*, 2012, and *Tron: Legacy*, 2010) where the "dissolutions of classical dichotomies (body/mind, human/machine, natural/artificial, reality /fantasy)" are played out on the mediated female body. Her analysis clearly reveals once again the fluidity of gender as a construction or a performance and explores how the corporeality of the female protagonists becomes "key for understanding contemporary subjectivities." Science fiction then becomes a window into the social manipulation of women's bodies in an attempt to shape them into "culturally appropriate" objects of domination. Yet once Katnis is awakened, she rebels.

Turning to contemporary novels in the United States, Mar Gallego elaborates on the pernicious legacy of slavery and domination in the depiction of the bodies of women of African descent. Living in a society in which their bodies are *a priori* judged to be either lasciviously sensual or perniciously evil, black women have had to deal with the double jeopardy of both misogynism and racism, from Anglo American whites, and from colorism from other blacks. Somehow their bodies were always found to be unattractive, somehow menacing, somehow "wrong" and unable to fit into any preconceived idea of what beauty should be. Gallego Durán,

explicating novels by Ntozake Shange, Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison, focuses on the search for an identity outside the dictates of a racist society and the reclamation of "wholeness" in the representations of black female corporeality, defying the exclusion and commodification to which black women historically have been subjected. Silvia Castro Borrego expands this search for wholeness to include the ever more stringent difficulties of this project when the women involved are victimized not only through abuse and incest, but also through infection with AIDS. In contemporary novels by Sapphire (*Push* [1998] and *The Kid* [20111]) and by Pearle Cleage (*What looks like crazy on an ordinary day* [1997]) the authors struggle through speechlessness and corporeal colonization to reclaim a spiritual wholeness rooted in strength, in resistance and in forgiveness. Through speech, story-telling, and sometimes though transgressive sexuality, these women lay claim to sexual desire and the right to their own definitions of healthy corporeality, taking charge of their history and circumstance to create a healthy space for themselves to grow.

But the demand for bodily integrity cannot be contained by any once space or nation. Where history and geography collide is clearly in the transnational calamity that is sexual trafficking. Beatriz Domínguez García tackles the issues inherent in the use and abuse of female bodies for economic enrichment, specifically focusing on Piere Morel's film *Taken* and Kate Atkinson's *One Good Turn*. Especially valuable in addition is her understanding of the difference in focus and development of the plots when elaborated by a man or a (feminist) woman. Employing the popular genre of crime fiction (and dealing with the pressing issues of female prostitution), both the film and the novel recur to similar plot devices: two female tourists become trafficked migrants, the miscreants are members of an organized crime gang, one of the two females will survive, and one will die, a male protagonist is sympathetic and treats the death of the victim humanely, migrants are presented as both vulnerable and dangerous to the community. But while *Taken* bases its plot on a well-worn rescue narrative, it relies on traditional roles of femininity and masculinity, and a patriarchal view of female sexuality. *One Good Turn*, however, disputes traditional roles and ultimately paints a more realistic portrait of trafficking.

Andrea Rodríguez Álvarez also uses a transnational approach in her analysis of *The Bullet Trick,* crime fiction by the Scottish author Louise Welsh (of the Tartan Noir genre). Two major tropes structure this novel: urban spaces (London, Berlin, and Glasgow) and the staged representation of the female body. While seemingly governed by the degradation (in life and on stage) of female corporeality and the depiction of the women performers as abused and silenced objects of the male gaze, the novel nevertheless challenges this apparent conformity in an unusual twist. Gender inequality is elucidated, yet the women are ultimately (and apparently) more in charge that the male character around whom uncertainty swirls. Placing the female body within the geography of the urban space offers an alternative "non-confrontational" perspective on the position of women in the city.

The variety of approaches, settings and genres manifest in these essays attest to the burgeoning and ever-more-complicated field of feminist studies. It also attests to the interest these debates have aroused in Spanish universities as all eight essays in this issue have been carried out under the auspices of research projects

funded by the Spanish national institutions. This interdisciplinary cross-section of a considerable number of authors and directors at the very least presents a challenge to the reader to delve ever more deeply into the nature of gender inequality and the uses and abuses of female corporeality to further a misogynist cause. What they tell us is that unearthing and elucidating the multifarious manifestations of oppression, even when they are inadvertent and hence even more insidious, is a collective endeavor, one to which each of us has both the capacity and indeed the feminist obligation to contribute. Rome wasn't built in a day, and it will take many more to dismantle its legacy. Although the challenge may seem daunting, the ever-widening participation of new and well-informed academic talent will make the journey not only worthwhile but, even more importantly, inspiring.

The editors wish to acknowledge and thank all the reviewers who so kindly gave of their time and expertise to strengthen the arguments and enhance the academic quality of these contributions.

ARTICLES

DISCIPLINED BODIES: THE MAGDALENE SPECTACLE IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH CULTURAL TEXTS*

Auxiliadora Pérez Vides
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Abstract

This article explores women's corporeal repression in Ireland's Magdalene laundries as represented in Marita Conlon-McKenna's novel *The Magdalen* (1999) and Aisling Walsh's film *Sinners* (2002). Women were sent to those institutions, which operated in Ireland until the mid 1990s under the rule of several religious orders, for a variety of reasons: showing dissolute manners, becoming pregnant out of wedlock, being victims of rape, having a mental disability or simply extremely good looks, among others. To expiate their "sins", the inmates suffered various schemes of corporal mortification that revealed an intricate ethos of national, religious and gender elements. My contention is that the two texts describe how the different assaults upon the Magdalenes' corporeality entailed the corruption of a system that exploited their bodies as the apparatus of expiation of wider social fears and bigoted understandings of female virtue and justice.

Keywords: magdalene laundries, Ireland, women's disciplination, sexual repression.

Resumen

Este artículo examina la represión corporal de las mujeres en las «Lavanderías de la Magdalena» en Irlanda y su representación en la novela *The Magdalen* (1999) de Marita Conlon-McKenna y la película *Sinners* (2002) de Aisling Walsh. Los motivos por los que se encerraban a las mujeres en estos centros, que funcionaron hasta mediados de los años 1990 bajo la dirección de varias órdenes religiosas, incluían el haber mostrado comportamientos lascivos, quedarse embarazadas fuera del matrimonio, haber sido violadas, tener una discapacidad mental, ser extremadamente atractivas, entre otros. Para expiar sus «pecados», las reclusas eran sometidas a distintos métodos de mortificación que revelan una complejidad de elementos nacionales, religiosos y de género. Intentaré probar como los dos textos describen que la agresión a la corporeidad de las Magdalenas deja ver la corrupción de un sistema que se dedicaba a explotar los cuerpos de las mujeres, convertidas en instrumentos de expiación de temores sociales más genéricos y de dudosas interpretaciones de la justicia.

Palabras clave: lavanderías de la Magdalena, Irlanda, adoctrinamiento de mujeres, represión sexual.

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In the Gloucester Street laundry perhaps they can't speak
In the graveyard of Glasnevin there's no sound
but history is pregnant and the truth is pushing out
and there's no virtue left in silence any more.

Maighread Medbh, "The Price that Love Denied"

1. INTRODUCTION

In her landmark work *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex,* Judith Butler proposes a materialist approach to corporeality, which is entwined in the social regulatory practices that have traditionally controlled and demarcated the body. For her, "what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect" (2). In this sense, Butler calls for "a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (9). Similarly, in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Elizabeth Grosz underscores the material dimension of corporeality, also drawing attention to how social and historical variations articulate bodily identity in both subjective and physical terms: "What are regarded as purely fixed and unchangeable elements of facticity, biologically given factors, are amenable to wide historical vicissitudes and transformations" (190). Following Butler and Grosz's lines of reasoning, this article concentrates on the particular manifestation of the culture-body dialectic that has characterised Ireland for nearly a century. Since the early years of the foundation of the State, the Irish national discourse has produced a complex politics of corporeality by which ideologically, the female imaginary has served to articulate the abstract concept of the nation, but at the same time, the bodies of everyday women have been repeatedly controlled by the agents of power. For Angela K. Martin, in Ireland "[the] discursive correspondence between the nation-state and gendered bodies materially mediates the ways in which feminine bodies are constructed, disciplined and experienced" (66). In other words, women have been mechanisms of the nation through which Irish culture has been acted; yet, the expression of their corporeality outside the codified formulations has appeared as subversive and in need of restraint.

It is commonly argued by contemporary critics and scholars that the repression of the female body became one of the major artefacts of the Irish social ethos resulting from the process of decolonisation from Britain (Herr 1990; Hug 1999; Ferriter 2005 and 2009). Simultaneously, a double standard pervaded the Irish postcolonial milieu of the 1920s onwards whereby any form of sexual transgression

* The author wishes to acknowledge the funding provided by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness for the writing of this essay (Research Project FFI2013-47789-C2-1-P).

only ostracised women, while male culpability was generally overlooked. Throughout the twentieth century, the Catholic Church and the State of Ireland sustained this gendered-biased notion of discipline. In their common project of national identity formation, both institutions based their defence of the notion of "Irishness" on a religion-centred normative framework and a system of gender coding that overtly hindered women's rights. A widespread obsession with sexual immorality, which jeopardised the pillars of a Catholic and principled nation, led to a number of restraining policies that would set the basis for the official approach to what was deemed as moral degeneration. As a consequence of this ideological framework, the Irish Free State's extensive response to various groups of problem women and children rested on their removal from public view, with their institutionalisation in prison-like centres that spread throughout the island, thus giving rise to what James Smith calls "the nation's architecture of containment" (2004; 2007). For that purpose, a network of "homes", conceived as spaces of detention and chastisement, gradually consolidated their "moral power" by the mid-century. There, offences and misbehaviour, predominantly of a sexual kind, could be covered and remedied, bearing witness to the preoccupation with family stigmatisation and most acutely, further depravation of the "fallen" individuals. Essentially interdependent in many cases, these institutions included the so-called Magdalene laundries as well as "mother and baby homes, county homes, industrial and reformatory schools and insane asylums" (Smith 2007: 42). However, what seems striking is that although they were chiefly operated by religious congregations, who allegedly contributed to the social provision and moral teaching of the interns, a confinement and totalitarian regime permeated them, indicating the role of censure, secrecy and retribution in what arguably was a microcosm of the social imaginary of newly independent Ireland.[1]

2. THE INSTITUTIONALISED BODY: THE MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES

In this article I explore the disciplinary order inside Ireland's Magdalene laundries, with a particular focus on the terms and effects of the corporeal repression carried out upon the inmates. Run by Catholic sisterhoods like the Sisters of Mercy or the Good Shepherd Sisters —the dominant one—, the laundries figured as penitentiary places for "fallen women", who remained incarcerated and ostra-

[1] Although this chapter focuses on representations of twentieth-century Magdalene homes, I should point out here that these institutions existed for much longer on the island and that they were modeled on the Victorian Magdalene Hospitals, which did rescue work for prostitutes. The first Magdalene Asylum, opened in Dublin in 1767, accepted only Protestant women offenders and it had a purely reformative philosophy. However, when by the mid nineteenth century Catholic Asylums began to proliferate, they gradually became more corrective, as they admitted other types of "fallen women". For an extensive analysis of these early institutions and their development up to the twentieth century, see Finnegan (2001), Luddy (2002) and McCarthy (2010).

cised usually for life. As Maria Luddy notes, "[r]eferrals to Catholic-run Magdalen asylums in the twentieth century came from religious, either priests or nuns, family members, the police or employers" (737). The recurrent motives for consignment ranged from showing dissolute manners or becoming pregnant out of wedlock, to even being victims of rape, having a mental disability or extremely good looks and consequently, according to the strict morals of fundamentalist Catholicism, suspected of tempting men and provoking sexual misconduct, among others. In clear reference to Mary Magdalene, the biblical sinner who redeemed herself, the inmates were addressed as "magdalenes", "maggies", "penitents" or even "children", with their real names also transformed into more saintly and often bizarre ones. Their daily penitence consisted of a scarce diet, hard laundry work, constant prayer, silence and very little recreation (Ferriter 2005: 538), a regimen articulated around the expectation that they had to go through physical and emotional pain in order to expiate their "fall". On this account, the inmates also suffered various schemes of corporal mortification, in a perverse exercise of moral rectification based on a prejudiced interpretation of religious authority, as will be described below. Indeed, it is this atrocious mode of imposed atonement that I am particularly interested in highlighting in this article, insofar as it comprises an intricate ethos of national, religious and gender elements that must be brought to the fore. My contention is that the different assaults upon the Magdalenes' corporeality entailed the corruption of a social system that, albeit founded on mercy and religious teaching, simply exploited their bodies as the apparatus of expiation of wider social fears and bigoted understandings of female virtue and social justice.

An important fact to be considered in this contextual analysis of the Magdalene laundries is that although they propagated throughout the island and continued in operation until the 1990s, the greater part of the Irish population decided to ignore the existence of such places and what was happening in them. As Smith points out, "[n]o one sought to understand how these institutions actually operated; that religious congregations were in control was enough to excuse official inquiry, inspection or regulation" (2007: 47). For that reason, this chapter of Ireland's recent history remained deliberately absent from public discussion and broadly unknown (O'Toole 2003). In Luddy's words, "[b]oth the Catholic public and the religious communities colluded in removing these 'shameful objects' from public view" (737). However, this rule of silence began to be questioned in the last decade of the twentieth century, [2] when a number of survivors, scholars, activists and artists gradually brought to light the incarceration of young women inside these

[2] The revelations about the laundries coincided with the airing of other Church-related scandals, the publication of several studies and the launch of campaigns about the recurrent institutional abuse of children in the so-called Industrial Schools, also managed by Catholic orders. The different committees established to investigate these events led to the Ryan Report, which was released in 2009 and proved the Irish State's involvement in such a system. For a detailed description of these episodes, see Raftery and O'Sullivan (1999) and O'Malley (2005).

institutions.[3] Particularly gripping has been the representation of this repression through powerful media like the visual arts and literature, as they depict in rather unsettling ways the brutality that the Irish magdalenes experienced. By and large, they problematise the mutual benefit of Church and State in perpetuating this system, raising general awareness not only about the everyday life within the laundries, but also the complicit social ethos that had sustained them. Therefore, an early period of revelation on a national and international scale progressively developed into a sharper stage of social confrontation, focussed on notions of responsibility, memory and reparation.[4] Significantly, this course of events at the public level can be said to have an analogue in the internal organisation of many cultural productions about the magdalenes, which I will draw on as well for the construction of my analysis in this chapter. Hence, the productions to be discussed below emphasise in similar ways how the magdalene body was internalised as the direct source of sin, the subsequent object of punishment and then, echoing the discussion that was taking place in society, it became the focus of spectacle that would make up for the rule of silence over this strand of female corporeal tyranny.

3. REPRESENTING THE MAGDALENE BODY: FROM REPRESSION TO EXPRESSION

Among the broad spectrum of works that paved the way for the artistic representation of the Magdalene experience, I concentrate on Marita Conlon-McKenna's novel *The Magdalen* (1999) and Aisling Walsh's film *Sinners* (2002). Both texts illustrate the brutal handling of female corporeality when Irish women transcended the female bodily imperative, particularly having pre-marital sex and getting pregnant out of wedlock. Set in the 1950s and 1960s, respectively, they reveal at the outset the inflexible moral imaginary that prevailed in Irish rural communities

[3] To name but a few: Patricia Burke Brogan's plays *Eclipsed* (1994) and *Stained Glass at Samhain* (2003), Steve Humphries' documentary *Sex in a Cold Climate* (1998), June Goulding's memoir *The Light in the Window* (1998), Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's Magdalene poems in the collection *The Girl Who Married the Reindeer* (2001), Peter Mullan's film *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002) and Mannix Flynn's art installation "Call Me by My Name" (2004). Of crucial importance was also the creation of advocacy groups such as Justice for Magdalenes (www.magdalenelaundries.com) and Magdalene Survivors Together, which supported survivors and their families in their claim for a formal State apology for the atrocities committed against the Magdalenes in the laundries and the establishment of a system of redress.

[4] Most recent products about the Magdalene laundries are characterised by a more direct appeal to the everyday public for their ongoing complicity in the perpetuation of this system. They include live durational performances like Amanda Coogan's "Yellow" (2008), Áine Phillips' "Redress" (2010) and "Emotional Labour" (2012), Helena Walsh's "Invisible Stains" (2010), the documentary "The Forgotten Maggies" (2009) by Steven O'Riordan, the site-specific performance *Laundry* (2011) by Louise Lowe, the internationally acclaimed film *Philomena* (2013), directed by Stephen Frears and based on the book *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee* (2009) by Martin Sixsmith, and the art installation "Forsaken" (2014) by Mannix Flynn and Maedhbh Mc Mahon.

at that time. Such context is evident through most of the first part of *The Magdalen*, in which the protagonist, Esther Doyle, suffers the consequences of falling in love with a mysterious young man, Connor, who despises her when she announces her pregnancy. Shame and humiliation are Esther's family's reaction towards her fall, while her innocence and vulnerability contrasts with Connor's exculpation. That her body denotes sin and carnal desire can be grasped not only by the names she is immediately called —"slut", "dirty little tramp" and "a hussy of a daughter" (177) — but also by the eldest brother's interpretation of the events: "You couldn't wait for it, like the rest of the decent girls in the parish [...] couldn't keep those legs of yours closed" (177). It is this "saturation with sexuality", to use Michel Foucault's well-known argument about the premises upon which those in positions of knowledge and power have traditionally founded their regulation of female bodies (*The History of Sexuality*: 104), that sets in motion the Magdalene machinery for Esther. Thus, to avoid "the gossip and scandal she would cause" (178), her family rely on the advice of the parish priest, who recommends the Dublin asylum of the Sisters of the Holy Saints, as well as on the support of a sympathetic aunt, who travels with Esther to her new "home". There the girl meets other Maggies, known as Tina, Rita, Mary and Maura, who were confined to the institution for different reasons. The oldest, Detta, had been an intern for fifty years, having nowhere to go back to after her family scorned her for getting pregnant by a Royal Navy sailor. The case of Tina is particularly noticeable too, considering that she was institutionalised when carrying her own father's baby, ultimately stillborn, to whom due to complications she gives birth in a nearby hospital. The unfolding of this incest plot stands out against the common belief among the community and the customers of the laundry that "they're all just sluts and prostitutes, God help them!" (234). Likewise, it reveals not only Conlon-McKenna's insistence on social secrecy but also her adamant critique of the gender polarity when it comes to the violation of the rules of sexual behaviour.

The representation of female corporeal transgression also inaugurates *Sinners,* which tells the story of Anne Marie, an orphan girl from the countryside who is committed by her aunt and a priest after an incestuous impregnation by her own brother, Eamon. Soon after her confinement, Anne Marie's hair is cut, she is renamed Theresa and solemnly initiated by the Mother superior into the philosophy of the laundry: "You may be a sinner. You may have contravened the laws of God and society. But here you can do penance for your sins. You can earn, as Mary Magdalene did, the forgiveness of our Blessed Lord. So remember my dear, our Heaven's sent mission is to return you to the loving arms of our Lord Jesus Christ". As depicted in different moments of the film, this judgement contrasts with the patriarchal protection of Eamon, who remains unpunished throughout. The audience is constantly made aware of society's double standards, probably more explicitly than in the novel but in an equally thought-provoking manner. In this vein, the director's critical position in this poignant aspect of Magdalene institutionalisation illustrates how Finnegan has understood this polarity: "The fact that men were never punished for their part in these women's 'downfall' is a major cause for condemnation. Even more iniquitous is the fact that any woman held in such a place against her will (whether for one week or for the rest of her life) was unlawfully and immorally detained" (243). Quite

significantly, Walsh confronts this excessive female condemnation by later rendering a resentful, wiser Anne Marie remind Eamon of his accountability: "I've been beaten, I've been shouted out, I've been told I'm filth...they took my life away. What we did was wrong, I accept that. But it was both of us. Tell me: why was your life worth protecting more than mine?" A similar case can be found in Kitty, a primary school teacher who refused to have a forced marriage with the father of her baby, or to use her own words, "simply because [she] said no". And other notable characters are Angela, the belle of the place, who was incarcerated there for being "temptation on legs"; Brida, the sparkling and romantic girl who dreams about her illegitimate baby being adopted by an American family and becoming a film star; and finally, Sister Bernadette, who appears as the severe and ruthless religious figure that endorses the girls' compliance with the convent rules of silence, work and contrition. Arguably, this array of institutionalised women reflects the manifold rationale upon which the strict regulatory norms of female sexuality were predicated inside the laundries.

For the analysis of the complex scenario of corporeal repression that permeates both the novel and the film, it is useful to examine the ideas discussed by Ariel Glucklich in *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* (2001). An interesting point in his study is the conflation of corporeal pain with redemption that has characterised different religious traditions across the world, as well as the intersection of the notions of violence, culture and power. In many religious practices, including the Catholic, pain is understood as punishment but also as a transformative element for the spirit and the mind. For Glucklich, the hurting subject usually correlates with a cultural context so that "[t]he task of sacred pain is to transform destructive or disintegrative suffering into a positive religious-psychological mechanism for reintegration within a more deeply valued level of reality than individual existence" (6). This approach to the culture-subject binary and the psychological transformations that result from the various forms of regulated sacred pain reverberates in the complex order in which violence is inflicted upon the Magdalenes, whose bodies can be understood then as the utmost recipients of cultural power. Indeed, most survivors' accounts and artistic representations of the laundries have insisted on the fact that, as the guarantors of Catholic morality, the nuns and the clerical figures imposed their system of beliefs over the inmates not only by physical maltreatment[5] but also through psychological harassment, in a clear example of what Glucklich calls "punitive-educational pain" (21).

[5] The issue of physical violence has been a quite controversial one because the Church and the State have overlooked this practice, contrary to most survivors' testimonies, as illustrated in several documentaries and the report of "State Involvement in the Magdalene Laundries" issued by Justice for Magdalenes in September 2012. The official disregard was evident in the results of the recent so-called McAleese Report, issued in February 2013, which officially stated the occurrence of psychological intimidation but did not fully admit physical maltreatment by the religious figures. The report and many social debates that emerged in its aftermath, however, led to a formal State apology to the Magdalene survivors and their families.

Disciplinary practices surface over the course of the second part of Conlon-McKenna's novel, which concentrates on the institutionalised experiences of the protagonist and the other Magdalenes she meets in the Dublin laundry. Progressively, we follow the evolution from Esther's initially innocent response to the system, to her more thoughtful analysis of the routine within the home. One of her earliest encounters with the tyrannical regime takes place when one of the nuns, Sister Vincent, violently cuts Esther's hair, a common practice reported by former inmates and broadly criticised for the humiliation, dehumanisation and desexualisation that it entailed. The effects become evident in the following excerpt:

> Ignoring her protests, the bloody old bitch of a nun dosed her hair with a foul-smelling liquid. [...] Taking her scissors, the nun began to clip away at her light brown curls till her hair barely reached beyond her ears. [...] Esther tried to mask her shame and anger until she reached the upstairs dormitory. Tears welled in her eyes when she caught a glimpse of herself in the cracked mirror in the corner near the wardrobe. She looked awful, almost as bad as she felt. Her dampened hair hung straight and limp; her eyes were huge and lost in her pasty face; the unflattering overall shift dress was geared to accommodate expanding waistlines and bulges, the dirty blue colour making her look even paler. Already, she looked just the same as the rest of them.[6] (213-15)

Shortly thereafter, the reality of the laundry begins to dawn upon Esther, who observes how "[t]he women worked so hard, it was as if they were being punished. It was bloody awful work too, with arms and legs and backs aching, standing in suds and water, eyes stinging from the bleach" (219). Indeed, it is this type of descriptions of the Magdalene reality that seems to justify their identification as "the Irish gulags for women", as Sam Jordison has called them (2007). To this interpretation must be added that throughout the novel, Esther and the other inmates display the continuing terrorisation that hovered over them, as any breach of the rules meant a severe castigation. Quite illustrative in this respect is the case of Saranne, a sixteen-year old orphan who was accused of having helped another Magdalene to access the annexed orphanage where her baby had been placed. Saranne is "strapped" by Sister Gabriel, and the narrator emphasises how "her livid red hands, wide welts of bruised torn skin covered her palms. They were too sore for her to bend or use" (333). Soon after, we learn about the nun's reaction as she was "determined to come down hard on the penitents. They deserved no trust or understanding. She had a vindictive streak, and had Saranne's hair shorn close to her scalp, making an example of her.

[6] The erasure of individuality was concomitant to this ritual, which strongly affected the Magdalenes' psyche for years. A common thread among many cultural products has been precisely the recovery of these women's identity, as clearly claimed in Mannix Flynn's artistic installation "Call Me by My Name". Also, the last sequence in Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters* shows one of the protagonists, whose hair had been violently cut by a nun as a punishment for her misbehavior, proudly bragging her long hair after having escaped from the laundry.

Saranne looked like a small scared skeleton, her bruised hands constantly touching her almost bare skull" (335).

In the film, punitive violence also recurs, and it has an equally brutal character. In various scenes we see several Magdalenes with shaved hair, which noticeably demonstrates the director's intention to highlight the incidence of this practice, as evidenced by survivors and former nuns. However, it is through Kitty that corporeal terror is most elaborately articulated, because being a talented and educated woman, she is constantly reminded that she should understand "the meaning of discipline", so when disobeying the rules, she receives the fiercest castigation: Sister Bernardette flogs her when Kitty is caught talking to the rest of the girls while washing the sheets, and she is also harshly beaten when the nuns find out that in an attempt to escape the laundry, she had been offering her sexual favours to Patrick, one of the police officers that regularly visited the institution. Likewise, corporeal violence is the immediate scolding that Anne Marie gets when the guards take her back to the laundry after having run away with her new-born baby to the village nearby. Although the beating is not directly filmed, the camera concentrates on an injured Anne Marie, with various wounds on her face and her hair chopped irregularly, and an intimidating Sister Bernadette, in what seems the climax of bodily aggression and verbal degradation on the part of the nun: "Shall I tell you what I see? I see ugliness, wantonness, corrupt and defiled flesh. An abomination of God's holy will". Embedded in this scene are most of the gender, religious and cultural elements of corporeal repression discussed so far in this study, shedding some light, through Walsh's interpretation, on the radicalisation of religious indoctrination through the body of the (M)other.

The use of violence and the implementation of pain in the two texts can also be read in terms of Foucault's notion of visibility and the disciplined body outlined in his study *The Birth of the Prison* (1975). He argues that "at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the great spectacle of physical punishment disappeared; the tortured body was avoided; the theatrical representation of pain was excluded from punishment" (14). The idea of spectacle then adds to the other aspects of the body analysed in this chapter insofar as it seems to inform the methods of educational punishment that are deployed in the laundries. The context is by no means similar to the ones described by Foucault, but as he also observes, "the practice of the public execution haunted our penal system for a long time and still haunts it today" (14-15). It is the durability of this system and the intersection between corporeal pain and visibility that, I believe, correlate with the context in which the Magdalene bodies were disciplined. For Foucault,

> The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as right and as property. The body, according to this penalty, is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions. Physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty. From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights. (11)

This passage speaks directly to the situation of women interned in the laundries, where the haunting of a long-standing penalty system seems evident. A complex punishment order ruled over the Maggies, whose rights were totally "suspended" while the agents of power frequently performed individual violence in a kind of spectacle mode and with supposedly didactic purposes. Thus, the Magdalene disciplined body became not only the object of violence but also the mechanism through which further condemnation, on both an individual and group level, could be prevented.

Both in the novel and the film, Foucault's ideas of punitive spectacles acquire an even more significant dimension as the two texts highlight the cruelty inflicted upon a number of "penitents" at the moment of childbirth, when many of them were ruthlessly treated and severely injured as a result of an implicit need to atone for their sexual sins. This imposition of pain, which of course resonates with Eve's fall, also brings to mind what Glucklich calls "the juridical model of pain" (16). For him, "[t]his constitutional sentiment, if taken seriously, situates the pain of parturition in a moral universe in which pain is not meaningless, or even merely biological. It is the automatic moral consequence in an iron logic of action and reward" (16). In *The Magdalen,* Esther's childbirth takes place quite smoothly and it certainly figures as a happy experience for the protagonist, but in the narration of this event there are certain elements that actually indicate a redundant repression and victimisation of the Magdalene body. Esther had anticipated the moment as one of the "horror stories about childbirth" that she had heard from the Maggies (231). Indeed, when taken to the mother-and-baby annex, we hear that she felt "mortified" by Sister Bridget's treatment during her labour, mostly when the nun tries to administer an enema against her will, to what she concludes: "They were trying to torture her, that's what it was!" (341). Remarkably, too, another inherent dimension of this conception of forced pain is the manifest supremacy of the nun that prevails over the competence of the midwife, whose presence seems to be merely symbolic, as she only participates in the delivery to "attend to the afterbirth" (343).

In *Sinners*, the director features a very enlightening childbirth scene that encapsulates many of the constructions and complexities that we have just mentioned in relation to the novel, but which are predicated in a more engaging way. Although the nuns commonly reproved close friendships among the Magdalenes (Finnegan 29), when Kitty's labour starts Margaret is exceptionally allowed in the maternity ward. Then, the intern nurse, Nuala, is called for in order to attend to the delivery but as in the case of Conlon-McKenna's novel, the inflexible orders of Sister Bernadette immediately invalidate Nuala's medical expertise and complicity with the Magdalene. In this scene, Walsh keenly depicts the different levels of power and the two distinct positions represented by the nun and the nurse, whose attitudes towards Kitty stand for women-centered and patriarchy-oriented handlings of labour, respectively. The moment constitutes, to my mind, an open critique of the extreme exertion of hegemonic power over female corporeality and it illustrates women's claim to have full control of their bodies, which has been on the feminist agenda for a long time, mostly as far as parturition is concerned. In this light, the conditions in which Kitty's childbirth takes place can be interpreted in terms of

Naomi Wolf's account of contemporary approaches to the pregnant body and the handling of labour in her book *Misconceptions.* Wolf delves into the wrong expectations and the invasive treatment of women's bodies during pregnancy and childbirth, and she denounces how "birth has become too pathologized". For her,

> Obstetricians justify a high degree of medical interventions in part because they see almost all circumstances of birth as pathological. Midwives object to classifying all births as "low risk" or "high risk", for example —a categorizing system that does little to help women, no matter how healthy, think of birth as "part of their wellness cycle", as midwives like to say, and something that they can manage with confidence. Midwives argue that birth is best treated as a normal and healthy process —that women as rule, are capable of giving birth without undue interventions. Many midwives believe that the way doctors have medicalized normal births leaves women less able to call up the confidence and courage they need to get themselves through birth without drastic intervention. (128)

The representation of childbirth in the film takes an interesting expression when seen through the lens of Wolf's ideas, as in this case invasion occurs clearly: not only is the midwife's role limited but also, and most significantly, pathologisation leads to criminalisation. Strictly speaking, Kitty's parturition is not medicalised, but as a representative of the law of the Father, it is the nun who clearly controls the event, as in Conlon-McKenna's novel. In the film, Walsh renders a watchful Sister Bernadette monitor the delivery throughout, while she declines the administration of any pain relief and verbally terrorises Kitty by reminding her of her fall, questioning her teaching abilities and reinforcing her need to do penance for her sins. The "undue intervention" of the nun, to use Wolf's words, appears at its outmost form when she ruthlessly insists to Kitty that death would be the only expected merit of her past wrongdoings.

Once the baby is born, the domineering attitude of the nun in the labour ward continues, as she refuses to allow the nurse to give Kitty stitches after her bad tear during childbirth. The recurrence of this practice is confirmed by June Goulding, a former midwife in Bessboro Mother and Baby Home, in her book *The Light in the Window*, which is based on her experiences in that institution. She remarks that it was understood that the girls had to go through pain and put up with the discomfort of being torn, as they had to atone for their sins (31). This imposed agony resulted in most of the cases into what Goulding describes as "excruciating labour" (33), also adding to the nuns' common refusal to administer any kind of analgesics, and to the other elements of punishment mentioned above.[7] Such understanding of

[7] In a further elaboration of her witnessing of Magdalenes' incarceration and pain, Goulding also comments: "The girls were treated like criminals in this building and there was a general air of penitence. It permeated every corner —even the chapel. Those in charge who ran the godforsaken place like a prison did so as cruelly and as uncaringly as any medieval gaoler. [...] Mother and child were alone and together for at least ten days, at most three loved-packed years until the final and inevitable parting forever —*amputation without anaesthetic*" (1998: 42, emphasis added).

pain, typical of the Catholic doctrine, echo again the ideas discussed by Glucklick, who observes that "pain can be the solution to suffering, a psychological analgesic that removes anxiety, guilt, and even depression" (11). The custom illustrates quite clearly his idea of the juridical model of pain insofar it is understood as "a debt or damages owed" (16).

Also, the representation of the pregnant Magdalene body in the two texts bears out Julia Kristeva's ideas about abjection in very interesting ways. In *Powers of Horror*, she pointed out that the abject is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Consequently, in order to achieve national identity societies tend to reject and contain abjection insofar as it threatens its symbolic order. In Kristevan theory, defiled and fuzzy elements, like corpses, excrement or blood, blur the limits of a normative society, displaying its fragility and corruption. The problem lies in the fact that the abject is always present, so that it constantly jeopardises identity for individuals and nations, which try to separate from it. For Kristeva too, maternity and femininity have been elements against which cultural, religious and national identity has been constructed: "That other sex, the feminine, becomes synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppressed" (70). In this light, the notion of the abject perfectly applies to the Magdalenes, who have historically experienced various forms of abjection/suppression on account of their "disturbing" condition, as described above. More particularly, I believe that the Magdalene body in labour epitomises Kristeva's ideas on the blurring of corporeal limits, as well as the disruption of cultural borders and the nation's attempt to control social anxiety.

Most aspects of Kristeva's theory of the abject can be said to materialise in the scene of Kitty's childbirth, especially in its last part, when right after the delivery Sister Bernadette asks Margaret to put out for the pigs a bucket with a mixture of amniotic liquid, the umbilical cord and the placenta. The fluids in the bucket, which Walsh emphasises with a camera close-up, figure as a perfect example of the abject: they blur the body's boundaries, and disturb the system order, not only by being female fluids but also, and most importantly, for the institutionalised context of defilement in which they were produced. This interpretation also coalesces with Luce Irigaray's denunciation of the lack of representation of female fluids, as made clear in her study *This Sex Which Is Not One*. For Irigaray, the traditional absence of representations of female corporeal fluidity has to do with the prevailing associations between solidity and rationality, whereas, she remarks, "fluids have never stopped arguing" against that relationship (113). Similarly, in "Stabat Mater" Kristeva also reclaims what she calls "the semiotic maternal body", that is, the linguistic expression of the body of the mother, which has been traditionally repressed by the Catholic dogma of the virginal maternity of the Virgin Mary (143).

In order to counteract this recurrent victimisation, Walsh and Conlon-McKenna emphasise women's corporeal force by featuring one of the most sordid aspects of transgressive female sexuality, and they focus instead on the liberating effects of its fluidity. For that reason, their choice becomes a spectacle that not only defies the punitive corporeal acts effected upon the Magdalenes, in the Foucauldian disciplinary mode, but also pinpoints a decisive aspect of these women's experiences

that must be openly exposed. Thus, with their representation of the institutionalised female body in its outmost abjected form, Conlon McKenna and Walsh fill the traditional gap of artistic discourse about childbirth, which was also claimed by the French philosopher, while suggesting that the victimised female body needs to be brought to a broad public space of representation, analysis and critique. Indeed, as Jennifer Jeffers points out, "it is the body —or contestation of the body— that is at the heart of the Christian religion, important to societal regulation, and precisely the recipient of violence, punishment, and incarceration in Ireland. It is the body in the Irish consciousness that first and foremost needs to be interrogated" (29). A similar point has been made by Heather Ingman when she notes that in the "hypermasculinized Irish nationalism, maternal subjectivity featured as the abject, that which had to be suppressed in order for identity to form" (75). In that sense, the two texts propose a return to the material or matter, echoing the postulates of Judith Butler considered above.

Indeed, in *Sinners*, female sexual repression of the Magdalenes acquires a deeper and tragic meaning through Kitty. Patrick's promises of a life together outside the laundry raise her hopes for some time, but the prospect of marrying a Magdalene, with all the prejudices of their sexual looseness that circulated in the community, results in Patrick's final refusal. As a consequence, and shortly after her baby is given up for adoption, Kitty commits suicide by falling off the stairs in the laundry courtyard. In this terrible scene, her body, or more precisely her corpse, becomes again the abject, not only for its visual impact upon Patrick and the other Maggies, but also because for cultural identity to prevail, it has to be "covered" as a "terrible and unfortunate accident", as Sister Bernadette asks the policeman to report it right afterwards. Again, this scene reworks Kristeva's views of the abject, particularly in reference to the corpse, which for her, "seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (*Powers of Horror* 4). In this case, and understood within the context of the Irish cultural and Catholic grounds described above, the suicidal Magdalene corpse represents the paramount expression of abjection and corruption, from which society and its agents of power, figured in the microcosm of the laundry, need to detach in order to perpetuate their core identity. To counteract such debasement, Kristeva also claims that repudiated elements should not be expelled or silenced as they are necessary for the complete social validation of the individual. Under those circumstances, the abject must be spoken through sublimated activities, in which Kristeva includes the production of art, literature or psychology and sexuality, and this is precisely what is accomplished by the director. In other words, the therapeutic speaking of the abject is carried out through the film, and, by foregrounding the corpse of a Magdalene, Walsh seems to be claiming that, contrary to the accepted rule of silence about Magdalene corporeality, it is necessary to depict all its details, to make it a spectacle and therefore, an element of resistance, because being the abject, it draws attention to the fragility of the social order upon which its defilement has been constructed.

4. CONCLUSIONS

A close reading of *The Magdalen* and *Sinners* in terms of corporeal discipline has shed some light upon the durability of a system of punishment that is detrimental to women and has lingered well into the twentieth century in Ireland. From different artistic genres, the two texts emphasise the same practices of corrective pain within the laundries, which became part of the officially sanctioned apparatus of moral rectification. However, with the stories told in both productions, we are acquainted with the fact that with their particular focus on women considered sexually disruptive, these institutions typified the prejudiced treatment of deviance and the gender-biased character of such an attempt. The issue of corporeal punishment has been a rather contentious one when it comes to the intersection of religious doctrine and individual performance. In the two productions, this clash is encapsulated by the different modes of corporeal discipline upon the Magdalenes, usually carried out for the sake of moral learning, but also widely misconstrued on more general, excessive and wicked interpretations of the atonement of the Magdalene other. With my analysis, I have tried to provide a fuller understanding of how Conlon-McKenna and Walsh articulate the Magdalenes' embodied experience of pain in what was, essentially, a cruel enactment of social performance over the material individual body, as denounced by Butler, Ingman, Wolf and most of the critics that have been mentioned above. To counterweigh that widespread norm, both the novelist and the director offer artistic representations of some of its most hidden particulars while demanding more subjective and individual-centered expressions of this infamous chapter of Ireland's history. Hence, they can certainly be said to have set the agenda for the display of the actual corporeal bodies of the Magdalenes that has been taking place in Ireland in most recent times.

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EXPROPRIATED BODIES: VICTIMS OF FATHER-DAUGHTER INCEST IN THREE CONTEMPORARY IRISH NOVELS*

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Abstract

This article explores the representation of father-daughter incest victims as expropriated bodies in three contemporary Irish novels: *In Night's City* (1982) by Dorothy Nelson, *The Invisible Worm* (1991) by Jennifer Johnston and *Another Alice* (1996) by Lia Mills. The protagonists of these novels are young women who, in order to cope with life, try to come to terms with a painful past marked by abominable episodes of sexual abuse. The literary representation of their bodies, locus of sexual exploitation, is examined from a feminist psychoanalytic approach with a dual focus: first, attention is paid to the way in which these bodies are perceived by the perpetrators —as commodities—, by the girls themselves —as alienated properties without any value— and by Irish Society in a more broad sense —as abject; and second, analysis is shifted to the inner struggle the protagonists undergo to reappropriate their bodies and, consequently, their lives.

Keywords: incest, sexual abuse, psychoanalytic feminism, abjection, melancholia, Ireland.

Resumen

El artículo analiza tres novelas irlandesas contemporáneas en las que se aborda la temática del incesto padre-hija: *In Night's City* (1982) de Dorothy Nelson, *The Invisible Worm* (1991) de Jennifer Johnston y *Another Alice* (1996) by Lia Mills, con el propósito de estudiar la figura de la víctima como cuerpo expropiado. Las protagonistas de estas narrativas son mujeres jóvenes que intentan superar un pasado traumático, plagado de episodios de abuso sexual abominables, para hacer frente a la vida. La representación literaria de sus cuerpos, lugar de explotación sexual, se estudia desde la perspectiva del feminismo psicoanalítico con una doble finalidad: en primer lugar, prestar atención al modo en el que estos son concebidos por los padres (como objetos), por las propias víctimas (como propiedades alienadas carenes de valor) y por la sociedad irlandesa en su conjunto (como lo abjecto); y en segundo lugar, exponer la lucha interna que emprenden las protagonistas con el fin de retomar el control de sus cuerpos y, en consecuencia, de sus vidas.

Palabras clave: incesto, abuso sexual, feminismo psicoanalítico, abyección, melancolía, Irlanda.

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This paper will examine the representation of father-daughter incest victims in contemporary Irish narrative, focusing specifically on three novels written in the final two decades of the twentieth century: *In Night's City* (1982) by Dorothy Nelson, *The Invisible Worm* (1991) by Jennifer Johnston and *Another Alice* (1996) by Lia Mills.[1] The authors of those works are amongst the most successful, accomplished and respected Irish writers and hence their portrayals assume particular potential interest. It will be seen that the young protagonists of these narratives have been sexually abused by their fathers, emotionally neglected by their powerless mothers and openly stigmatised by Irish society. Devastated, they develop a strong sense of dislocation and eventually become split subjects as they need to keep their consciousness —mind— apart from defilement —body.

In Night's City narrates the story of Sara Kavanagh and her mother, Esther, who revisit their past while keeping vigil over the corpse of the paterfamilias, whose funeral is about to take place. At the beginning of the novel, readers learn immediately that Sara was sexually abused by her father when she was a child, and with the complicity of her mother, who herself had also been a victim of incest. *The Invisible Worm* tells the story of Laura Quinlan, a thirty-seven year-old woman haunted by the ghosts of the past: a pederast father and a negligent mother, who, unable to cope with the situation, commits suicide as soon as her daughter confesses to her the source of her grief. A strong sense of fear and guilt blight Laura's existence, impelling her into silence and social isolation, even long after her parents' death. In *Another Alice*, Lia Mills examines the way in which a damaged daughter, Alice Morrisey, relates to an abusive father and to an "apparently cold, complicitous, and uncaring mother" (Moloney 181), both of whom regard her as an abject being.

These novels will be analysed from a feminist psychoanalytic approach and with a dual focus. Attention will first centre on how the bodies of these young protagonists, locus of sexual exploitation, are perceived by the perpetrators of incest —as commodities which can be used and abused at will; on how their bodies are viewed by the victims themselves —as alienated properties without any value; and, in a broader sense, on how those bodies are seen by Irish society —as defiled matter which needs to be purified in order to re-enter the symbolic order. Secondly, the analysis will aim to show how the three girls undergo an inner struggle to be able to regain control of their bodies, and most relevantly to be able to accept and enjoy them, thus becoming what Julia Kristeva calls "subjects-in-process" —*sujet-en-procès*—, that is, a subject who "is in the process of being set up" (Kristeva, "Mourning the Lost Mother" 339).

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[1] For an analysis of this subject on Edna O'Brien's work, see my essay "Child Sexual Abuse and Traumatic Identity in *Down by the River by Edna O'Brien,*" published in *Identities on the Move. Contemporary Representations of New Sexualities and Gender Identities*, edited by Silvia Pilar Castro Borrego and María Isabel Romero Ruiz in 2015.

Dorothy Nelson, Jennifer Johnston and Lia Mills dare to lay bare a topic, incest, which is often called "the ultimate taboo" or the "universal taboo" because it is regarded as the gravest violation of the rules of human society (Finkelhor 85), a violation which is based upon the father's patriarchal right to use female members of his family to provide him with love, service and sex (Herman 49). In writing such novels, these Irish authors suggest that incest is secretly but not infrequently practised in Ireland. This is consistent with the information contained in a press release issued in 1993 by Monica Prendiville, president of the Irish Countrywomen's Association, in which she openly discusses the prevalence of incest in Irish society. She states that at least one third of Irish women have been subjected to sexual abuse and that many thousands of Irish girls and women have been victims of incest (281). In the same vein, Sarah-Anne Buckley adds that "for victims of incest in Ireland resistance was more a rarity than an actuality" (168). In the 1990s, women's organisations and individual women like Prendiville made incest an issue. When media coverage of this topic explodes, it enters the nation's discourse and the number of victims who gather strength and confidence to report it increases. Formerly a taboo topic hardly ever discussed in Ireland —as it had been contained "within the private sphere, the space of male privilege" (Conrad 82), father-daughter incest became then the "focus of an increasingly substantial body of sociological, psychoanalytic, and clinical discourse; the subject of modern novels, TV docu-dramas, and films" (Ford 1). Nelson, Johnston and Mills are, no doubt, part of a collective attempt to bravely and outspokenly denounce the cultural conditions that makes father-daughter incest possible in contemporary Ireland. Moreover, they portray the devastating consequences for the victims, whose bodies are assaulted, colonised, controlled and silenced; and whose minds are alienated, haunted by memories of abuse, troubled by recurrent nightmares and weakened by self-contempt. These writers also describe the victims' struggle to eventually acquire some voice and some agency with which to reappropriate their own bodies and rematerialise them with one purpose: re-entering the symbolic order, defined by Judith Butler as the "register of regulatory ideality" (*Bodies that Matter* 18). Their protagonists —Sara Kavanagh in *In Night's City*, Laura Quinlan in *The Invisible Worm* and Alice Morrisey in *Another Alice*— come "to symbolize all the abused children, battered women, and incest survivors whose stories bear witness to the underside of Irish nationalism, stories that men like [their fathers] wish to suppress because they do not fit into the image of the glorious new nation" (Ingman 340).

1. THE FATHER-PERPETRATOR'S PERCEPTION OF HIS DAUGHTER'S BODY: A DOCILE, EXPROPRIATED AND DEFILED BODY

Even in late twentieth century Ireland, social, religious and political forces joined to perpetuate patriarchy and —within this ideological framework— the role of the father as the absolute ruler of the household. Thus, the paterfamilias becomes the head of the family unit and his authority is regarded as sacred and protected by law. This would explain why the father-perpetrator in each of these novelistic

narratives thinks he has the right to impose his will upon his wife and progeny as a natural prerogative. He is "the boss in the house" (Nelson 46) and, unfortunately, his nature is that of a "[t]yrant" (Mills 41). The "patriarchal law, the law of the father decrees that the 'product' of sexual union, the child, shall belong exclusively to the father, be marked by his name [and] that the womb which bears that child should be a passive receptacle with no claims on the product" (Gallop 156). Therefore, the paterfamilia's sense of power develops parallel to an instinct of ownership that leads him to believe that he owns his wife and children in the same way he owns a house, a car or a horse. In this order of things, family members are bound to him by a bond that only he can release. In *In Another Alice*, the protagonist literally confesses to her psychotherapist that, in childhood, her father made her feel that she was one of his properties: "He was my father, [therefore] he owned me" (Mills 78). The father-perpetrators in these three novels control their wives and children by physically and psychologically abusing them. They skilfully employ what Kristeva coins "the power of horror" to make sure that every single member of the family unit respects their decisions and obeys their commands, no matter how perverse those orders may be. Rebelling against this order of things would seem to imply rebellion against natural, religious and social laws.

It is no surprise, then, that their daughters do not defend themselves when they are raped; but simply keep quiet and let them act. Alice describes this strategy as follows: "I have to be careful not to make him angry. So I act as if I see nothing, hear nothing, say nothing. I do what he tells me to do" (Mills 347). The victims' bodies, small and weak, become "passive surface[s]" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 4) that reflect the values of Irish society, which imposes women's subjection to men and children's obedience to parents. As Karin Meiselman indicates: "To truly understand the passivity of the daughter, one needs to imagine the situation as it is perceived through the eyes of a child. Especially in a paternalistic family, the daughter has been taught to obey her father in all situations, to anticipate punishment for any show of defiance, and to believe that what her father does is unquestionably in her best interests" (159). In these novels, the father-perpetrator regards his victim's body as a "puppet", a "rag doll with floppy limbs and empty head" (Mills 220). In his eyes, she is, to employ Luce Irigaray's expression, a "commodity", i.e, a utilitarian object without "any possible identity or communicable value" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 188). This means that she is available to be used, abused, or even annihilated or, in Michel Foucault's expression, hers is a "docile body": a body which can be "manipulated, shaped and trained" to obey commands (Foucault 136). Bodies become docile through discipline and the perpetrator knows how to implement it: "All the activity of the disciplined individual must be punctuated and sustained by injunctions whose efficacity rests on brevity and clarity; the order does not need to be explained or formulated, it must trigger off the required behaviour and that is enough" (Foucault 166). Thus, Michael Morrisey in *Another Alice* commands his daughter: "*turn over*, *open your legs*, *lie still*, *stop whining*" (Mills 347). Far from displaying parental affection, the fathers in these novels, monstrous tyrants, exhibit a terrible despotism. Unable to feel any sense of empathy for their victims, they are ready to manipulate and torture their small vulnerable bodies nearly to death as

if they were inert, insensitive and worthless matter. For example, in *The Invisible Worm*, Senator O'Meara inflicts such pain upon his daughter's body when sexually abusing her that Laura thinks she is about to perish: "With his left hand he took her hair [...] and winding it into a long, dark rope, he pulled it round her neck. He silenced the only word she could say. He pulled until she thought she was going to faint" (Johnston 156).

This sexual abuse and physical cruelty, as Susie Orbach states, "is designed to show that the master of the body is not its inhabitant but its torturer" (108). The expropriation of the girl's body has specific territorial connotations since she becomes a kind of expatriate in relation to her own physicality, becomes a kind of surface that the "colonizer" marks as his own with sweat, blood and sperm, and where he freely exercises his "male, phallic power" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 70). Without a body, the victim is totally disempowered and in this condition, she can only surrender[2] and accept a subordinate role, that of "the servant of the militant male, his shadow" (Cixous 420). "The Law of the Father" is thus enforced, a Law that according to Judith Butler "dictates the 'being' and 'having' positions" of men and women within the symbolic order (*Bodies that Matter* 139), a Law "that produces the trembling of the body prepared for its inscription" and "marks it [...] with the symbolic stamp of sex" (101). The perpetrator uses his "asymmetrical, irrational, wily, uncontrollable power" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 70) to impose this law and oppress his victim, a member of the other sex, which according to patriarchal order is "unintelligible" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter 39*) and according to the Catholic Church is "synonymous with a radical evil" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 70). In these narratives, the perpetrators can even try to convey their misogynistic prejudices to their daughters in justification of their atrocities. They want to convince the girls that they deserve the harm inflicted upon them when sexually abused, that it is warranted as a kind of punishment for being abject matter or *massa damnata*, whether for Alice for being "bad and dirty" (Mills 343), Laura for being "mad" and Sara for being a "fuckin' little whore" (Nelson 27).

As "discourse constructs the subject" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 8), the three perpetrators use its effective power to materialize their daughters' body in derogatory terms. Their hate speech puzzles and injures their victims as it actually constitutes them at the moment of its utterance (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 18).[3] As a consequence, the victims end up accepting the labels imposed upon them by their male progenitors as if those descriptions corresponded to a factual reality. So, Alice says: "I am, *dirty*, *filthy*, *slut*, *evil*" (Mills 1996: 347), Laura affirms: "I'm just mad" (Johnston 136), and Sara simply attaches the nasty labels addressed to her on her imaginary alter ego whom she calls Maggie.

[2] "A woman without a body [...] can't possibly be a good fighter", states Cixous (420).
[3] Butler calls it "identity through injury" (*The Psychic Life* 105).

2. THE VICTIM'S PERCEPTION OF HER BODY DURING AND AFTER SEXUAL ABUSE: A DEFILED, FRAGMENTED, HATEFUL AND ALIEN BODY

Bodies "must be clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 102) —that is, in order to be incorporable into the "register of regulatory ideality." Before being sexually assaulted, Sara Kavanagh, Laura Quinlan and Alice Morrisey perceive themselves as "normal" as they comply with the necessary requirements to be part of the symbolic order. Their respective minds and bodies are clean and proper according to Irish religious and cultural regulatory ideality. They all seem to share some highly positive features before being raped: they are intelligent, they love reading, they are eager to learn, they are sensitive, they are mentally and physically healthy, and they love the company of people though they have a rich inner world that makes them somehow special. These singular features are apparent in for instance, Alice Morrisey's belief that she is a heroine from the ancient world, a secret survivor of the Fianna[4] (Mills 27), and in Laura Quinlan's proud memory of her own courageous portrayal of the heroine in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* at school (Johnston 28).

However, after incestuous relations take place, the protagonists start perceiving themselves as defiled by those who cover their bodies with sweat, blood and sperm. In fact, Alice Morrisey thinks her father uses her "as a toilet" (Mills 381), a receptacle of dirt; Laura conceives herself as "Bruised... No, unclean. Marked, marred by uncleanness. Dirty. Foul. [...] Defiled. Stained, smirched" (Johnston 133). As the potency of the pollution of defilement is proportional to the potency of the prohibition that founds it (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 69), and since incest is one of the "two taboos of totemism with which the morality of man begins" (Freud 185), its potency to defile is huge. Once defiled by these body fluids, the girls lack their "own and clean self" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 53) and, as a result, become abject and inferior beings who must occupy a position on the margins of the symbolic order. This stigma differentiates them from what Kristeva calls "the normal category of normal people" (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 3-4). To get rid of "polluting" body fluids and their sense of defilement, the young girls resort either to water or fire which are recurrent symbols of purification and rebirth: Laura launches herself into a rough sea; Alice holds herself against an old steam pipe in the bathroom "raising red weals on her legs. Furious that she [...cannot] stay there long enough to scorch and sear something slimy and horrible from her skin..." (Mills 270); and Sara washes herself with steaming hot water with the purpose to peel her flesh off in layers till her bones are completely bare (Nelson 102-103).

According to Sigmund Freud, "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego" [in Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 13]. This would explain the reason why the protagonists of the novels, whose bodies are defiled, marked, and abject, become split subjects. In

[4] Mythological Irish warriors who featured in the stories of the Fenian Cycle.

Kristeva's terms, in order to avoid total collapse, they need to keep their consciousness —I/subject/inside/mind— apart from defilement —Unconscious/the other/object/outside/body═ (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 30). The experience of sexual abuse is so unbearable for them that they need to detach themselves from their bodies, where the horrendous sexual assaults are taking place. They imagine they are watching the incest acts from outside their bodies as if they were witnessing them rather than suffering them. Dorothy Nelson describes Sara's process of binary splitting —dissociation of mind and body— and the resultant death drive in the following way: "the Dark is over me with the snake. [...] The colours are eatin' me up. And then I'm not me anymore. I'm Maggie. The colours are eatin' Maggie up. So it is all right. It is all right" (Nelson 58). Sara's body and mind end up being two entirely different entities, therefore they receive two different names: Sara stands for the conscious/mind and Maggie symbolises the unconscious/defiled body of the once unified subject. Maggie, the other self, is not only the barrier protecting Sara from psychological collapse, but also the addressee of her confessions, as no one within her family or social circle seems or wants to take notice of her distressing situation. Sara and Maggie explicitly represent the protagonist's schizophrenia that results from the trauma of incest, Sara/Maggie provides two different views of the same phenomenon: detached from her own body, Sara can look upon Joseph Kavanagh as a father, whereas Maggie, damaged body, can only gaze at him as "a man" turned into beast (Nelson 102).[5] Passive, silent and "sexed" matter, Maggie acquires voice and some agency in the last chapter of *In Night's City*. She not only revolts against her father's cruelty by designing, though unsuccessfully, a scheme to provoke his death, but she also manifests her disapproval of Sara's betrayal: "I wouldn't forgive Sara for still loving him after what he'd done to me" (Nelson 103-104). Laura Quinlan's mind also projects an alter ego: as early as on the first page of *The Invisible Worm*, the reader meets another woman who, unlike Laura, seems to run away from the house where she feels trapped. Alice Morrisey, however, experiences what has been termed "parcellary splitting" (Klein in Kristeva, *Black Sun* 18), since her very self seems to be divided into many replicas. She very often "sees" children, also victims of incest, confined in a dark space. She eventually realises that each of them is a copy of herself, that every single time she was sexually assaulted by her father, a fragment of her own flesh came off to become a new being, and that though also weak, enslaved and doomed, "They were all me. One for every filthy time he touched me. Some of them even liking it, [...] until he hurt them. Us. Me." (Mills 383). Thus the little girls' bodies are not only defiled and marked, but also broken, incomplete, deeply wounded. Their wound is not only physical, but also, by osmosis, psychical. This invention of another self, this regarding one's body as "the other", is a defence mechanism employed by the girls to cope with the fear and sorrow which are provoked by incest. As Mary MacNamara, the protagonist

[5] Similarly, Sara regards Esther Kavanagh as a mother, whereas Maggie refers to her as "an old woman" obsessed with cleaning (Nelson 102).

of Edna O'Brien's *Down by the River*, another novel dealing with incest, states: "It does not hurt if you are not you" (O'Brien 5).

The victims of incest in the novels here examined regard their bodies, centre of abuse and suffering, as alien and hateful matter. They assume, as conveyed by the perpetrators, that their bodies have no value, that they are "thing[s] dragged towards any shape and property" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 176). As such, these become the uncanny strangers on display —the ailing or dead figures— which so often turn out to be the nasty companion (Cixous 419). Sara Kavanagh hates her body so much that, as already noted, she decides to dissociate herself entirely from it and call it Maggie, who, in turn, shows her self-loathing by affirming '"I hate myself," I said. "Hate, hate, hate, myself" (Nelson 111). As sites of phallic inscription, these "confiscated" bodies are attacked, both consciously and unconsciously, by the girls themselves. Their self-destructive behaviour involves eating disorders,[6] addictions to drugs and alcohol, self-inflicted pain, self-mutilation and suicidal attempts. Alice's case is most noteworthy: she bites herself to the point of bleeding, bruises herself, scratches herself, and makes marks on her arms and legs (Mills 269). By their self-inflicted wounds, the protagonists express what they are unable to confess to others through words. In Orbach's terms, they want to "bring an attentiveness to a body that has been neglected, disregarded or mistreated" in order to amplify their pain "as a mechanism of self-communication and self-expression" (108). By exerting violence on their own bodies, they are actively implementing a strategy of resistance; they are actively rejecting what they believe to be a possession of the tyrant. This is proof that they can exercise some kind of control over their bodies as a way to re-appropriate them. Paradoxically, the dialectic of power implies that resistance to bodily abuse is implemented by equal resort to bodily abuse.

Judith Butler has asserted that, in an incestuous relationship, the alienation of the child's body implies a further deprivation: that of his/her psychic life[7] (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 155). Laura Quinlan refers to this when she analyses the impact incest has had on her life: "That was what he had stolen from me... the expectation of love, joy, peace" (Johnston 144). Deprived of their psychic life, Sara Kavanagh, Laura Quinlan and Alice Morrisey project themselves onto wounded, bloody, cadaverous and indolent bodies. This can be most clearly illustrated through two quotations, one from *The Invisible Worm* and one from *In Night's City*. In *The Invisible Worm*, Laura Quinlan states that she lives in a perpetual vegetative state: "It's as if there were a stopper somewhere in my body, and when it is pulled out I become slowly drained of hope, love, confidence, even the ability to feel pain; I become an empty skin" (Johnston 125). In *In Night's City*, Sara Kavanagh mentally addresses her mother saying: "Ma I'm dead would you please come and feed me to the dog or else mix me up in cow dung and send me down the country to the farmers as

[6] Sara falls prey to both anorexia and bulimia, while Laura and Alice become anorexic.

[7] Since "it is often precisely the child's love that is exploited in the scene of incest" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 155).

fresh manure" (Nelson 68). Both fragments seem to show that incest, defilement and death are closely connected. When defiled by incest, the girls' bodies become "flesh in the state of decay" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 186) and eventually fall "beyond the limit —cadere, cadaver" (3). Unable to clearly think, speak or act, their behaviour coincides with that associated with the "melancholy woman", depicted by Kristeva as "the dead one [...]. Modest, silent, without verbal or desiring bonds with others, she wastes away by striking moral and physic blows against herself" (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 30).

Born in families where physical and psychological abuse is highly frequent, where members relate to each other in a non-protective and non-affective way, where loyalty and silence are insisted upon to "keep [...] up the family name" (Mills 291), Sara, Laura, and Alice are unable to verbally express the cause of their distress. They cannot even resort to their mothers for "help. Safety. Reassurance. Love" (Johnston 149). Alice is unable to tell her mother, Elaine Morrisey, the source of her suffering, as Elaine is always busy, tired and cross. Rather than a source of relief, Elaine is a source of distress since she continually puts negative labels on everything Alice does, and punishes her, both psychologically and physically, for every single action she considers deviant. As a consequence, Alice develops a strong sense of guilt which leads her to conclude that she deserves what is happening to her and, therefore, to accept it with stoicism. Laura Quinlan and Sara Kavanagh dare to reveal their secret to their female progenitors, but neither Harriet O'Meara —Laura's mother— nor Esther Kavanagh —Sarah's mother— provides any soothing credit, helpful protection or healing affection. The passive-dependent personalities of the mothers lead them to align with their husbands whether by facilitating, concealing or justifying violent actions against their daughters. In Judith Herman's expression, due to the "enormous power imbalance between the father[s] and mother[s]" in patriarchal families, the latter "are terrified of any assertion of power" (in Caruth 133). This would explain the way in which Harriet addresses her daughter when informed that she has been victim of incest: "We have to carry on as if nothing had ever happened. [...] Get up like a good girl, and go to school. [...] Please don't hate him, Laura. Think how frightened he must be" (Johnston 177). Sara's mother, Esther Kavanagh, a victim of incest herself, however, prefers to ignore the truth. Although she becomes a bystander at the girl's incestuous abuse, Esther tries to convince the victim that she must look towards abuse not as a reality, but as "a bad dream" (Nelson 8). These mothers —who withhold love, attention, support and sympathy when their daughters are sexually assaulted by their fathers— effectively contribute to reinforcing the strong death drive that their daughters experience. They represent a type of devouring motherhood that has very little to do with the prototypical one —that associated to the figure of the Virgin Mary— which is embodied in the devoted and loving mother who constantly protects her offsprings from any harm, and who teaches them how to keep themselves within the symbolic order by adhering to "positive" values and by keeping "a clean and proper body". If "maternal authority is the trustee of the self's clean and proper body", as Kristeva states (*Powers of Horror* 72), then the mothers of the protagonists clearly fail to comply with their responsibility.

In addition, the victims of father-daughter incest become marginal elements not only within but also outside their family framework. Damaged, defiled, melancholic and silenced bodies, the protagonists of these novels cannot be included in "the normal category of normal people" (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 3-4). Within the imagination of these "normal people" who represent the patriarchal and Catholic order in Ireland, the bodies of Sara, Laura and Alice evoke an irrational fear which they associate with the abject, defined by Kristeva as that that "disturbs identity, system, order" (*Powers of Horror* 4). For Irish society, these girls embody that which "is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles" (4). To protect the symbolic order, social agents not only spot and label the victims of incest as abject bodies, they also try to transform these into "clean and proper" ones. Therefore, the protagonists are forced to undergo, first, a process of purification and, second, a process of re-materialisation to become "true" Irish girls and thus re-enter the symbolic order. Different strategies are devised for this purpose, and some of them —like confinement or medical treatment— constitute, once more, the appropriation of their bodies. Alice Morrisey and Sara Kavanagh are taken to the doctor in search of a medical treatment which could solve their physical and psychical disorders. The possibility of a stay at a hospital is discussed in the case of Alice. Laura Quinlan is imprisoned at home by her own husband who wants to exercise a tight control upon her (Johnston 52) because he believes she is "crazy" (15). Classified as abject bodies, controlled for being insane and injured by hate speech, the protagonists develop a sense of mistrust, fear and insecurity. Vulnerable, like "an unshelled snail" (Johnston 40), they retreat to their homes —very often to their bedrooms— in search of isolation and protection. Laura and Alice are prototypically house-bound and agoraphobic, the former literally states: "People frighten me. Here [at home] I am protected from people" (Johnston 94). They epitomise the "ego, wounded to the point of annulment" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 47).

3. REAPPROPRIATING THEIR OWN BODIES: VICTIMS STRIVING "TO COME ALIVE"

Memories of sexual abuse make the protagonists relive the terrors of the past: "I live with voices, touches, the violations of the past" says Laura Quinlan (Johnston 57). The past seems to condition the present and the future. As victims of incest, they find themselves trapped in an outside-of-meaning, repetitive, marginal and invisible existence. However, the lesson they must learn at the end of their stories is, in Cixous's words, that "the future must no longer be determined by the past" (Cixous 416) and that if "sex [is] itself materialized" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 10) by repetition, it can be, by the same procedure, re-materialised (2). So, what Sara, Laura and Alice must do in order to re-enter the symbolic order is to assimilate and persistently repeat, and thereby establish a new pattern of behaviour.

The death of the perpetrators, the detachment from "dysfunctional mothers" and, most importantly, the bond with people who provide them with support, confidence, kindness and affection are all elements that offer Alice and Laura pos-

sibilities for re-materialization through opening up a new horizon of experiences. To fully acknowledge their past and come to terms with it, Alice Morrisey counts on her psychotherapist and Laura Quinlan depends on Dominic O'Hara. This support is crucial for both of them in reconstructing themselves as "proper and clean bodies" and in recovering their original psychosomatic unity through regaining what they lost when their bodies were alienated from them by sexual abuse: they regain self-esteem, self-respect, self-confidence and self-ownership. But only Alice, having completed a lengthy process of psychotherapy, becomes a real survivor. She realises the achievement when she starts feeling love for herself: "Something warm stirred inside her. She was shocked to realise that what she felt was love. As she recognised it, it grew. Love for herself, both then and now. Love and a fierce kind of pride" (Mills 350). Sara Kavanagh, however, is not as lucky as the other two characters. She cannot find someone ready to help her to produce a testimony of her traumatic past, to accept it and therefore to overcome it. As a result, her psyche does not evolve emotionally in a significant way over the years. This is illustrated by the fact that, even as an adult, she clings to a version of an ideal patriarchal family reality, one which she made up as a kid to cope with fear and pain: "My Ma was a good woman. Da beat us sometimes but that's because we were bad. He loved us all the same. And my Ma loved me. My Ma LOVED ME." (Nelson 113).

At the end of their respective journeys, the protagonists want to abandon their states of lethargy and to rearticulate their minds and bodies in order to "come alive" again (Johnston 180-181). Laura Quinlan feels able to set fire to the place where her father molested her, her new sense of power can be easily appreciated in the way she addresses Dominic, who helps her accomplish this ritual of purification: "I don't want you to speak. Not a word. I am generalissimo. I am in charge" (Johnston 166). Alice Morrisey feels satisfied with her own transformation into "another Alice", with her successful career as a photographer, and with her role as a mother. Her goal in life is now "to live well", to discover unknown places and enjoy new experiences in the company of the person she most loves, her daughter Holly. Alice's attitude is that of the triumphant survivor; aided by a psychotherapist, she has successfully learnt to "denaturalise" sexual abuse, to overcome its effects (Champagne 2) and to inhabit her own body again. Laura Quinlan does not go as far as Alice Morrissey in the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of her bodily sense, but she is, at least, on the right path to develop a new and more positive bodily ego. Laura's and Sara's bodies are at this stage not only in need of action, but also open to love. These protagonists seem to claim "the right to pleasure, to *jouissance*, to passion" (Irigarary, "The Bodily Encounter" 421): when thinking about the future, they link any chance of experiencing happiness with male partners who could offer them the empathy and affection they long for. Laura's last thoughts in the novel are devoted to Dominic O'Hara: "I smile at the thought of that man. *Prehaps* my dreams will in the future be of him" (181). Sara's reflections are directed to a yet-unknown man who could help her re-enter the symbolic order as wife and mother: "Someday I'll get married and have children [...]. Everything will be all right then" (Nelson 113-14). As this indicates, the protagonists of *In Night's City* by Dorothy Nelson, *The Invisible Worm* by Jennifer Johnston and *Another Alice* by Lia Mills, though expe-

riencing and reacting towards incest in a similar way when they are still only girls, they "come alive" and reappropriate their own bodies as adults, albeit to different degrees, depending on their personal features and social bonds.

If there is agreement with Kristeva that "An enunciation [...] amounts to a denunciation" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 131), then it is more than apparent that Dorothy Nelson, Jennifer Johnston and Lia Mills denounce father-daughter incest as an extremely destructive hazard that may face the female sex within the closed and hidden reality of patriarchal family life. Their depictions and characterisations bluntly depict victims as alienated bodies who are discursively constructed as defiled matter not only by perpetrators, but also by "the normal category of normal people" in order to justify their appropriation, sexual exploitation, subjection and marginalization. The authors also condemn this phenomenon as thoroughly unacceptable describing the devastating and long-lasting effects it has on its victims, who will need to undergo a complex and lengthy mental process in order to satisfactorily reappropriate their bodies and, consequently, re-possess themselves and their lives.

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THE REPRESENTATION OF THE LESBIAN BODY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE*

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Abstract

In this essay, we examine the representation of the lesbian body in two contemporary Indian pop cultural products: Shobha Dé's bestseller novel *Strange Obsession* (1992) and Karan Razdan's Bollywood film *Girlfriend* (2004). We argue that rather than challenging and undermining the hegemonic modes of representation of lesbian women, both works deploy, and manipulate for dramatic effect, a repertoire of visual/textual stereotypes that have long been associated in misogynist and patriarchal imagination with perceptions of lesbian women as sexual abjects and heterosexual partners as victims of their insanity.

Keywords: homophobic discourse, male gaze, *Girlfriend*, *Strange Obsession*.

Resumen

En este ensayo, analizamos la representación del cuerpo lésbico en dos textos culturales de la cultura popular contemporánea de la India: la novel *Strange Obsession* de Shobha Dé (1992) y la película de Bollywood *Girldfriend* de Karan Razdan (2004). Argumentamos que, en lugar de desafiar los modos hegemónicos de la representación de las mujeres lesbianas, ambas obras despliegan y manipulan con efecto dramático un repertorio de estereotipos visuales y textuales que se han asociado con percepciones misóginas y patriarcales de las mujeres lesbianas como abyectas sexuales y sus parejas heterosexuales como víctimas de su locura.

Palabras clave: discurso homófobo, Mirada masculina, *Girlfriend*, *Strange Obsession*.

> We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. To make a truly unavoidable challenge of the question: What can be played?
>
> *Michel Foucault's* "Friendship as a Way of Life" (1981)

Within a context of denial as to the presence of lesbian relationships in the heteronormative environment of Indian society even today, it is my intention to examine that experience, using two heterosexual voices representing the lesbian abject: ShobhaDé's popular bestseller novel *Strange Obsession* (1992) and Karan Razdan's Bollywood film *Girlfriend* (2004).[1] I will focus on how the authors pretend to construct lesbian imaginative spaces, as they exploit the sensationalist aspects of lesbianism, seeking scandal as a tool of publicity. Both works share successful marketing strategies while manifesting traditional conceptualizations of gender and heteronormative models of women's identification. In the two works analyzed here, lesbianism is linked with insanity, dramatized by a bisexual love triangle which finally reinforces the conventional male-female relationship as the only acceptable one. Even though both works have been reviewed as unique creations for their depiction of lesbian relationships, rather than challenging and undermining the hegemonic modes of representation of lesbian women, *Girlfriend* and *Strange Obsession* deploy, and manipulate for dramatic effect, a repertoire of visual/textual stereotypes that have long been associated in misogynist and patriarchal imagination with perceptions of lesbian women as sexual abjects and heterosexual partners as victims of their insanity.

Girlfriend and *Strange Obsession* portray two single women who are aspiring models and are caught, unwillingly, in a tormented relationship with their same-sex 'best friends' in Bombay. These mannish female characters happen to be paranoid, manifesting a violent obsession towards their innocent villa-mates whenever the latter try to initiate a heterosexual relationship. Both love triangles construct a task-roles continuum: the naïve, feminine and vulnerable femme (Sapna in *G*, and Amrita in *SO*), the possessive and sexually dominant butch —the only one who is presented as a lesbian and seems to have an obsessive compulsive disorder— (Tanya in *G*, and Minx in *SO*), and the superhero (Rahul in *G*, and Rakesh in *SO*). In the end, the butch is condemned to fail both as a woman and as a lover and, as Shameem Kabir suggests, "must be punished and destroyed" (3). The lesbian, with her 'unhealthy' obsession, violently dies so that the femme is liberated and can live a happy and conventional heterosexual marriage.[2]

Given that a speaking subject occupies a place of power and authority, s/he requires an ethical involvement in the representation of 'others.' Razdan and Dé, in their powerful position as writers, reinforce dominant ideologies and disown their lesbian protagonists by dismissing them as mentally disturbed, thus denying any

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[1] From now on references to *Strange Obsession* and *Girlfriend* are given in abbreviations (*SO* and *G*).

[2] In spite of all the similarities, *Girlfriend* is not a filmic adaptation of the novel *Strange Obsession*. The writer/director has claimed in an interview with Jha (2004) that the script is completely original.

viable form of lesbianism in contemporary popular culture. When responding to right-wing condemnations of *Girlfriend*, Razdan declared that he did not mean to promote a message of support for lesbians, he just believed Indians should accept them. On the other hand, Shobha Déhas been acclaimed by many literary critics and journalists as the Indian creator of the New Woman, emphasizing in her novels free and independent female characters.[3] The New Woman emerged during the period of economic liberalization of the 1990s, signified by and celebrated for her sexual openness as opposed to the sexual conservativeness of previous decades. In the case of *Strange Obsession*, it has been argued that lesbianism can be interpreted as a protest against male hegemony in an effort to completely free female characters from dependence on men. On first sight, both works seem to be sensitive to queer desires (erotic captures in the film and detailed description of same-sex intercourse in the novel), but eventually they affirm the inevitability of heterosexuality: *SO* and *G* continue to portray women who are policed and disciplined by the dictates of heterosexual patriarchal marriage.

1. DESIRE FOR THE LESBIAN BODY: VOYEURISM AND THE MALE GAZE

Sapna and Amrita are the objectified females seen through Tanya's and Minx's masculine gaze and the (male) spectator's/reader's gaze. They are fetishized as the perfect product of beauty (they are young supermodels) which alleviates the threat posed to the (male) spectator/reader by the figure of the butch. Razdan and Dé attempt a reversal of the male gaze when in *G* Tanya is gazing at Sapna, the object of her desire, while Sapna is in the bathtub and Tanya peers through a half-open door at her, or when in *SO*, Minx tapes Amrita naked many times with a video camera, while living together, and for example commands: "Lie back the way you were and play with yourself—use the flowers and fruits. Go on—don't you have any imagination?" (186). But both authors fail, as their attempt at showing a possible instance of a female gaze and desire is "almost exclusively understood in male (and commonly heterocentric) terms [and can't] be transformed so that it is capable of accommodating the very category on whose exclusion it has been made possible" (Grosz quoted in Sue Thornham 118). This can result in what Jagger points out to be "co-option of existing power relations and regulatory ideals rather than actually challenging them or their basic premises" (105).[4] Moreover, Tanya's and Minx's desire can only be accommodated when they are 'cross-dressed,' and therefore their access to pleasure is through 'masculine identification.'

[3] See, for example, Chaudhary (2013), Vats (2012), Rafiuddin and Parab (2013), Chauhan (2011), Kumar (2012), and Saraladevi (2013), among many other articles and reviews.

[4] Butler suggests that lesbianism is not wholly unique and to a certain extent it cannot be freed from being modeled upon heterosexuality (1993: 310).

Girlfriend is addressed to a male target audience, which is bombarded by erotic lesbian scenes absent of subversion; Razdan used female homosexuality for exploitation to serve sensational ends. The erotic sequences appear as the imaginings of the two seemingly straight protagonists. The first time we see Tanya's desire for Sapna is when Sapna is in the bath-tub and Tanya is the voyeur. Sapna's body then functions on two levels, firstly "as [an] erotic object for [Tanya] within the story, and [secondly] as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium" (Nair 54). The second time we see a seduction scene between Tanya and Sapna is through the process of flashback during their college days, vividly described to Sapna's boyfriend Rahul and thereby to the audience. This love-making sequence is visibilized through what turns out to be the phobic imaginings of Rahul, as he wakes from this 'nightmare' and decides to 'rescue' Sapna from such 'danger.' In *SO*, as in any pop novel, violence and sex seem to go hand in hand. And although Amrita does not approve of their relationship, she leaves her weak nature in the hands of her 'butch' friend. The erotic scenes are described in heterosexual terms and do not discomfort nor challenge the reader, as what is being narrated in these two passages is how a woman's body responds to pleasure:

> Minx had taken each one of her toes into her mouth and was massaging them with her tongue, while her hands reached between Amrita's legs and touched her with teasing, rhythmic stabs. She felt her legs open almost voluntarily, as Minx climbed upon her, straddling her slim hips with her own, covering her breasts with her hands, cupping the nipples and circling them repeatedly till the ached with a sweet pain. Amrita had never known anything like this ... never. She moaned with pleasure as Minx brought her to a peak, again and again, starting where she'd left off each time she felt Amrita's body going slack under her. (136-7)

> Her thighs spread a little to allow Minx's hands in. She felt her nipples stiffen as Minx's tongue circled them maddeningly her toes moving down between her legs, teasing the wet grotto there, as her big toe moved rhythmically against the point of maximum pleasure, manipulating it incessantly, till Amrita felt her body shuddering with the intensity of the sensation (...), as Minx kept up the pleasure and with her other toe tickled her breasts and nipples. A small scream escaped from Amrita's mouth. (156-7)

It is interesting to note that every aggression is followed by a nonconsensual but unopposed sexual encounter, scenes which "ended up with a contrite Minx making love to Amrita, followed by giant-sized bouquets and an expensive gift" (194). Minx is described in 'masculine' ways (even highlighting her absence of breasts due to plastic surgery) and Amrita is feeling but not seeing, which seems to imply the misogynist idea that a woman can always get pleasure "begging for more" (157), no matter how badly she is physically treated or verbally abused as a "bitch" or a "whore" (193). This reminds us of Kakar's idea that according to the traditional view of Indian women, they need to be protected "not from external danger but from the woman's inner, sexual proclivities" (18). This is, in fact, a sadomasochistic relationship such that after having been abused, "Amrita's body, soaked and relaxed, began

to respond to Minx's pleasuring" (156). Amrita suffers from the two sides of Minx: the generous one who offers gifts such as an air-conditioner (59), a luxurious apartment (174), a green-eyed black cat (184), an Art Deco bracelet set with rubies and diamonds (191), an eternity band crafted from a string of exquisitely-cut marquises linked by tiny emeralds (140), a diamond ring (20), silk undies (32), long-stemmed roses (117), and the sadist who offers a dead piglet (23), and a frozen heart (31), injuring Amrita's friends, and setting Amrita's pubic hair on fire and pushingan object inside her till she passed out (214-5). We can highlight here that having an expensive and fashionable taste in gifts is a signifier of the stereotypical lesbian identity. In her analysis of *SO* as an intertext of Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Helff notes that Dé uses the literary motif of butterflies and its connotations of imprisonment and abuse. When Amrita moves into Minx's impersonal flat high in the sky, a perfect hiding place for producing a porn movie with the intense moments between the torturer and her victim, she finds tons of books related to butterflies (137).

Another sexually explicit passage takes place after Minx tells Amrita she performed a goat sacrifice at the Kali Mata Mandir to thank the goddess, for which Amrita responds with disgust and rejection: "it was a mistake...the whole thing was mistake. And I'm sorry but I don't love you" (155). As expected by the reader, Minx transforms her anger into a sexual assault on Amrita who "crossed one arm over her breasts and stuck her hand over her pubis. Minx gripped her wrists and dragged her arms away, exposing her completely" (156), then getsAmrita into a warm, perfumed bath with her, where they finally have sex. The passage is described as a human sacrifice performed in the temple. According to tradition, the goddess Kali grants powers to those who sacrifice a virgin's body to her with the condition that the victim had to be willing, had to know what was happening, watch the knife, and not stop it. It is not surprising that Dé chooses this sacrifice so that Minx is attributed the brutality of the only female divinity associated with blood (and the only one represented to be dark and therefore ugly). Minx's body is often described as being abominable in contrast to Amrita's sweet and fair complexion. The evil versus good (butch-femme) corresponding to the beast and beauty is another trope used by Dé. Minx's appearance is 'masculine.' Her flaky, mottled skin gives Minx a reptilian appearance, with close-set, grey-green eyes that never seemed to blink, with lank, cropped hair that looked listless and dull, or the mouth set in a severe line, like a gash carved by a blunt knife (43). The reader knows that this ugly masculinized character is capable of committing evil acts as well, as for example, what she did to another model, Lola: "It wasn't just an acid attack—the poor girl was carved up nicely. Her insides were minced with a switch-blade shoved through her vagina. Only a sadist would mutilate an innocent young girl like that. Who will marry her now? Her chances are permanently destroyed" (97); or when she says: "You will move when I command you to. Right now, you are my slave, let me feast my eyes on you" (187). Minx clearly represents the lesbian abject, following Kristeva's definition as somebody who "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior" (4).

At the end of the novel, we find an explicit and detailed description of the sex scene between the newlyweds, violently forced by Minx while she recorded it: "Amrita knelt and took Rakesh's penis between her lips. [...] climbed over him, slipping in his erect penis easily, smoothly. [...] The two of them climaxed just as Bolero reached its crescendo" (290). We can clearly see here how Minx reproduces the heterosexual gaze as if in a porn movie, as she even says "I feel like I'm back in school watching all those dirty films" (290). Dé is popular for her pornographic writing style, which has given her a reputation of taboo-breaker.

2. THE L-WORD: ACTING (AB)NORMAL

Films like *Girlfriend* and novels like *Strange Obsession* are rife with stereotypical depictions of what constitutes a lesbian and "relegate lesbian desire either to the realm of the (immature) pre-Oedipal or to the status of the merely imitative ('I'm looking, as a man would, for a woman' (...) [and] risks leaving the structures of heterosexuality (and perhaps heterosexism) untouched" (Thornham 123). This is exemplified in the characters Tanya and Minx who hate men because they were abused by them as children, and so became boys trapped in the body of girls. Thornham, quoting Kristeva, argues that the notion of the 'boy trapped in the body of a girl' has important implications. It alludes to the conception of a lesbian as "I'm looking, as a man would, for a woman" (122), thus rendering lesbianism as an imitative model. Lesbianism then comes across as a reductive concept which can be conflated with other completely different issues, thus bringing about a general misconception with regards to the definition of a lesbian or lesbian identity.

Both texts rely on child abuse to justify Tanya's and Minx's lesbianism as if there is always something in a lesbian's background that could explain her homosexuality. In *G* the reason for her being lesbian is articulated when Tanya tries to stop Sapna from going to stay with her prospective mother-in-law, recounting the tale of a childhood horror. In that shot, looking vulnerable for once, Tanya confirms she was physically abused by her father and sexually abused by a neighbour. This justification for her behavior again confirms the most ludicrous and ill-informed stereotypes about lesbians. She is also shown to be obsessively jealous and harbours deep hatred for the opposite sex because she was abused as a child. She gradually metamorphoses into a stalking and predatory psychopath who unleashes homicidal violence on Rahul. According to the ostensible logic of the film, Tanya's psychopathology emerges not from her being a rejected lover but from being a lesbian. Further, she is lesbian because as a child she was abused. Tanya then is the typical caricature of a lesbian that constantly perpetuates negative stereotypes about female homosexuality. This idea finds fuller expression as the film moves towards its climax. In a sequence that marks the birth of the psychopathic killer, Tanya cuts off her hair to shed the last vestiges of femininity, as it were, while confronting Rahul, "Yes...I'm a lesbian, a man trapped in a woman's' body!" Her transformation into a defeminized lesbian psychopath is accompanied by a bodily aberration. And with that, she confirms to a lot of insensitive, misunderstanding, prejudiced people that

this is all a lesbian stands for. The ludicrous definition goes down really well judging by the amount of murmured approval in the theatre.

Tanya's hatred for the opposite sex has echoes of the reasons given by Minx in *SO*. So strange is the obsession of Minx for Amrita that when her pursuit of Amrita fails, she fabricates an emotional story, projecting her own father as a rapist and villain to gain Amrita's confidence. Minx declares that her father raped her when she was thirteen and that her mother rejected her for considering her a pervert. Minx and Tanya are so violent, not because of any individual thing, but just because they are lesbians so their relationship acquires a tinge of fairly widespread perversion. In the popular imagination, love between women is associated with disease, dementia and tragedy. In the twentieth century literature and films with lesbian protagonists, we often encounter tortured, unhappy characters who fantasize about suicide, and who, as 'deviant' subjects, are expected to be a danger to themselves or others. By connecting child sexual abuse, criminality and lesbianism, the film and the novel mark homosexuality as psychopathology whose visible symptoms are a predatory obsession with women and homicidal hatred for men. It is almost always assumed that a woman who likes other women is the result of having been abused in childhood and therefore hating the opposite sex, and this automatically nullifies lesbianism as a sexual orientation in its own independent right as a choice made by women who are lesbians.

The definitions offered in the film and in the novel about lesbianism are extremely problematic. Lesbianism becomes perverse, marginal and cursed. Dé seems not to be very clear about it, since the same character claims that she is not lesbian at all when accused by Amrita of being "weird. Abnormal" (32), reason enough for them never to be friends. Here, Minx responds: "Abnormal? [...] You think I'm a bloody lesbian, don't you? [...] I'm not a dyke. I'm not kinky. [...] It is not sexual. I don't wish to go to bed with you" (32-3), while when talking to Karan, she firmly asks: "And what is abnormal about mine? Just because I am a woman does it mean my love is inferior to yours? Or to any man's?" (237). Amrita continues labelling Minx as an abnormal woman: "You say 'I love you' to me as if it's perfectly natural for one woman to say it to another. I think it's abnormal. You are abnormal. I don't know what you're looking for in me, I have already told you I'm not made that way. I don't like women" (60). But then Minx justifies her having become "like this" (62) in appearance and in behaviour, which is obviously an abused childhood Amrita is forced to hear with disgust: "Why does it make you sick? Why should it? Because I belong to the same sex? Is that my only sin? You find it sickening to accept my love [...] There is nothing abnormal about my feelings for you" (62), or in this dialogue:

> don't you like what I do to you? Doesn't it make your body feel good? [...] It's wrong. I hate myself for it. [...] Why? Because of some stupid guilt-complex? Why should it be all right for you to get screwed by scum like Rover...but not loved completely, totally and thoroughly by me? Just because God made me a woman instead of a man? [...] Yes, yes, yes, dammit. That's reason enough [...] I feel such shame (159).

The masculine characters in the novel never believe Amrita is a lesbian. Karan, the photographer, refers to them as "you and that lesbian friend of yours" (93). The journalist Partha says, "I won't call her a lesbo. The correct term these days for them is, I believe, people who practise alternative sexuality" (164), suggesting "you should get her to see a competent psychiatrist" (164) and that she—Amrita—should "consider seeing a therapist" (164) to cope with the terrible situation she is going through. It is also a male character in the film who suggests Tanya's homosexuality needs medical treatment. Sue Thornham theorizes that there is a tendency, during the course of the narrative, to replace [the woman's] point of view with that of an authoritative masculine discourse. This discourse, most frequently the medical discourse, diagnoses the female protagonist's 'symptoms', by subjecting her to the 'medical gaze', and then proceeds to restore her to normality/passivity by 'curing' her (53). The basis for medical treatment for homosexuality is also recorded in Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, where the "psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized" (43) and "an entire medico-sexual regime took hold of the family milieu" (42). This meant that "the sexual domain was (...) placed under the rule of the normal and the pathological" (67) where the pathological domain called for "therapeutic or normalizing interventions" (68). Although "[t]he experience and representation of lesbianism in India have much in common with those in the West" in today's time period, it must be notedthat such a discourse on the medicalization of (homo) sexuality is specific to nineteenth-century Europe. Following the colonial rule in India, the medicalization of homosexuality in the country was a result of conforming to Victorian rules and regulations (Vanita 246). And although homosexuality is no longer proclaimed abnormal in official scientific and medical texts, it is rejected for not being considered to be something 'natural' or at least 'conventional.' The LGBT movement in India has been fighting against the pathologization of sexual preference, but there are certain cultural productions which categorize lesbians as perverted in their deviant bodies and psyches.

Both works share the stereotype associated with lesbians, that if one is a lesbian then she is mentally unstable and in need of treatment and psychological counselling that can medically 'cure' and 'correct' the behaviour.[5] Minx in *SO* is labeled as a dangerous person, a maniac and a psychopath (163). In *G*, Tanya is portrayed as a dangerous breach of nature and tradition that must ultimately be eradicated. Their overt sexualized nature is also a threat to the hetero-patriarchal order, and therefore they need to be put back in their 'correct' place.[6] Both characters

[5] The Naz Foundation has reported many cases in contemporary India.

[6] The women's wing of the right-wing nationalist Group Shiv Sena, MahilaAghadi, filed a petition to ban *Fire* on the grounds that if "women's physical needs get fulfilled through lesbian acts, the institution of marriage will collapse" and that the "reproduction of human beings will stop." (Praveen Sami, "Furore over a Film" Frontline 15.26, 19 December 1998–1 January 1999. www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl1526/15260430.htm. It is interesting to note that this group in based in Maharashtra, where both Déand Razdan are located.

accidentally die in the end, by their own hands, no one directly responsible, which implicates that for the authors nature also opposes homosexuality. "Poetic justice" is meted out to them.

3. CONCLUSION

More than lesbian narratives, *G* and *SO* share a homophobic discourse in order to support mandatory patriarchal heteronormativity. The visibility of queer life and same-sex desire in the film and in the novel, however, does not lead to any significant gains in terms of equal rights, as they do not challenge the normativity of heterosexuality. Tejal Shah, a journalist and human rights activist wrote a letter to Razdan after the movie's release, protesting such a homophobic portrayal of lesbianism. This piece shows the damaging, pervasive and persuasive effects of a medium such as popular cinema. She wrote:

> Every time I hear of another lesbian suicide, another girl who hanged herself for being teased about her 'best' friend, another *hijra* woman raped in police custody, another woman sent for shock treatment and aversion therapy to cure her of her homosexuality, another couple put under house arrest by their parents when they find out about their same-sex love, I will think of this film and I will be reminded of the power that Bollywood wields in creating a mass consciousness of one sort or the other. In this case, it will be a conscious, articulated, homophobia (*Countercurrents.org*).

While this is not to say that the audience/reader is passive in engaging with such texts, it brings out the grim realities faced by lesbian couples in the context of this dialogue. Thus, the belief that any transgression of female sexuality has violent and punitive consequences is reinforced and re-affirmed. It also shows the extent to which cinematic and literary texts become overdetermined as carriers of 'dominant' ideologies and hence take on a larger-than-life significance where contentious issues such as homosexuality are concerned. On the one hand, the competing struggles of different groups in power can be seen as struggles over the regulation of women's bodies and sexualities and the extent of their visibility at different locations. On the other hand, it also goes to show how identities become fixed by particular ideologies and discourses at a point in time, "however unsuccessfully, temporarily or contradictorily" (Jackie Stacey quoted in Thornham 87).

According to Michel Foucault, power does not necessarily assert itself through mechanisms of repression, censorship and denial. Power also works positively to construct identities of certain subjects. For example, he says that a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty and "psychic hermaphrodism" made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of "perversity"; but it also made possible the formation of a "reverse" discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturality" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same catego-

ries by which it was medically disqualified (*Discipline and Punishment* 101). Many theorists have discussed the process of speaking for and representing others. These practices of representation are directly tied to the production of knowledge and power and are thus ethical and political. The fact that representations of lesbianism in Indian popular culture are disallowed is quite clear in the work of the authors analyzed in this article. This is the only public face of lesbian desire, a monolithic description of the lesbian community that falls into the easy stereotype. The lesbian body is not represented with responsibility in the popular texts under scrutiny in this article, as they appear inside the hegemonic cultural and societal constraints. As Sukthankar suggests, lesbians "were utterly dependent on the mediation of those who offered to speak for us and interpret us" (xxiii). These popular cultural productions propagate homophobic constructions of lesbianism, as they are reproducing the heterosexual patriarchal cliché in which same-sex relationships are demonized within the conservative standards of the Indian society. Furthermore, they were produced and are consumed within the parameters of heteronormativity and reinforce a plethora of stereotypes which are not resisted by the voyeurist public. Even with the work done on the decriminalization of homosexuality in India, what remains to be changed in light of Foucault is the cultural perception of the queer subject as deviant, marginal, pathological or even demonic.

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THE MEDIATED BODY IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA: *TRON: LEGACY* (2010) AND *THE HUNGER GAMES* (2012)*

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Abstract

It is commonly agreed that we are immersed in the information order where classical dichotomies body/mind, human/machine, natural/artificial, reality/fantasy are dissolving. The science fiction genre particularly offers opportunities for understanding the complex relationship between the human body and the media. This essay intends to explore the implications of the "mediated body" as conveyed in contemporary science fiction cinema, focusing on how visual texts articulate the idea of gender as construction or performance, and how this connects with contemporary anxieties concerning how media affect the materiality of our bodies. In order to carry out this study, two contemporary science fiction films will be analyzed: *Tron: Legacy* (2010) and *The Hunger Games* (2012). From the analysis of cinematic representations of the "mediated body," the idea of performativity is highlighted, focusing on how corporeality becomes key for understanding contemporary (posthuman) subjectivities.

Keywords: science fiction cinema, mediated body, performance, gender, posthuman, subjectivity.

Resumen

Nos encontramos inmersos/as en la era de la información donde los límites entre cuerpo/mente, orgánico/máquina o natural/artificial dejan de estar claramente diferenciados. El género de ciencia ficción nos brinda oportunidades para entender la compleja relación que existe entre el cuerpo y las tecnologías de la comunicación. En este artículo, se pretende explorar la imagen del «cuerpo mediatizado» en el cine de ciencia ficción contemporáneo, haciendo alusión a cómo ciertos textos visuales articulan la idea de género/sexo como constructo o «performance», y como esto afecta la manera de entender la «materialidad» de nuestros cuerpos. Para tal propósito, se analizarán dos películas, *Tron: Legacy* (2010) y *The Hunger Games* (2012), centrándonos en la idea de artificialidad y en cómo lo corpóreo es clave para comprender nuestras subjetividades posthumanas.

Palabras clave: cine de ciencia ficción, género, cuerpo, subjetividad posthumana.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mainstream Science Fiction (Sci-Fi) cinema has proved to be a useful tool from whence to examine issues of sex, gender and subjectivities. Indeed, the depiction of alternative bodies in the form of human-alien hybrids, monsters, cyborgs or humanoid robots has led to numerous—and sometimes controversial—analyses on gender. It is interesting to note how the genre is becoming more and more preoccupied with the "materialization" of the human body in mediated spaces such as virtual reality, cyberworlds, digital databases, the Internet and the like. As this essay sets up to defend, the material body as represented in recent Sci-Fi cinema becomes key for understanding contemporary subjectivities, while offering fresh instances of sex and gender depictions on screen. At issue here is the integration of the "natural" body into new media developments and how the genre depicts alternative genders. The resulting image has been interrogated by many authors and futurist propositions about the dissolution of the organic body in techno-spaces.[1] This is not to say, however, that the Sci-Fi film excludes the celebration of fluidity. Certainly, a recurrent motif in contemporary films is to show characters whose bodies interfere with technology up to the point that the difference between organic/technological becomes difficult to distinguish.

The "mediated body" is understood in this paper as a fluid and complex foundation that affects and is affected by new media technologies. The idea of the body as a complex relational process that is constantly shifting rather than as a biological state concerns many feminists who have become aligned with the emergence of corporeal feminism. Specifically, the notion of the "mediated body" discussed here entrenches with materialist analyses on the posthuman. Materialist or embodied posthumanism states that bodies are not static figures, but entities mediated by processes and practices. This corporeal branch of posthumanism claims for a polymorphic body, one that is not reduced to sexual difference, but that takes into account the complex set of differences that pass into our beings. In this context, it is essential to stress the importance of understanding the subject in a time when technology is able to alter our bodies and our sense of an interior. While identity can

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[1] The literary movement known as "cyberpunk" appeared in the 80s with William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). For most cyberpunk fiction, the body is not a biological essence but, because it has been dangerously invaded by information, it is regarded as pure mind. The so-called cyberpunk mode is deeply entrenched within technology and, Gibson's work has especially exemplified postmodern poetics. These writings have become key analytical tools for understanding postmodernism and the interaction between the human and the mechanical. The relation between a human individual and a non-human system has typically been represented as problematic, being the function of the hero to resist the "invasion" of technology. By privileging the hero's "human" side over the "non-human", films like *The Matrix* (1999) dangerously re-write humanist mind-body dualities, along with the resulting gender binary of masculinity and femininity.

be understood as the product of cultural processes by which we construct ourselves, subjectivity relates to both the body and the mind, situating ourselves in relations to power. Hence, the notion of subjectivity, especially that of posthuman subjectivity, becomes key for the discussion of the "mediated body" in contemporary Sci-Fi.

The "mediated body" becomes represented in many contemporary Sci-Fi films dealing with the media—*Avatar*, *Inception*, *Surrogates*, *Tron: Legacy* and *The Hunger Games,* among many others—especially as they consider fluid and fragmented corporealities as inherent to human subjectivities, avoiding visualizations of powerful and static bodies fused with steel and hard technologies.[2] They present a return to the body, yet a reconfigured and hybrid body, far from being the organic repository of conventional gender traits. In order to explore the implications of the "mediated body" as conveyed in contemporary Sci-Fi cinema, this article will focus on how visual texts articulate the idea of gender, and how this connects with contemporary anxieties concerning the way media affect the materiality of our bodies. To this end, two popular Sci-Fi films are considered: *Tron: Legacy* (Dir: Joseph Kosinski, Per: Jeff Bridges, Garret Hedlund and Olivia Wilde. USA, Walt Disney, 2010) and *The Hunger Games* (Dir: Gary Ross, Per: Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson and Liam Hemsworth. USA, Lionsgate, 2012).

Released fairly recently, these visual texts explore, albeit in very different ways, the consequences of border transgression and the problematic of "natural" bodies when mediated by computer programs and television. What is interesting for the purpose of this essay and makes these films different from others that thematize the same conflict is that, in them, the "mediated body" consciously plays with conventional sex codes and gender performance to offer posthuman characters. More specifically, both films rely on the idea of body transformation for survival, being precisely this conscious mutability of one's own body which leads to a positive image of female subjectivity. Another remarkable commonality that will be discussed here is the films' insistence on the need for violent games as means for social and personal success. Both Quorra (Wilde), the female warrior in *Tron: Legacy,* and Katniss Everdeen (Lawrence), the rebellious female protagonist in *The Hunger Games*, offer their respective "audiences" what they want to see, while, at the same time, proposing alternative views of female corporeality. Quorra is a video game character who decides to leave her mediated world and start a new life outside this realm, whereas Katniss is forced to move to a space where she needs to perform certain roles in order to survive. The ideas of body transformation and gender performance are thereby common ground in both movies, suggesting the need to perform bodies, genders and sex in order to survive in technologically mediated societies.

[2] Popular Sci-Fi films of the 80s and 90s like Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984) or Verhoeven's *Robocop* (1987) offer armoured and violent male cyborg figures. In his hyper-masculinity, the cyborg is both strengthening traditional masculinities while representing the hero as having a "better" masculinity because it is "natural". In a similar way, we get many instances of hyper-feminization of the cyborg figure, as it happens with the replicant Rachael in *Blade Runner* (1982).

2. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As suggested above, the articulation of the "mediated body" proposed here resonates with the concept of the posthuman as described by Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles or Rosi Braidotti among others, whereby the "link between the flesh and the machine is symbiotic and therefore can best be described as a bond of mutual dependence" (Braidotti, "Metamorphosis" 223). These theorists on the posthuman put forward a hybrid, fluid and complex body that incorporates media technologies by proposing an embodied subjectivity, against the tendency to erase the materiality of the body in contemporary contexts. Critical posthumanism is also different from transhumanism, a movement that celebrates a technologically enhanced human in his/her quest over nature.[3] The two contemporary Sci-Fi films under discussion—*Tron* and *The Hunger Games*—will be analyzed through the lens of materialist feminist theory. In them, the body operates between two spaces (the real and the simulated) that sometimes merge, affecting the characters' subjectivities. Hence, the rigid categories of femininity and masculinity proposed by Western patriarchal cultures are somehow reconfigured and/or rearticulated in the ambiguous space of virtual reality or hypermedia.

The digital media (which include computer games, virtual reality, television and special effects used in Hollywood films) allows for a re-imagining of the traditional body, since humanist ideas surrounding the materiality of our bodies are altered in these spaces. Moreover, images of the body speak to our contemporary politics and, as Kroker contends in *Body Drift* (2012),

> [w]hile the triumph of mass media, particularly television, may portend a future of pure simulation, the overriding cultural reality is that the image machine is itself haunted by memories of the body: bodies of missing children; crime victims: bodies of those abused, violated, accidented, disappeared. (Kroker 1)

In this sense, Sci-Fi coalesces with forms of feminist criticism (Butler, Hayles, Haraway, Braidotti) that propose a new way of being multiple, hybrid, and bodily (Kroker 4), arguing that it is vital to "reconfigure" rather than negate the materiality of our bodies in technologically-mediated societies. As a matter of fact, and as Kroker contends, we are drifting through many different specular performances of the body and "we no longer inhabit *a* body in any meaningful sense of the term but rather occupy a multiplicity of bodies—imaginary, sexualized, disciplined, gendered, laboring, technologically augmented bodies". Moreover, the codes governing behavior across this multiplicity of bodies have no real stability but are themselves in drift—random, fluctuating, changing (12).

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[3] Nick Bostrom is one of the central figures associated with transhumanism, and recognizes that this project of enhancing the human species derives directly from ideals of human perfectibility and rationality inherited from classical humanism.

This thought on "body drifts" stems from Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity (1993, 1999, 2004), whereby bodies are subjected to normalizing practices by means of performance. Butler seeks to contest binary systems by reconceptualizing gender as unstable and performative. Her argument is that "the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 2). Butler proposes a performative theory of gender that disrupts the categories between bodies, sex, gender and sexuality. Accordingly, femininity and masculinity become bodily styles that are incorporated to construct gendered subjectivities.

In a similar way, but more concerned with information environments, Katherine Hayles (1999, 2002, 2005) employs the category posthuman to refer to an emergent ontology that reshapes and challenges the traditional concept of the human subject. Hayles describes the posthuman as a collection of heterogeneous components. Posthuman subjectivity becomes, then, the ideological reflex of information environments, troubling the information/material separation. In *My Mother was a Computer* (2005), Hayles deals with the ineludible interaction between subjectivity and intelligent machines: "the experience of interacting with them [intelligent machines] changes me incrementally, so the person who emerges from the encounter is not exactly the same person who began it" (Hayles 243). She takes a materialist feminist approach to argue that we are embodied creatures, and "just because information has lost its body does not mean that humans and the world have lost theirs" (244). Equally, Braidotti (2002, 2013) further develops the potential of the posthuman subject and proposes virtual embodiment as a new path for the material/media relationship. Arguing that it has become "historically, scientifically and culturally impossible to distinguish bodies from their technologically mediated extensions" (Braidotti, "Metamorphosis" 228), Braidotti poses the opportunity for different bodily conceptualizations.

Subjectivity is key to these writings on the posthuman predicament. Yet, while Butler develops a queer approach to performativity that relies heavily on psychoanalytic approaches to the subject, Braidotti takes an affirmative and vitalist Deleuzian approach to difference to argue that we exist in a plenitude of possible "becomings" that are continually changing and transforming. When dealing with the idea of "becoming", Braidotti contends that "the intensities this engenders create pleasures and affirmative and joyful affects that open the subject up to a multiplicity of possible differences" (Braidotti, "Metamorphosis" 71). Hence, examining subjectivity not as a universal consciousness but as a process is crucial for any analysis of the posthuman. Indeed, the aim of critical posthumanism is, according to Braidotti, to think beyond traditional humanist limitations and embrace the risks that "becoming-other-than-human" brings (Braidotti, "Posthuman" 15).

Taking these foundations as theoretical framework, the notion of the "mediated body" proposed here refers to the visualization of an intricate body that, although still addressed by power and inflected by questions of gender and sexuality, suggests a re-articulation of the codes that have traditionally governed the corporeal body.

Indeed, corporeality is depicted both in *Tron: Legacy* and in *The Hunger Games* as performance, as will be debated in the following paragraphs. Unlike other popular texts dealing with the media, the two films under analysis here offer transgressive female characters whose "mediated bodies" consciously play with sex and gender conventions in order to get power.

3. THE VIRTUAL BODY: *TRON: LEGACY* (2010)

In *Tron: Legacy*—a sequel to the 1982 film *Tron*—characters enter virtual reality and their bodies interfere with computing media, becoming part of it. This blurring of frontiers offers opportunities for questioning familiar categories of gendered bodies and practices, while allowing us to consider our intricate relationship with computing and information technologies. After the software engineer Kevin Flynn (Bridges) disappears, his son Sam (Hedlund) starts an investigation that pulls him into the Grid, a virtual reality space created by his father who had been trapped there for twenty-five years. With the help of the female warrior Quorra, Sam attempts to release his father and escape from the system, always stopped by the villain Clu (also played by Bridges), a digital double of Kevin that rules the program and that will do anything to stop them. By creating a body/media relationship, the film opens up spaces for the representation of posthuman subjectivities. In a similar way, and as it will be discussed in the next section, *The Hunger Games* proposes instances of the "mediated body" by means of characters who present a disturbing relationship with media.

Human characters (namely Kevin and Sam) find themselves trapped in cyberspace, where they literally fuse with media technologies. They corporeally enter the Grid and become undistinguishable from those characters that, like Quorra, are but bits of information. Yet, mediated bodies are "recognizable" by contemporary audiences. Indeed, Quorra has a female appearance, and, precisely, she will take advantage of her "corporeality" to take the final decision of leaving the Grid, as will be commented below. Also, when Sam is sent to the "Games" at the beginning of his adventure in cyberspace, he is forced to fight computer programs whose bodies, movements and behavior are human-like. Hence, the body appears in these virtual spaces under the guises of graphic representation, bodily movements and standardized language. In the sequence that shows the fight's final round, Sam faces the dangerous assassin program Rinzler (Cheurfa) who accuses him of being a human user after seeing him bleed, technically reinforced by a close-up of a blood drop. The blood becomes, then, the only signifier of Sam's biological/organic nature. Notably, this domain of violent games bears a resemblance to the games arena in *The Hunger Games*. While participants in *Tron: Legacy* are computer programs that simulate human behavior and bodily movements, both movies engage in the portrayal of a brutal spectacle with a deadly outcome to be enjoyed by a privileged audience.

The virtual environment plays with appearances and expectations in the film, simulating the human characters' experience of reality, which results in the confusion between reality and fiction, a main motif in Sci-Fi films, in which characters–and

spectators by extension—are frequently unable to perceive what is "real" or, in this case, what is "human". Specifically, *Tron: Legacy* blurs the distinction materiality/information by simultaneously considering corporeality as information (as suggested by the programs that inhabit the Grid), and by proposing characters that corporeally enter the virtual space. In this context, subjectivities become troubled. This resonates with Hayles' affirmation that the body is vulnerable to be influenced by media, so mediation functions as part of the feedback loop that is both constructing and constructed by the body. Specifically, Hayles's thought relies on the posthuman subject to address the complexity of information environments in the twenty-first century, promoting the elimination of fixed gender and sexual traits in this new concept of the body. By challenging the humanist notion of the body, the movie suggests new ways of understanding the relationship between media and its users, which is in line with materialist feminist analyses.

Tron: Legacy proposes an embodied subjectivity that erases the border between simulation and materiality. The resulting image is a fluid, hybrid, multiple and complex body that "simulates" or "performs" genders. As Michèle White concludes after analyzing the gendered gaze in MOOs (multi-user object-oriented worlds), the participants' fascination with the spectacle of power and with being visual "perpetuate[s] a series of limiting identity constructs" (124). Hence, and as other media critics have also argued, the digitally-coded bodily attributes become markers for users or participants: "the shape and form of a digital body, coding clothing, skin colour or hairstyle, points to the ways these markers of difference are explicitly constructed and therefore open up performative possibilities" (156). Although multiple subject positions are offered in these sites, they normally follow familiar operations of gendered identities and bodily practices (150). The fact that virtual space is opened for alternative genders, but normative bodily constructions are consistently played out, further highlights the performative aspect of gender.

The film portrays a group of female programs, called the Sirens, whose function is to outfit other programs for the games, providing them with any needed equipment. All dressed in white, with the same hairstyle and wearing skin-tight body suits, high heels and extreme make-up on their faces and eyelids, the Sirens who re-clothe Sam at the beginning of the movie suggest artificiality and performance. With the help of costume and other aspects of the mise-en-scène, the Sirens perform femininity in this virtual world. Indeed, they adopt—or rather exaggerate—bodily codes traditionally associated with women in an attempt to become visually different from male programs, inevitably following traditional gender norms. They can be said to play the role of "acceptable" women within the heteropatriarchal virtual world. Yet, the overemphasis on a shared external aspect, together with the futuristic and synthetic looks of the Sirens suggests the artificiality of gender. These sequences further remind us of the pre-games in *The Hunger Games,* in which performing gender is but a strategy to survive in the ensuing games. Likewise, the Grid is a fabricated space where gender seems constructed and artificial.

The rather static and non-natural vision of gender insinuated by this group of female programs is soon altered when the female protagonist appears on screen. As will be discussed below, Quorra can be very much compared to Katniss, espe-

cially if we take into account their bravado courage and protective instinct. Quorra is the last remaining member of "isomorphic algorithms" destroyed by Clu with a complex code and triple stranded DNA. Significantly called "The Miracle", she survives thanks to Kevin, who has shared all his knowledge about the real world with her, a world she is extremely curious about and wants to experience. Her first appearance on screen, clearly opposed to Sam's, exalts the superiority of her body. Neither Sam nor spectators know about her sex/gender at first. Like the rest of the programs, she is wearing a neon suit, which makes her "melt" into the futuristic setting. Moreover, she is using a helmet that covers her face, the part of the body that best works as a sex "differentiator" in the virtual world of the Grid. Costume helps to suggest hybridity in the film, reinforcing the idea of the crossing of gender boundaries.

Quorra's body is represented on screen as strong, resourceful and capable, characteristics often associated with masculinity, but all of this in the very heteronormatively attractive tradition. Given that Quorra/Wilde is exemplary of this physicality (as it is Katniss/Lawerence), expectations are not totally subverted in the film, especially since the "heroics" are done by a "sexy" female body. Her depiction on screen is similar to some female heroes present in contemporary mainstream action and Sci-Fi films, a tradition which began in the late 1980s and beginning of the 1990s with characters like Ripley (Weaver) in the *Alien* saga or Sara Connor (Hamilton) in *Terminator II,* and continued with Trinity (Mosse) in *The Matrix* trilogy, or Lara Croft (Jolie) in the film adaptation of the popular video game *Tomb Raider*, to give some significant examples. While Sam looks astonished when Quorra takes the helmet off and shows her face, contemporary audiences are used to finding strong, resourceful and accomplished attractive female warriors leading the action.

Hence, sequences in the Grid indirectly address the problematic of gender construction in virtual domains. It is in this sense that the film clashes with cyberfeminit perspectives that see cyberspace as a gender-neutral site that enables women to communicate and act outside the constraints of male-dominated physical realms. Sadie Plant (1997), for instance, argues that virtual worlds "undermine both the world-view and the material reality of two thousands years of patriarchal control", probably in reference to the differing representations of a body where sexual differences are not so sharply marked (265). Quorra does not succeed in offering a differing body while in the Grid, but follows bodily and gendered expectations. Moreover, her goal is to escape from virtual reality and move to a "reality" governed by patriarchy. Characters like Quorra and Sam, with the help of costume and other aspects of the mise-en-scène, play with conventional notions of masculinity and femininity in this virtual world.

Hence, and precisely because of the presence of the body, virtual reality films encounter obstacles when representing new body politics and gender roles, which echoes existing socio-material power inequities. In my view, the main obstacle may well derive from the fact that mainstream cinema presents digital worlds that are meant to simulate a gender-biased reality. As in *The Hunger Games,* the illusion of a heterosexual romance between the main leading characters is suggested—albeit in a very subtle way—at the very end of the movie, when Quorra fulfills her dream

and accompanies Sam on his journey back to the real world. The last sequence in the movie shows an apparent flesh-and-blood female body at the back of Sam's motorbike, delighted because she is seeing the first sunrise in her life. *Tron: Legacy* is, after all, a Walt Disney production, which normally offers conventional depictions of gender.

The virtual world offers, then, contradictory images of women, which, according to Springer, makes it "difficult to either condemn or celebrate them, since a single interpretation cannot entirely explain their appeal" (Springer 138). In order to confer meaning on the visual text, screened bodies need a referent and, while the reality in the film may be constructed as very different from our current reality, it is nevertheless still a simulation of it. *Tron: Legacy* does not propose disembodiment in cyberspace but the virtual look and feel of the characters are signs of an embodied experience. The resulting image—epitomized by the character of Quorra—is a virtual body with its memories, desires and wishes. In this sense, the "mediated body" can be aligned with Kroker's definition of body drift, which, in cinema, "is the universal essence of powerful visualization of bodies of the future, with their complex intermediation of code, flesh, and desire" (4).

In short, corporeality can be understood in *Tron: Legacy* as a performance, a melancholic subjection to social codes of power in order to become acceptable, and, eventually, to survive in an unknown world. This same idea, which resonates with Butler's theory of performativity, is clearly articulated in *The Hunger Games*, as will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Its protagonist—Katniss Everdeen—is but another example of the "mediated body" in pursuit of empowerment through imitation. Very much like Quorra, she also needs to perform her body in order to survive in a mediated world.

4. THE TELEVISED BODY: *THE HUNGER GAMES* (2012)

In the film *The Hunger Games* the material body encounters media in the sense that it is conceived as mere spectacle, and the characters' actions and behavior as a popular (and brutal) form of mass entertainment. The movie is an adaptation of the first novel of Suzanne Collins's trilogy of the same name, written in 2008.[4] It shows a dystopian world governed by an authoritarian government, the Capitol, which organizes the annual event known as the Hunger Games, a popular competition that is televised live across the twelve districts in which the country—Panem—is divided. One young girl and one young boy from each district are chosen at random to participate in the games, and become TV show contestants who are forced to fight each other to death in front of cameras. Their existence becomes eventually

[4] Susan Collins's trilogy consists of *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay* (2010). These three texts have been adapted to the big screen in four movies: *The Hunger Games* (2012), *Catching Fire* (2013), based on her second book, and with the film adaptation of *Mockingjay* split into two parts, the first of which was released in 2014 and the second in 2015. These films continue the adventures of Katniss and Peete after their victory in the 74th Hunger Games.

counterfeit given that they are reduced to mere tributes to be evaluated, and die for a rich, good-looking and fashionable audience.

In line with Butler's notion of performativity, whereby the body acts upon genders, ideologies and compulsory heterosexual normativity to become socially accepted, the "mediated body" works in *The Hunger Games* to suggest the artificiality of gender in contemporary contexts. In creating a visual display of performative bodies and subjectivities, the film resists gendered expectations both by parodic irony and by blurring binarisms. The clearest example of the "mediated body" as defined in this essay is that of the film's protagonist, Katniss Everdeen. She is a transgressive figure in many senses, and her "televised" body turns into a social construct which she consciously employs to challenge power. Remarkably, and as in *Tron: Legacy,* the film "dehumanizes" the body by reducing it to a piece of a popular game to be consumed by mass audiences. In this sense, both Katniss and Quorra are images of the corporeal that become key to understanding posthuman subjectivities in mediated-driven societies.

Katniss embodies qualities of the ideal young girl: she is beautiful, athletic, brave, intelligent, courageous and resourceful. As Lem and Hassel argue in "'Killer' Katniss and 'Lover Boy' Peeta" when referring to Collins' text, "Katniss Everdeen is a female character who balances traditionally masculine qualities such as athletism, independence, self-sufficiency and a penchant for violence with traditionally feminine qualities such as idealized physical female beauty and vulnerability" (pos. 1787). This fact favors her appeal to both young male and female readers:

> One way that *The Hunger Games* bridges the divide between boys and girls' culture is Collins portrayal of a heroine who embodies traditionally masculine characteristics—in her role within her family, in her behavior, and in her adherence to patriarchal expectations regarding masculinities. (Pos. 1834)

Yet, Katniss' beauty before entering the Capitol is a construct of the film, as it is not originally written into the novels. The opening sequences of the movie show Katniss as a physically active young girl capable of feeding and taking care of her family. Katniss crosses the physical boundaries of her district and ventures to the woods for hunting, a moment of freedom that she shares with her friend Gale (Hemsworth), which can be further interpreted as an act of rebellion. She is the protector of her little sister, a role that will continue inside the televised games when she takes care of Rue (Stenberg), the young female tribute from District Eleven. Her courage is explicitly shown when she volunteers to take her sister's place in the Hunger Games, being the first to do so from District 12. From this moment onwards, she is depicted as a rebellious figure.[5]

[5] Katniss's rebellious attitude will continue throughout the rest of the films that follow *The Hunger Games*. Thus, at the very end of *Catching Fire*, Katniss learns that she is the face of the rebellion in Panem. *Mockingjay* Part 1 and Part 2 see Katniss lead this rebellion against the Capitol.

The Capitol holds the absolute power of judgment, imposing an authoritarian ideology that promotes the visual enjoyment of punishment. Its power is spread through media, proposing a dominant body image linked to spectacle. Hence, and in order to become visually acceptable the tributes taking part in the cruel spectacle of the games must reshape their bodies according to the members of the Capitol's idea of beauty. In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1975), Michel Foucault deals with how the body is involved in the political field, and power relations have an immediate hold upon it: "they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (25). The Capitol imposes its societal norms, and participants need to literally train their bodies and perform genders to adjust to the prevailing rules. Their bodies are, then, regulated to correspond to the social ideal and to satisfy the audience's visual demands. All of the tributes—both male and female—become active recipients of a dominant aggressive gaze. Katniss actively rejects the gaze and Peeta (Hutcherson) is also quite aware of it and manipulates it for his own (and Katniss') gain, as it becomes explicit in the interview sequence. In it, Katniss is somehow confused about the power of performing fashion and heterosexual love. To Peeta's sudden holding of her hand, Katniss first reacts abruptly. However, as the film develops, she realizes the influence of acting as a loving couple in front of cameras and the implications of heteronormative desirability. In spite of her initial confusion, Katniss tries to be pleasant in the televised interview just before the games, with the sole purpose of getting the sympathy of the audience and gain sponsors.

Power is not unidirectional but a field of play, exerted in what Foucault calls "observing hierarchy" (184). As the sequences prior to the game show, the participants actively play with power in the process of "beautification", or "reshaping", guided by their mentors and stylists, who teach them how to make people like them. Following the advice of her stylist, Cinna (Kravitz), Katniss and Peeta are dressed in stylish black leather suits with capes made of fire for the tribute parade in the opening ceremony. Bodies are converted into lovely objects of desire, and gender is but a script to be consciously learned and played by the participants for the Capitol's enjoyment. Bodies are conceived, then, both as being acted upon and acting in concert with power. Katniss' beautification process is controlled at all times and placed upon her from outside, but she also takes advantage of it and plays with power for her own benefit. This reaffirms Butler's idea that the body is actively participating in the way in which that inscription is happening. The bodies of the tributes are not just passive receptacles, but they are also complicit with what is happening. Their final aim is to be legible and desirable to the audience as this increases their chance of survival.

The Capitol's emphasis on aesthetics and visual enjoyment is technically supported by a number of strategies. Both characters and spectators can be blessed with an attractive setting which shows an abundance of nice, beautifully displayed food, colorful and stylish dresses and accessories, and luxurious and charming bedrooms. The Capitol's obsession with fashion, style and physical appearance is reinforced by the recurrent use of close-ups of the characters' faces and parts of their bodies so that their hair-style, make up or cosmetics can be fully appreciated, and evaluated

in the case of the tributes. Significantly, the sequence showing the two-week physical preparation/training before the games lasts thirty-five minutes, approximately one third of the film, a fact that evidences the importance of the recreation of the senses for plot development. It also serves for setting up the contrast between the poverty and colourless setting of District 12, the excess of the Capitol, and the lush but lethal Arena. Paradoxically, the Capitol residents, extremely concerned with beauty and style, advocate a visual enjoyment of death.

Fashion, cosmetics and body modifications are, then, the language of power. Looking beautiful and desirable is decisive for survival as it is a mean of securing sponsors. Katniss soon learns that her success or failure in the games depends upon her image and that, in order to survive, she needs to perform the role of a beautiful, engaging and attractive girl, apart from being physically and psychologically strong. The molding of her body is easily observed in the sequences in which her stylists reshape her body into a "visually appealing body", which is deeply ironic for contemporary 2012 audiences who can appreciate Lawrence's fine physicality. Apart from her external image, she needs to construct her behavior. She must smile to charm sponsors and play the idealized traits of female beauty and vulnerability, yet combined with qualities like independence, self-sufficiency and violence. This resonates with Foucault's idea of disciplining one's own body to avoid social punishment.

Katniss's performativity has been interpreted as an act of rebellion. Indeed, as Amy L. Montz argues in reference to Collins's novels, "the spectacle [Katniss] becomes is itself a rebellious demonstration of the power of consuming, fashion, and femininity" (pos. 2077), since "physical presentation and public spectacle are the two most important components of protest, particularly when placed on the bodies of women" (pos. 2082). Montz bases her arguments on the novels' particular attention to the details of dress and the preparations made to present a composite image of Katniss to the public: "Katniss's fashions become visual representations of the Resistance that are, ultimately, more important than her actions" (pos. 2090). After the tribute parade, her stylist comments that she will forever be known as "the girl who was on fire", a sentence that leads Montz to affirm that she is marked by this visual representation throughout her life, and her stylized outfits make her socially and politically "on fire" as well. Katniss's alteration and/or manipulation of the codes governing behavior by ironically displaying conventional gender roles is itself a transgression, but it also speaks to the arbitrariness and randomness of the rules, making audiences aware of the artificiality of gender. Katniss learns the power of a good performance and succeeds in transgressing the rules, which, once again, syncs with Butler's idea that power is in drag.

As it has been suggested so far, both in *The Hunger Games* and in *Tron: Legacy* bodies are on display. The idea of the "mediated body" is clearly articulated in both films, and characters are forced to play their part in deadly games inside a mediated space. Female bodies are active agents that are, nevertheless, reduced to pieces of a deadly game, tributes. Interestingly, in *The Hunger Games* the arena, the events, and the rules are constantly manipulated by the Gamemakers to maximize the spectators' engagement in the games, making it difficult sometimes to differentiate what is real from what is not, except that, as happened in *Tron: Legacy*, the

ramifications for Katniss and the other tributes are very real and material, involving physical pain and death. Gamemakers throw in firestorms, tricks and traps and release carnivorous aggressive wasps to intensify the games and raise the level of action in order to avoid boring the audience. It is at this point when one can best affirm that the characters are "dehumanized", reduced to pure spectacle. Sequences inside the game further suggest the insensitivity of viewers to the brutality of the images, which resonates with Foucault's idea that dominance is projected through violence and observation. The film promotes violence as a media strategy to suggest the power of the Capitol. Similarly, and as pointed out earlier, in *Tron: Legacy* the "posthumanized" character Quorra feels terribly trapped in cyberspace and dreams about escaping it.

Katniss "simulates" a heterosexual romance with Peeta inside the game, which is but another example of the film's heavy reliance on performativity. As Cinna warned her, the Capitol "would love it" and, indeed, while in the middle of the game, participants are told that two players of the same district are permitted to win. Ironically, heterosexual romance is used by the Capitol to reinforce patriarchy in a world where everything—including gender—seems constructed. When at the very end of the game the Gamemakers proclaim that the rule change is revoked and only one survivor is allowed, Katniss plays the role of her life. She pretends to act out of love and announces her intentions: she and Peeta will both commit suicide at the same time. She is aware that this decision will affect the Capitol, especially because the rules of the game will be totally transgressed. To this, the Capitol reacts promptly and allows both of them to live, showing the arbitrariness of a system focused on pleasure and appearances. At this point, one can affirm that Katniss manipulates spectacle by giving the (whimsical) audience exactly what it wants. She plays the Capitol's rules for her own benefit. These sequences specifically suggest Butlerian theories of performativity, whereby gender is an act of imitation, except that Katniss is very consciously performing femininity as the only form of power against the tyranny of the Capitol.

In short, the film rests on the idea of refusing rigid gendered rules through parodic irony, creating a visual display of performative bodies and posthuman subjectivities. Katniss takes advantage of the power of her body, adopts an artificial appearance and simulates a fake personality, and, thanks to this, she survives and becomes the winner of the games, together with her potential lover, Peeta. *The Hunger Games* adds another meaning to Darwin's "survival of the fittest", linked to the performance of beauty, fashion and gender in mediated contexts, which responds in part to the televised gaze of the twenty-first century.

5. CONCLUSION

In spite of the cultural, social and biotechnological forces that work to transform the body in contemporary society, it is difficult to find radical representations of the human body in our visual culture, especially if we are to consider mainstream Hollywood cinema. Still, contemporary Sci-Fi has refocused the relationship between

flesh and machine by proposing a hybrid, composite and fluid body, which has been here termed the "mediated body". With the help of the latest special effects, the human body as represented in contemporary Sci-Fi is symbolic of the attitudes and anxieties of society to technological advances. Breaking with previous visualizations of the traditional body, the "mediated body" works in *The Hunger Games* and *Tron: Legacy* to value the organic self and hybrid identity in technologically mediated spaces. By proposing a performative—sometimes ironic—gender identity, both films rearticulate traditional sex and gender codes in an attempt to show transgressive figures whose bodies are, in one or another way, mediated by media technologies. In this sense, they propose two versions of mediated bodies, the televised and the virtual body, embodied creatures placed in post-apocalyptic scenarios, specters of posthuman subjectivities.

The main characters of the films under analysis, Katniss and Quorra break down the traditional alliance of power and body, which used to privilege male physicality, at least when represented on screen. In this sense, the films propose, within the limitations posed by popular media, new ways of challenging power structures. Indeed, by means of a series of visual and plot strategies, such as parodic irony, androgyny, fluidity, gender role reversal and performance, both movies engage in the portrayal of a hybrid body that, although still constrained and influenced by gender conventionalisms like heterosexual romance, open up new ways of thinking about the fruitful possibilities of body-media interactions. While a white, masculine, heterosexual, Western subject is normally present in these movies, these cultural products also manage to rearticulate human embodiment from different angles. Indeed, both Katniss and Quorra subvert gender expectations in an attempt to convey more flexible bodily figurations.

The analysis of these cinematic representations of the "mediated body" casts light on the idea of corporeality and strives to find new paths from which to analyze gender and body politics in contemporary Sci-Fi cinema. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach towards the study of the gendered body signifies a departure from existing practice, and demonstrates that the Humanities constitute an effective field for the study of contemporary digitalized, mediated or/and fluid identities.

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BLACK FEMALE BODIES ON (DIS)PLAY: COMMODIFICATION, REEMBODYMENT AND HEALING*

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Abstract

The articles focuses on the search for alternative models for black female identities and bodies which challenge sexualized and racialized images historically imposed onto them. To counteract this historical denigrating and traumatic legacy, three novels are especially relevant: the classic *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* by Ntozake Shange (1982) and *Bailey's Café* by Gloria Naylor (1992), and a more recent publication *Home* by Toni Morrison (2012). These novels examine those bodies and identities as sites for self-representation, empowerment and healing, both physical and psychic. Dismantling racist and sexist ideologies, these works ultimately signal the way to reconstitute black female bodies in a newly devised politics of the black body that defies the exclusion and commodification to which they have been historically subjected, and facilitates the shaping of alternative non-hegemonic identities.

Keywords: Black bodies, female identity, sexualization, racialization, alternative models, healing.

Resumen

El artículo se centra en la búsqueda de modelos alternativos para las identidades y cuerpos femeninos negros que desafían las imagénes sexualizadas y racializadas impuestas históricamente. Para contrarrestar ese legado denigratorio y traumático, tres novelas son especialmente relevantes: las clásicas *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* de Ntozake Shange (1982) y *Bailey's Café* de Gloria Naylor (1992), y una publicación más reciente *Home* de Toni Morrison (2012). Estas novelas examinan esos cuerpos e identidades como lugares para la auto-representación, el empoderamiento y la sanación, tanto física como psíquica. Deconstruyendo las ideologías racistas y sexistas, estos trabajos finalmente señalan el camino para reconstituir los cuerpos femeninos negros en una nueva política del cuerpo negro que reta a la exclusión y comodificación a la que han sido sometidos históricamente, y facilita la construcción de identidades alternativas no-hegemónicas.

Palabras clave: Cuerpos negros, identidad femenina, sexualización, racialización, modelos alternativos, sanación.

It is the intelligence of the body that I have exploited

(*Josephine Baker*)

To explore issues of identity and body politics in connection with black bodies means to plunge into ongoing processes of commodification, fetishization and sexualization, indeed, but also to engage in the discursive practices that have historically attempted to reconstitute, reconnect and inhabit those black bodies as sites for empowerment and self-enunciation. Black bodies have defied their own "body-historiography" by deconstructing the powerful allure of the white body as the hegemonic norm through discursive constructedness and claims of ownership and self-representation. This article intends to focus, on the one hand, on revisiting that historical legacy and its lingering effects on contemporary renderings of the black female body and, on the other, on examining alternative models to reclaim black women's identities and bodies in three ground-breaking novels: two pioneering efforts that paved the way for critical interrogations on the texture of those identities and bodies, Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1982) and Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Café* (1992), and one more recent endeavor by Toni Morrison in her 2012 novel *Home*.

These texts destabilize, if not altogether eliminate, the demeaning legacy of black and female bodies in contemporary times by disentangling them from outright monolithic representations to become a contested terrain for notions of race, gender, and sexuality. More importantly, these novels chronicle the development of an embodied subjectivity that articulates a thorough revision of the relationship between the mind and body more attuned to African-based critical discourses. My contention is that for more than four decades now these leading writers have been intent on enacting significant political and literary interventions that enable repossession and recovery of the violated black female body, helping to forge new forms of identity and agency.

1. BODY HISTORIOGRAPHY, TRAUMA AND RESISTANCE

In order to trace that "body-historiography" in Alexandra Ganser's words (105),[1] and to account for the long-standing misinterpretation and mistreatment of black bodies, readers should be aware of the ideological tenets sustaining the modern Western world and its profoundly racist and exclusionary nature. As Meri Danquah aptly remarks,

> The black body, whether whole or broken down to its parts, was *"ized"* in every single way something could be. It was racialized, fetishized, romanticized, demonized,

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[1] Ganser uses this idea to retell bodily inscriptions found in injured soldiers. Nonetheless, I deem this concept particularly relevant for the study of black bodies which were literally injured, ravished and traumatized during slavery and colonization.

> infantilized, criminalized, dehumanized, sexualized, criticized, ostracized, ritualized, and, much more often than we think, it was also prized. (14; author's emphasis)

This incisive critique foregrounds some of the processes to which the black body has been historically subjected and their tremendous impact on notions of subjectivity and belongingness. Yet black people have been able to challenge those negative processes by reassembling and reembodying their bodies and identities. As Baker would put it in the quote that opens this essay, her strategic manipulation of the cultural fantasies attached to black female bodies reverses that spectatorial gaze by "receiving and returning 'the look'" (Henderson "About Face" 137), thus placing herself as the empowered subject.

To truly understand the depth of that history of defiance and resistance, it is necessary to return to the origins, as it were, to effect a journey back to the perverse encounter with black bodies through the European twin projects of slavery and colonization, especially at the height of the Age of Enlightenment. Every scholarly contribution on the black body feels the urge to revisit the traumatic legacy of the cruel and systematic abuse to which Africans were submitted for economic and imperialistic purposes. As Toni Morrison emphatically declares, there is a compelling need to revisit that past, to "rememory" it, appropriating her coinage, in order to make sense of the everlasting and excruciating pain and devastation derived from the Middle Passage and the plantation terrors that ensued. Black bodies were fragmented, disembodied, disowned, tortured, branded and silenced in so many ways depriving African slaves of their own sense of humanity and self-worth. As Patricia Hill Collins pointedly states:

> Under chattel slavery, people of African descent occupied a particular place in class relations—their bodies and all that was contained in those bodies (labor, sexuality, and reproduction)—were objectified and turned into commodities that were traded in the marketplace. (55)

Notably, these non-hegemonic identities were drastically reduced to essential bodies. In consequence, black bodies came to occupy the place of the "excluded Other" (Shildrick and Price 2). They would be used and abused for mainstream consumption and disruption, epitomizing what Hortense Spillers graphically describes as "the theft of the body" (67).

In addition, black female bodies were also regarded as the embodiment of deviant sexuality, depravation and sickness. Lisa Collins contends that the exploitative history of black female bodies is consistently tied to "slave, sexual, and service economies" in nineteenth century European and American ideologies ("Economies" 102). Sander Gilman argues that this perception was already in place by the eighteenth century, when "the sexuality of the black, both male and female, becomes an icon for deviant sexuality" (228). Black women were considered not only as a menace to Western civilization (as scientists, doctors and even historians insistently proclaimed), but also "as source of corruption and disease" (250). Unbridled, untamed depictions of black females abounded in literature and other artistic forms,

both in US and Europe. Part and parcel of the effort to substantiate culturally what was known as the "white man's burden," those depictions also encoded the need to restrain other sexualities, particularly black female sexuality.

Another aspect would understand the black body as monstrous and abject.[2] Closely following Judith Kristeva's notion of the abject body, Judith Butler contends that "the repudiation of bodies for their sex, sexuality, and/or color is an 'expulsion' followed by a 'repulsion' that founds and consolidates culturally hegemonic identities along sex/race/sexuality axes of differentiation" ("Variations" 133). Thus, it is important to insist first on the body as a cultural construction and icon in order to invalidate the pretended neutrality and universality of the hegemonic white body. Arguing for the discursive construction of bodies, Butler's notion of the performativity of bodies is especially illuminating for this analysis:[3] bodies are always marked by difference, along racial, sexual, gender, class lines, etc. Revealing the prescription of a normative definition as a fabrication is the initial requirement for elaborating an alternative politics of the black body that engenders its own rules and codes, disavowing the exclusion to which it has been submitted on the grounds of repulsion and horror.

2. BLACK BODIES IN CONTEXT: PERFORMING SUBJECTIVITIES

There have been diverse proposals to articulate black gender politics, but from my point of view the most intriguing and sophisticated theoretical models have been provided by African American feminist critics over the last four decades. They substantiate their approaches through insights into the nature of both racial and gender discourses. On the whole, their reflections offer particularly illuminating critiques of the pervasiveness of damaging and oppressing stereotypes—both racist and sexist. Simultaneously, however, they allow a recovery of black bodies from oblivion in order to highlight alternative modes of representation that dispel crippling assumptions, and invest in their own multifarious forms of beauty.

bell hooks' pioneering book *Black Looks* enables an affirmation of black identity by pondering the historical struggle for control over representation. Calling for effective "revolutionary interventions" (2) in the area of racial representation, hooks bolsters a more radical stance on the ways blacks are still fundamentally underrepresented, mainly brutalized and sexualized, by the dominant ideology of our

[2] I have elsewhere applied Kristeva's notion of the abject as "the inbetween, the ambiguous, the composite" (4) to Lina's interstitial position in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* ("Nobody Teaches"). In this case, my argument focuses on how black bodies not only occupy that interstitial position, but rather have profited from that position as a means of empowerment.

[3] I am particularly indebted to Butler's theory of the discursive constructedness of bodies and gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990), later complemented and expanded by *Bodies that Matter* (1993).

time. Concretely, the critic underlines the fact that contemporary representations of black female bodies "rarely subvert or critique images of black female sexuality which were part of the cultural apparatus of 19th-century racism" (62). Responding to that call, Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Sexual Politics* honestly evaluates the traumatic history and the harmful effects of the battle for representation and assertivity, and champions a redefinition of black gender ideology. She explicitly places the blame where it belongs: "Now as then, scientific discourse, mass media, and public policy all depict African Americans as either less able and/or willing to achieve dominant gender ideology" (183).[4] Janell Hobson also adheres to what she designates as aesthetics of the black female body, which would comprise an articulation of a "black liberation discourse on the black body beautiful" (15). The contested notion of beauty is then one more aspect that needs to be investigated for the reconstruction of the politics/poetics of the black female body.

Many scholars and writers across the African diaspora have denounced the conflation of black women and physicality. That terrible dissociation has been effectively challenged by what Marlene NoubeSe Philip terms the intelligence of the body. For her the word "body" encapsulates also mind in a continuum: "within the 'body' ... resides an intelligence—including memory and knowledge—which is important to the whole existence of the person as the intelligence we have come to associate with the mind" (91). Thus, the body becomes a vehicle for the production of knowledge and is in itself a producer of knowledge and signification which generates strategies of resistance and survival in the face of constant surveillance. Furthermore, Manuela Coppola sees the black female body as "the repository of cultural memory, of ancestral knowledge and as catalyst for critical interrogations" (26). In that sense, Philip's articulation of the African body as "bodymemory" becomes particularly useful to claim the validity of the black body as a signifier of memory. Baker's notion of the intelligence of the body that inaugurated this chapter thus comes full circle, also a crucial part of the development of the novels' protagonists, especially in those by Shange and Morrison.

Numerous contemporary contributions on the black female body concentrate on a holistic and integrating vision, as Carol Henderson ventures: "a vision of this body—mind, flesh, and spirit—that will ... restore the primary vision of black women—their courage, dignity, communal responsibility, and pride" (6). These interventions to set the record straight, as it were, and to pay due homage to black women's bodies in their entirety signal a fundamental theoretical repositioning with respect to the traumatic body-historiography delineated above. Moreover, the reevaluation of that history of abjection, grotesqueness and even freakery facilitates an effective removal from (and renewal of) the very notions of Western categoriza-

[4] These social institutions are complicit with a hostile ideological regime whose ultimate goal is to propound the subjugation of "a people who have been rendered disabled by history" in Alexander's words (252). From their perspective, the problem seems to be located in a lack or unwillingness on the part of blacks to conform to the hegemonic gender criteria.

tions and social ordering. Hence, to envisage such innovative and subversive politics of the black body, the body cannot be approached or explained in isolation, since there are three interrelated aspects: soul/mind/body (Tally "Review" 197).[5]

Always respecting what Romero Ruiz rates as "the basic harmony of connectedness" (1), this tripartite compound implies that the black body may be restored to wholeness from a state of fragmentation and rupture thanks to its reconnection to the twin components mind and soul. Thus, Gay Wilenz devised the concept of healing narrative, a narrative which explores that process of resilience and empowerment of the black body through a project of reclaiming lost heritage and residual healing practices, as adequate cures for both the individual and the community.[6] My contention is, then, that to be able to lay claim to the black physical body is to place it at the centre of the investigation of cultural and spiritual discourses that may lead to a reconstitution of individual and communal identities through its diverse "intelligent" languages. Therefore, it fosters a change of state and position: from object to subject, from marginal to central, from abject to healthy, and eventually from fragmented to whole.

3. AFFIRMING THE BLACK FEMALE BODY: SHANGE, NAYLOR AND MORRISON

Two pioneering novels opened new ground for the reconfiguration of the black female body. *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* by Ntozake Shange (1982) centers on the lives of three sisters who not only resist racist and sexist attempts to limit the possibilities for their bodies and identities, but who are also able to delineate a markedly different way to inhabit both. *Bailey's Cafe* by Gloria Naylor, published a decade later (1992), presents a rather more complex and nuanced scenario whereby it is possible to enact alternative codes to fashion both body politics and gender performativity. In addition to these two texts, I have included a third and more recent novel by Toni Morrison *Home* (2012), in which there is a rather illuminating analysis of the terrible abuses of black women's bodies for scientific purposes. This is represented by the case of the female protagonist, Cee, deeply traumatized by a doctor's horrid experimentation on her body in the name of eugenics, and who is eventually restored back to self and life by a community of women.

In Shange's novel the black female body figures prominently throughout the text, celebrated and honored in its doubly creative function: begetting life and

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[5] In her excellent review, Tally tackles the notion of African spiritual healing in her praise of Denise Martin's essay, stressing the balance among the three aspects: "from the Bakongo, mwéla/môyo (soul/life), ngîndu (mind), and nitu (body)" (197).

[6] In her classic study published in 2000 *Healing Narratives.* For an enlightening discussion of this concept in relation to wholeness, see *The Search for Wholeness and Diaspora Literacy in Contemporary African American Literature* edited by Silvia Pilar Castro Borrego (2011).

art[7]: three sisters, three stories about their creativity and their zeal to repossess their bodies as a source of pride and self-identity. Especially interesting is the story of the dancer Cypress, who initially fights against her own body in ballet classes that suffocate and stifle her.[8] The turning point comes when she finally finds the courage to rebel against the white canon: "Cypress clung to her body, the body of a dancer; the chart of her recklessness, her last weapon, her perimeters: blood, muscle, and the will to simply change the world" (208). Her body appropriately becomes an effective instrument to express herself and channel her frustrations, dreams and the terrible nightmares that plague her in the form of her parents' suffering at the hands of white savagery and inhumanity. For Cypress her body represents the way to reconcile with the past and its traumas, while regaining the indispensable strength to reconnect to her rich cultural heritage.[9]

But to get to that phase she has to undergo a painful journey to pride and pleasure. Firstly, she begins to claim her corporeality through growing "deep into her difference": "Her ass and her legs she used like a colored girl" (136). Her dancing expresses a renewed sense of the self after years of self-denial and frustration in shallow ballet dances where her body is repeatedly condemned as inappropriate, objected to because of not being normative: "your ass is too big and your legs are too short" (134). Far from despairing over this mistreatment, she is encouraged to join Azure Bosom, an all-women company in which the female body is exalted by means of a series of choreographies that stage a rite of cleansing the body of pain and disappointment finally leading to an awareness of "pure pleasure of flesh and spirit combined" (144), clearly in line with Shohat and Stam's aesthetics of resistance. In this case, it can be further argued that the holistic view in Shange's novel sets a precedent for later fictional development of the compound body/mind/spirit that many critics propound.

However, there is a counterpoint to this celebratory positioning of the female black body in the text when Cypress notices how Azure Bosom's parties remind her of an auction where women sell themselves to the highest bidder. The fact that those bidders are other women complicates the reading, as Cypress is not ready to be taken in. As a result of her disgust, she finds in Idrina a companion, a lover who teaches her how to let herself be loved and be close to another person, and she awakens the tender part of her sexuality that has lain dormant after many affairs with different

[7] I first approached this issue in "La mujer negra como conservadora y creadora de cultura en *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*" (1994).

[8] There is some intimation that the character Cypress may be partly based on the actual experiences of a well-known dancer Debbie Allen, who was turned down by the Houston Foundation for Ballet when she was eight because of a presumed policy of racial segregation. Even later Allen was also refused at the North Carolina School of the Arts, allegedly because "she was built wrong" according to the school director (Haskins 193). She later became a successful dancer and performer in the 70s and 80s.

[9] As Melissa Walker points out, Cypress "learns to use her body to create an art that is at once beautiful and political" based on African Americans' survival strategies (155).

men who invariably "holding her [would leave] her wet and lonely" (137). Sexual connotations notwithstanding, Cypress learns to confide in Idrina totally, which is the reason why she feels truly betrayed when Idrina goes back to her former love Laura. The sense of betrayal is so overwhelming that Cypress decides not to dance anymore, once again denying her true self.

Another encounter with her old friend Leroy sets her off: "Cypress was a dance of a new thing, her own spirit loose, fecund, and deep" (156). His music and their lovemaking full of contortions and pleasant surprises eventually free Cypress from the last barriers she alone was imposing on her bodily movements, enabling her to unearth the true source of inspiration for her dancing and her life. Thus, sexual release is also concomitant with bodily and spiritual release.[10] Afterwards, Cypress can definitively proclaim her role as a dancer, or as Thompson-Cager further states, "Cypress can through dance comprehend the power of spirits" (39). The language of the body is therefore considered central to any reconsideration of an innovative politics centered on the black female body that unleashes the magic any woman is entitled to in the book: "where there is a woman there is magic" (3), a magic that is predicated on a reaffirmation of that spiritual realm.

A much more troubled and nuanced interpretation of the black female body is formulated a decade later in Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Café.* Through a colorful canvas of characters, Naylor reveals the difficulties inherent in coming to terms with diverse forms of sexuality that deviate from socially sanctioned models. Most of the characters that populate this novel struggle to shape satisfactory ways of claiming their bodies and their sexualities postulating their complex and multi-layered identities. In this case, the reading of corporeality is complicated by a mixing of genders and ethnicities congruent with Naylor's exploration of border-crossing possibilities in her haunting characters and their ordeals.

The stories embedded in this poliphonic novel deal with extremely traumatized women who have been severely abused before arriving at Bailey's Café. All of these stories certainly confirm Thompson-Cager's view that "[a] black woman is always in danger of having her sexuality used against her" (38). Naylor further contends that "[t]he core of the work is indeed the way in which the word 'whore' has been used against women or to manipulate female sexual identity" (cited in Pirklwas and Ross 2). From the alcoholic widow to the virginal mother, the self-mutilated wino or the deceived concubine, their stories intermingle and converge in a tapestry conveying isolation, horror and abjection of all kinds. In sum, each of the characters unmasks a very conflictive relationship with her own body and her sexuality. Conversely, each story adds a new layer of significance to the previous one, insinuating a collective voice that contests the multiple discriminatory practices directed against black women's bodies and psyches.

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[10] As Geta LeSeur observes, "it is because she has developed her own individual sense of self through her dancing that she is able to have a good relationship with a man" (172). Ultimately Cypress defines herself on her own terms, not according to others' needs or opinions.

These conflicting tendencies are particularly well exemplified by Mary's (Peaches) story. Regarded as a beauty and overprotected by her father, Mary suffers tremendously and literally doubles up into two selves: the pure Mary and the promiscuous and tempting Peaches. Her schizophrenic, tormented sense of self forces her to engage in affair after affair in order to placate her intensifying sexual urge: "Any race, any age, any size—any son of any man—had the power to drive away that demon from the mirror... they became my saviours from *her*" (105; author's emphasis). The demon is her own sexuality from which she needs to distance herself by means of others' desire for her body, codified as an outlet purely for sexual pleasure. Because of her inability to prevent the constant cheating on her boyfriend, she ends up hating herself which results in self-mutilation, disfiguring her face and her own body in an attempt to drive men away from her. Eventually reaching Eve's refuge for damaged and neglected women, Peaches unleashes her repressed sexuality even further. But as the number of callers dwindles week after week, there seems to be a lingering hope for some kind of redemption one promising day in which there will be only one man left: "A man special enough to understand what the woman upstairs is truly worth" (114). So Eve's promise to Mary's father—to return his daughter whole—is built on that process of selection in which only one chosen man would do for her. From untamed promiscuity to a certain sense of emotional stability, Mary will have to navigate dangerous waters by enacting a ritual transition, clearly hinting at a renewed balance in the end between body and mind. Thus, Naylor transmutes psychological and psychical displacement and self-alienation into a potential tool for healing and wholeness.

Nevertheless, the most heart-rending character is undoubtedly Sadie, who has been so neglected and deserted that she ends up selling her body for the exact change of the liquor bottles she lives on. An unwanted child, her despicable mother imparts self-loathing to her, while she unfailingly tries to be good to deserve her mother's love. Moreover, her mother sells her daughter's virginity to make her atone for having ruined her own life. Eventually coercing her into sterilization, the mother reinforces that view of maternity as a curse: "your life woulda been pure hell ever having to take care of a child" (45). After her mother's passing, she marries a man thirty years her senior, again working hard to convince him she was worth loving, but receiving exactly the same response after twenty-five years of marriage: "*nothing* around her was good enough" (54; author's emphasis). When he also dies and she loses the only thing that really mattered to her, the house, her last dream, Sadie becomes immersed in a cycle of despair, depression, loneliness, alcohol and prostitution, the "black hole" that swallows her up. Tellingly described as a "wino, a twenty-five-cent whore" (40), she is so shattered that she cannot accept another opportunity with the iceman who gives her her first real kiss and wants to share his life with her. The final sentence in the chapter renders the tale ironic: "She knew this dear sweet man was offering her the moon, but she could give him the stars" (78). All her life evolves around the stars that the bottles offer her, so her annulment as a person and her gradual deterioration will slowly but surely proceed.

The last character Eve is also victimized by the way in which in "all these lives erotic desire is repressed, by outsider 'agents' of the established religion or by

inner conflicts originating in outward pressures" (Chavanelle 68). Her "godfather" is one of those agents who plays an ambiguous role as a preacher who chastises her when she initiates sensual games with a boy. The awakening of her sexual desire is chronicled in those "innocent" games, in which she discovers "what my body was for" by pressing close to the earth while the boy stomped (87). Her need to be touched intensifies with her progress toward womanhood and when caught by her godfather, she is subjected to severe mistreatment and evicted from home naked and hungry. Overcoming great difficulties on the way, Eve resurrects herself from the utter abandonment and loss she encounters till she finally reaches her destination, her garden, which is codified as a haven, very distinctly a feminine refuge where battered women can expect solace and comfort. As Kathleen Puhr suggests, Eve—the first woman—clearly personifies "the mother of all healers" (525), who is willing to subject all these women to a ritual of pain and rediscovery in order to restore them back to life and wholeness. Sadie's unfortunate fate is closely tied up to her inability to reach out for help, as she is the only woman who does not take refuge in Eve's place. Clearly, Naylor seems to be promoting collective rituals of healing as the most effective path to redemption.

Toni Morrison's investment in the importance of the community and female bonding is likewise noteworthy in most of her novels. In *Home* another type of ritual enacted by an all-female community reverberates with meaning. Again readers are presented with an exploited and afflicted woman who has been subjected to an infamous treatment at the hands of a sadistic doctor, ironically called Dr. Beau. Prior to that experience, Cee's life has not been easy either, first mistreated by her own grandmother whose constant verbal abuse drives her away from home on to a husband who takes advantage of her and then leaves her to her own devices: "She learned that Principal had married her for an automobile" (49). As if she were just another piece in a commercial transaction, he sets his heart on the car and runs off. This process of dehumanization reaches its peak when she starts working for the doctor to make a living, a job that literally brings her to the brink of death. Her body is used and abused in the name of science. Interestingly enough, the person who acts as a spokesperson for Dr. Beau is his wife who instructs Cee how to behave: "Just do what he says the way he wants and you'll be fine" (60). She even mentions that he is "no Dr. Frankenstein" (60), although the reference is lost on Cee. Basically, then, Cee's exploitation escalates till she reaches the most profound annulment as a person who has lost control over her own body and mind.

The narration does not provide a precise description of the doctor's practices other than stating that he is a convinced and unrepentant Confederate, but there are certain hints as the novel progresses. On the one hand, the doctor's own daughters suffer from encephalitis, a painfully ironic twist given the racist ideology illustrated in his books entitled *The Passing of the Great Race*, and *Heredity, Race and Society*.[11]

[11] This is indeed a very revealing choice by Morrison. The former is a classic instance of treatises popularized by scientific racism. Published in 1916 by another eugenics convert named

Cee is awed by his knowledge and promises to read more about "eugenics." On her first day at work the doctor rather ominously warns her, "Be prepared for the reality of medicine: sometimes blood, sometimes pain" (64), which is exactly the kind of mistreatment she will be bound to in due course. But there is an especially poignant scene foreshadowing what is going to happen to Cee. Cee and Sarah, the cook in the house, select a melon to eat and they casually express the view that female melons are sweeter and juicier. Then Sarah "cut the girl in two" with a knife (66), anticipating the severe dismemberment and racial/gender violence that Cee herself will be forced to undergo.

It is also worth mentioning that the character of Sarah directly recalls the terrible case of Sarah Baartman's story, but with an additional twist. Thanks to Sarah's timely intervention Cee is rescued by her brother Frank. Morrison is very possibly intertextually citing the figure of Baartman when the woman who helps Cee to survive is Sarah. Moreover, Sarah's actions are also significant due to her awareness of the doctor's illegal practices, mainly comprising medicines of his own creation, performing abortions, etc., but Sarah also reveals that the main reason for Cee's decline is the doctor's interest in her vagina for increasing gynecological knowledge of black women's bodies.[12]

Morrison draws attention to the medical experimentation on African Americans that had been fittingly rendered invisible in the official chronicle of the 50s. Especially well-known cases that Morrison refers to were "LSD experiments on soldiers... [and] experimentation with syphilis that was going on with black men at Tuskegee who thought they were receiving health care" (cited in Bollen 4). Rewriting the narrative of the country, particularly the myth of the contented 50s in this novel, Morrison is intent on exposing the darker, more sinister aspects of that medical industry that would dispose of black bodies as guinea pigs for their unsafe experiments with impunity, inflicting upon them abomination after abomination. The fact that Morrison makes Cee—the sister of a veteran hero—the victim of the cruel medical abuse constitutes another strategic device in the story that adds to the shameful past of the nation. Cee's resulting infertility and the danger to her life could also be read as a cautionary tale about the traumas of the buried past and racial violence, an indictment for the entire, profoundly unjust, racial history of the United States.

Madison Grant, it rested on a radical program of racial cleansing to diminish the invasion of the "superior" Nordic race by the inferior ones. The second tome was published much later, in 1946, by two biologists Dunn and Dobzhansky, who aimed to probe into the employment of eugenics theories for political and racial purposes. According to Girling, the authors "express their opinion, with which most geneticists, but very few members of the public, in America, would agree, that the mixing of races is not biologically dangerous, and may even, in certain cases, lead to increased vigour" (216). I cannot help but mention an ironic undertone as these comments appeared in a publication titled *The Eugenics Review,* purposely trying to approach genetics "upon reason, and not upon prejudice" (Penrose 253).

[12] In line with the eugenics program to sterilize black women, for instance.

To counteract those traumas, Cee's recovery can only be achieved thanks to a community of black women living in their hometown, Lotus, who believe that Frank's "maleness would worsen her condition" (119), so he is expelled from the surroundings.[13] The novel thus highlights the stark contrast between traditional, nature-based healing practices and those of the aggressive and self-serving medical industry. To nurse Cee back to health, these practical and wise women perform a ritualistic healing session structured in certain phases, from the body to the soul and then back, as it were. First they take care of the physical symptoms—bleeding, infection, repair—, rounded off by a sun-smacking ending that reveals the extent to which these women's strategies are indebted to natural practices. By offering herself to the sun, Cee learns to feel comfortable with her own body laying claim to it for good. This scene bears the imprint of the erotic too, as there is a pleasant communion between nature and the body. As Tally rightly states, "this author's representation of the erotic, as opposed to the gratuitously sexual, make up a significant proportion of what she clearly defines as 'wholeness'" ("Nature" 60). The traumatized and discarded body can enjoy some degree of pleasure once again by doing away with shame and abjection, and also by feeling as one with other female bodies like her own. Consequently, bodily harmony is accomplished thanks to her acceptance within the community. Yagüe González points out that this acceptance "can help the individual defeat her demons" (122). What I would like to add to his appreciation is precisely the importance of the caring affection for the body, as well as for the mind, that this acceptance is actually committed to.[14]

The next stage is attention to the psychological damage inflicted by the doctor and the gallery of horrors she has been witness to: "Who told you you was trash?" (122). Little by little Cee is forced to regard these affectionate women as the nurturing models of love and female bonding she has never experienced before. Her grandmother Lenore's example is promptly dismissed, as they insist on a healthy definition of identity away from demeaning or castrating images. This alternative identity model is encapsulated in a telling passage: "You young and a woman and there's serious limitation in both, but you are a person too. Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are" (125). Soon enough Cee stands once more on her two feet and for the first time she is empowered to speak for herself. Having learnt to value and respect herself, she is even sure enough to declare that she is not in need of rescue anymore. The final step of the long healing process goes back to the physical realm: the final acceptance of what really happened to her body at the hands of the malignant doctor, which led to her permanent infertility. Facing that final truth is extremely difficult for Cee, but also

[13] Understandingly from their position as traditional healers, Frank's male energy "might hinder the healing process" (*Litlovers* 6-7).

[14] Bringing readers back to *Beloved* and Baby Suggs' insistence on loving the body, each part of it, in her poetic and deeply moving message in the Clearing: "We flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. ... Flesh that needs to be loved" (*Beloved* 88).

confirms her newly-found strength and her psychic integrity. Cee is definitively not haunted anymore, and is restored to life through a conjunction or integration of both body and mind.[15]

The three authors selected take up the issue of body-historiography and the historical processes of commodification, exploitation and sexualization, in an attempt to redeem the mistreated and violated black female body and to discard the traumatic legacy associated with it. Invalidating the universality of the hegemonic white body as the norm, their discourse of defiance and resistance denounces the inhumanity, hypersexuality and underrepresentation usually inflicted on black female bodies by the dominant gender ideology and its multiple discriminatory practices. Claiming black women's bodies and sexualities in their entirety, they also reject the hegemonic constant control and surveillance over them, together with the pervasive ways to box and display them for mainstream consumption and abuse.

The three novelists insist on communal healing as the only way to ensure survival and wholeness for black women. First the body, then the soul to regain self-knowledge. As Philip Page insightfully points out, "individuals are tormented but communities gain temporary relief by performing rituals" (12). Individual bodies can be harmed, brandished and tortured, but the collective body needs to be reassembled, healed and preserved. By means of a holistic vision that incorporates body and mind in an integrated whole, it is possible for black women to revisit their traumatic body-historiography and their emotionally damaged identities in order to transform them into adequate instruments for corporeal healing and psychic well-being. Dismantling racist and sexist ideologies, these novels ultimately chronicle the acquisition of a full-fledged persona that is contingent upon the survival of the collective body and soul. In consequence, they signal new ways to reconstitute black female bodies as sites and means for enunciation in a newly devised politics of the black body that resists the exclusion to which it has been historically submitted, and facilitates agency and the fashioning of alternative non-hegemonic identities.

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[15] For Morrison scholars, this ending would recall *Paradise*, especially the moment in the "Consolata" chapter after the ritual of the circle in which the Convent women are said to be "no longer haunted. Or hunted either" (266), in spite of the fact that it constitutes a premonition of their murders. However, in Cee's case her recovery promises to be more lasting.

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POLYMORPHOUS EROTICISM: NEW PATHS TO SURVIVAL IN BLACK WOMEN'S WRITINGS*

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Abstract

Following Audre Lorde's affirmation that black sexualities can be read as one expression of the reclamation of the despised black female body focusing on female desire and agency, sexuality is seen by contemporary African American women writers such as Sapphire and Pearl Cleage as a site where silence is disrupted, and a positive life-affirming sexuality is imagined. These writers are responding to views that historically have described black women's sexuality with metaphors of speechlessness, space or vision where black women's bodies are colonized by the hegemonic discourse on race and sex. In order to contest the historical construction of black female sexualities, and how it can be disrupted, the position of black women with AIDS in fiction is analyzed as a venue for exploring black women's agency and wholeness.

Keywords: black women's sexuality, black women with AIDS, black women's agency and wholeness.

Resumen

Partiendo de la afirmación de la escritora afroamericana Audre Lorde de que la sexualidad de la mujer negra puede ser interpretada como una expresión de la reclamación del desdeñando cuerpo negro, enfatizando el deseo y la proactividad, la sexualidad de la mujer afroamericana se refleja en las obras de autoras como Sapphire y Pearl Cleage como un lugar de disrupción del silencio, donde una sexualidad afirmativa es imaginada. Estas escritoras contemporáneas responden a interpretaciones de la sexualidad afroamericana que históricamente han descrito al cuerpo femenino negro con metáforas de silencio, espacios o visiones en los que éste ha sido colonizado por discursos hegemónicos sobre la raza y la sexualidad. A este fin, se analizará la posición de la mujer afroamericana con respecto al SIDA dentro de la literatura de ficción para explorar la proactividad, la subjetividad y la integridad de la mujer negra.

Palabras clave: sexualidad de la mujer negra, mujer afroamericana y SIDA, proactividad, subjetividad e integridad de la mujer negra.

To imagine Black women's sexuality
As a polymorphous erotic
That does not exclude desire for men
But also does not privilege it. To
Imagine, without apology, voluptuous
Black women's sexualities (*Clarke* 224)

The free expression of sexuality by black women writers in the first decade of the twenty-first century has proved to be a difficult task given its appropriation by the marketplace in black popular culture in what is known as the "booty revolution." The discourse of the 19th century created the black woman's body and her sexuality in the image of the Hottentot[1] female, a site where the black female and the prostitute converged, based on the "scientific" evidence of black women's uncontrolled sexuality under the stigmata of sexual difference and deviance. The hegemonic discourse created by white males exposed their own fears of difference in the age of colonialism, and their need to control and regulate the black female rendered as the "other."

Moreover, black women's sexuality has been historically described in metaphors of speechlessness, space, or vision; as an empty space which is at once ever-visible (exposed) and invisible. In this "void" black women's bodies are always colonized by the hegemonic discourse on race and sex. To this repressive force black women have reacted with silence, secrecy, and a partially self-chosen invisibility (Hammonds, "Towards a Genealogy" 171). As social and cultural agents, black women writers are contesting the legacies of symbolic power in order to define the terrain of black women's sexuality. They claim black women's sexual desire by exploring pleasure instead of danger, focusing largely on the building of agency by reclaiming the body as well as subjectivity, transforming the "politics of silence" into speech and telling. Audre Lorde's essay "The Uses of the Erotic" emphasizes the need to read agency as responsibility and to define difference as growth in order to transform fears into dialogue and speech. Overcoming fear means identifying "the mockeries of separations" imposed upon black women, often accepted as their own. It also means disrupting the "paradigm of resistance" (Ryan 16) and contesting the notion that sexuality is abnormal, opening to speech and rendering desire unbound. In her biomythography *Zami* Audre Lorde reveals a fluid identity located at "the very house of difference" (197), learning that strength comes from everyday survival, accepting fear as the very rhetoric of growth. Lorde encourages both writers and critics to explore how difference is established, how it operates, and how it constitutes subjects who see and speak in the world. The goal is to develop a "politics

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[1] In her book *Venus in the Dark. Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005) Janell Hobson revisits Sara Baartman's memory and the legacy of the Venus Hottentot or Black Venus in the African Diaspora.

of articulation" that builds on the interrogation of what makes it possible for black women to speak and act, to theorize difference as agency, as a way of knowing and power. As Hortense Spillers points out:

> We are in the incredible position of having either to create a first-order discourse on black women's community and/or speak immediately into the void left by its absence and the next fase of meaning, that stage at which we would locate contemporary feminist discourse. (89)

This essay intends to delineate a mapping of black female desire marked by agency and empowerment through a transgressive sexuality, enhanced by black women's spirituality and informed and enriched by a profound understanding of the erotic and creativity. This dynamic sexuality breaks the patterns of the representations of black women in the past, either as hyper-sexual and/or sexually deviant for most part of the 19th century, as silent beings who adhered to strict moral and sexual standards dictated by propriety in the 20th century, or as products of the boldness of hip-hop music videos and other manifestations of black female body currently in vogue "centered on the fragmentation and fetishization of the female body" (Mae Henderson 127).[2] Either in the representation through fictional characters in literature, in the lives of black women themselves,or in those reflected in the media, black women have not been able to express themselves sexually without constraints, and thus they have been denied the "liberating potential of an empowered and empowering embodied spirituality" (Weir-Soley 2).

This process of achieving sexual agency which is one of the hallmarks of black women writers in the 21th century is linked to the search for sexual wholeness, as an intrinsic part of black women's liberatory discourses concerning spirituality and sexuality. There is a need to delineate a necessary poetics of eroticism foregrounding the search for wholeness implicit in the African American experience by focusing on the transformative power of the erotic. Contemporary black women writers proclaim the power of eroticism as sexual healing. In these works, sex is sublimated as a major vehicle for human communication. It is through sex that these women are writing themselves into subjectivity, and it is through an honest understanding of their desire that they create liberatory discourses, free from a pathological expression imprisoned in the neurotic by the imposition of the patriarchal order. Weir-Soley understands this "merger between the sexual and the spiritual [as] a political act, an act of recovery that can potentially restore the black woman's sense of wholeness" (41).

The search for sexual wholeness implicit in the novels of contemporary black women writers provides an epistemic grounding unifying black female identity, sexual power, and spiritual agency. These aspects contribute to the development of a methodology for reading black women's novels focusing on the achievement of a

[2] While this is true, studies like Robin Roberts's *Ladies First: Women in Music Videos* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996) offer a feminist approach to hip hop music videos, thus refuting the prevailing notions of these videos as inherently misogynistic and racist.

kind of subjectivity in which sexuality and spirituality are key to identity formation based on agency. The search for wholeness both in the spirit and in the flesh provides a model of black female subjectivity whose ultimately quest is a divine search for wholeness. As Justine Tally contends:

> [T]he divorce in Western cosmology between the body and the mind, the physical and the spiritual, leads to disruption and imbalance in the female psyche, and in order to regain their integrity, black women must incorporate their physical bodies and sexual expression into an acceptance of their entire being. (1)

Judylyn S. Ryan inserts black women's writings within a "paradigm of growth" (17) which views black women as "powerful, independent subjects" (King, cited in Ryan 16) and which is proactive, reacting in this way against the "paradigm of resistance" (Ryan 16) used in most theoretical approaches to African diaspora cultural studies. This is particularly important when the healthy black female body is negated by infection with AIDS. In Ryan's opinion, the paradigm of resistance has viewed black women as victims, as fragmented individuals marked by trauma, and lacking a sense of wholeness. One of the most salient features of the "paradigm of growth" is that it reveals "a democracy of narrative participation" as a narrative strategy in which the standard binary casting of central and marginal characters is obliterated to give way to interdependent/interconnected relationships revealing that "even individuals whose presence is temporally or socially limited have full personalities and unlimited human agency" (Ryan 18). This narrative strategy also serves another purpose, that of allowing the reader to be able to recognize her/his own human agency, "thus extending their transformative impact beyond the fictional realm to the social universe in which the work of art is designed to function" (Ryan 18). It also accomplishes the goal implicit in the search for wholeness and individual agency: stabilize identity, and strengthen social/communal relationships, providing black women with a departure point from which to build liberating epistemologies, recognizing their sexual and spiritual agency, demonstrating black women's "narrative engagement with an ethos and ideology of interconnectedness" (Ryan 18).

In her collection *I am your sister* (1979) Audre Lorde defines a need to start writing about black women's sexuality in ways that account for difference. She is critical about the ways in which most scholarship on black women's sexual lives has focused on the devastating history of systemic and epistemic violence, whilst the "innersexual lives of black women, how they think about themselves sexually remain a mystery" (Wekker 76). It is helpful to consider alternative lenses in order to explore the flexibility of gender constructs in our discussion of the complex issue of black women's sexualities. Wekker suggests analyzing same-sex behavior cross-culturally when she offers the example of Afro-Surinamese women's concept of "mati work" as a way to articulate a complex, flexible gender and sexual system that defines sexuality in terms of women's agency and behavior rather than as essentialized identity. In her study, as Cole and Guy-Sheftall point out, Wekker shows that Afro-Caribbean working class women "consider their sexual activity with other women pleasurable,

but they do not identify as 'lesbian' because 'sexual behaviors have different meanings in various cultures' " (164-5).

1. BLACK SEXUAL IDENTITY IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST AIDS

As Evelynn Hammonds contends, black lesbians suffer from a triple discrimination which has gone under-analysed in studies about black women's sexuality. The development of a complex conception of racialized sexualities requires a methodology that contests the ideological system that has defined the terrain of black women's sexuality ("Black (W)holes" 134). Theoreticians of black female sexuality need to develop a methodology that puts emphasis on the pleasure, exploration and agency of black women, reclaims the body, and corrects that unspoken distortion of vision, where "Black women have, on the one hand, always been highly visible, and on the other hand, have been rendered invisible through the depersonalization of racism" (Hammonds, "Black (W)holes" 91). Thus, instead of focusing on issues of rape, incest, or sexual abuse, black lesbian sexualities can be seen as a site where black desire is explored. They can be read as an expression of the reclamation of the despised black body, pointing out that desire and agency are key elements in the search for a theory of black women's sexualities.

Even more, and in order to contest the historical construction of black female sexualities, and most interestingly, how it can be disrupted, the position of black women with AIDS should be analyzed because this perspective will reveal black women's self-defined sexualities, rendering them visible. One very productive venue for exploring black women's agency and reclaiming the voices of the oppressed has been the terrain of black women's fiction. The appeal to visibility does not necessarily challenge the structures of power and domination, both symbolic and material that determine what can and cannot be seen. The goal would be to develop a "politics of articulation" that would be based on the question of "what makes it possible for black women to speak and act" (Hammonds, "Black (W) holes" 141). In the last decade there has been an increasing concern around black women in the HIV/AIDS epidemic which is critical because, as Hammonds states, "Black women have been made both invisible and hypervisible in the HIV/AIDS epidemic" (cited in Weekly 182). As Weekley points out, black women suffering from HIV/AIDS have been largely ignored due to their marginalization in medical and popular discourses. Moreover, they have become hypervisible in the epidemic as they have been considered the vehicles for transmission to black men and children. Thus, the construction of black women's identity within the HIV/AIDS epidemics is quite complex and problematic, especially if we take into consideration their status as unwitting victims of black men's unrestrained sexual behaviour. Sexually promiscuous men, especially those who have sex with both men and women, serve as "bridges" for HIV to heterosexual women, their wives. This is known as the down low (DL) behaviour which has given way nowadays to DL discourses certainly in need of critical exploration. This might be the case of Precious Jones in the novel

Push, in which Precious' own father infects her with AIDS. Sapphire's involvement with political activism and the welfare of young black women, and their search for literacy is clear in this novel, which was successfully transposed to the screen as the film *Precious* in 2009. This writer best exemplifies the specific forms of oppression black women suffer within the context of lesbian literature.[3]

Push represents the "ancient and unexpressed angers" which Audre Lorde claims shape the life of "every black woman in America." The telling of the lifestory of Precious Jones, a stark representative of the abused black female body, functions as a liberatory act, because it is in the act of telling that the possibilities for regeneration and healing begin. Sapphire looks into those aspects of African American realities which are too dangerous, too shameful or too terrible to confront: incest and AIDS. Sapphire's desire is to activate language to utter the unspeakable things which are too often left unspoken. This appeal to visibility becomes an answer to the legacy of silence and repression in black women's articulation of sexuality. This approach transforms the issue of identity into a dynamic force becoming "discursive and material terrains where there exists the possibility for the active production of speech, desire, and agency" (Hammonds, "Black (W)holes" 141).

Ultimately, this leads to the achievement of resilience which is rooted in strength, in spiritual wholeness, in resistance and in forgiveness. The journey of Precious Jones is her struggle not only to overcome the trauma of racism and the consequent fragmentation of the self, but also to find ways of escaping the abuse heaped upon her by her own father and mother. What Precious has to confront is an oppression that goes beyond the historical "double jeopardy" of the black woman. Precious is the victim of rape and abuse from both her parents. This experience turns even more lethal when the victim lacks the vocabulary to contextualize the violence, unconscious of her own vulnerability and exposed to the disruption in her family life.

There is a shift in values that Precious needs to account for in her new experiences with the alternative school program led by Ms. Rain. Precious looks up to the social model defended by black-nationalist Louis Farrakhan, together with the image of men he supports. As Sapphire explains in an interview with M. Marvel, Precious "accepts the teachings of Farrakhan because even if she needs a positive view of black men (...) Precious doesn't understand the ramifications of black nationalism" (28). As Lubiano points out, black nationalisms support the construction of black womanhood based on a politics of respectability that excludes LGBT people, nonconformist women, and those individuals outside the boundaries of heteronormative sexuality who become thus marginalized by black nationalistic discourses (183). Precious is in fact amazed when she learns that not only the major character of her reading class assignment, Celie in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple,* is homosexual, but that her own teacher and one of her classmates are as well:

[3] Although she has written several books of poetry, her best known work is her novel *Push* published in 1996.

> But jus when I go to break on and go to tell class what Five Percenters 'n Farrakhan got to say about butches, Ms Rain tell me I don't like homosexuals she guess I dont't like her 'cause she one. I was shocked as shit. Then I jus' shut up. Too bad about Farrakhan. I still believe allah and stuff. I guess I still believe everything. Ms. Rain say homos not who rape me, not homos who let me sit up not learn for sixteen years, not homos who sell crack fuck Harlem. It's true. Ms Rain the one who put the chalk in my hand, make me queen of the ABCs. (81)

Precious is awakening into consciousness and accepting her personal feelings in order to create her identity, away from social narratives, paradigms, and ideologies.

Sapphire adds complexity to the issues of sexual abuse and the invisibility of women suffering from AIDS when the victim becomes the aggressor and the abuser, this being the main idea behind her most recent novel *The Kid* (2011). Abdul Jones is sexually abused by the catholic priests at the board school he attends after his mother, Precious, dies of AIDS when he is nine years old. The sexual abuse leads him to confusion about his own sexuality and when he is thirteen he starts having homosexual relationships with other kids understanding his sexuality as an exchange for money and other commodities. The novel introduces adults who are flawed, unable to sympathize with Abdul's situation and to offer any valid help so that he can improve his life. He is abandoned by his mom's true friends, especially Rita, in whom he had placed all his hopes. Another of Precious's former friends take up her identity in the welfare system after she dies, claiming that Abdul is also dead, in order to continue cashing the checks.

Inserted in an environment of abuse and fear, lacking a sense of family, and being unable to establish bonds with any kind of supportive community, it does not come as a surprise that Abdul falls into the violent ethics of survival when he is considered by the welfare system as a potential criminal. There is a direct relationship between the situation of Abdul and his behaviour as a sexual predator with the male culture of rape in US prisons. As Collins contends, "surviving in this male rape culture and avoiding victimization require at most becoming a predator and victimizing others" (239) because, as she further points out, "for many poor and working-class Black men, prison culture and street culture constitute separate sides of the same coin" (239). Even though Abdul might be disgusted with himself after raping someone else, he knows that the only way he can make sense of the suffered abuse is realizing that he is not powerless, and that he can deliver as well as receive pain. One important feature of male rape culture concerns its effects on sexual identities. In fact, Abdul does not consider himself gay because in this context of abuse masculinity is performed and constructed. For Abdul, to be a real man is to become an active participant in the sexual act; when he is with younger boys he penetrates them, not allowing himself to become a passive receiver. As Abdul learns from his great-grandmother, Toosie, he comes from a long line of males who die, just after being born or in infancy, so his legacy is survival as his own father was a failure (he died of AIDS and was a child abuser). Abdul also comes from a long line of abused women; his great-grandmother was raped, had a daughter when she was ten, then went to New York where she worked as a prostitute. Mary,

Abdul's grandma, was married to Carl, a child abuser who fathers other children and who corrupts Mary so that she abuses her own daughter, Precious. Carl also infects Precious with AIDS, and she dies as a consequence of this. The novel calls our attention to the transgenerational situation of permanent abuse and betrayal. We would like to focus on the section of the novel that looks into Precious and Abdul's family background in order to explain the genesis of abuse. Although she does not appear in *Push,* Toosie, Abdul's great-grandma, becomes the driving force behind the character of Abdul in *The Kid*. In fact, craving love is behind Tossie's character, and of Mary's thwarted relationship with Carl, Precious' desire to fit in, to belong, and also behind Abdul's expectations of becoming a respected dancer. Toosie experiences prolonged, unabated grief; she is stuck in grief, and her endurance is a redemptive tool for Abdul.

The women in the novel become the pillar for Abdul's energetic search for a true identity and agency. He explores the symbolic power of the legacy his great-grandma hands over to him in the form of a life-story. Toosie, whom Abdul pejoratively calls "slavery days" knows that for Abdul to be free he must listen to her story, which is, in turn, his-story, because on it lies the spiritual strength and the necessary tools he needs to become an artist. Toosie's story prevents Abdul from going bad, or flawed, or unacceptable because of what he does. However, at first, Abdul refuses to hear Toosie's story, that is full of vital words. Whether he likes it or not, she is giving him "the word" which he needs most after the death of his mother. Toosie and Precious have been both arrested and defeated by the past, but not totally thwarted by it, because they both remember their past and can construct a story which is a true gift for Abdul. They are the only two persons who offer unconditional love and support to the kid, but that most successfully help him to transform and to transcend, to freely become what he wants, and artist and a dancer, something his great-grandmother, "slavery days" nor his own mother, Precious, ever had a chance to do. Their stories unlock a future of possibilities for Abdul who just has to hear, to listen to their words of fire to help him unravel. Their words are powerful, they are sustaining; full of desire, pregnant with danger, eager for agency, reclaiming subjectivity: a place for the production of speech and telling, becoming part of the liberatory discourse of black women regarding expressions of spirituality and sexuality. The words of Toosie and Precious open a world of possibilities for Abdul to realize as a full human being.

Abdul's first person narration weaves together fantasy and memory. When he abuses others, he often dissociates and denies his actions to himself and sometimes sees the events as if they were dreams, as if he had only imagined them, falling, tragically, in diverse episodes of mental illness which can only find a way out through dancing: he is introduced to African dances and then goes to live with a group of dancers with whom he stages performances until his final mental breakdown. This somber ending provides some redemption when Dr. See helps Abdul to confront the vicious cycle of abuse he has total control over: what he does to others. Dr. See makes Abdul understand that his lies have prevented him from establishing a natural and wholesome relationship with his dancer lover, My Lai, the only person he has been able to trust and to honestly bond with since his mother died.

2. AIDS IN ITS RAVAGING OF THE BLACK FEMALE BODY

One aspect of gender oppression that has been overlooked by critics is the prejudice suffered by those black women with AIDS. A representative text that looks into this aspect of gender and sexual identity is Pearl Cleage's novel *What looks like crazy on an ordinary day* (1997), the story of Ava Johnson, a middle aged black woman who has just found out she is HIV positive. Ava is coping with it, learning to live with the fact that she might develop AIDS at any point in the future. As a heterosexual black woman, she needs to deal with the stereotypes about AIDS, and because she feels people in Atlanta are not ready to deal with the experience of having her around, she decides to sell her hair salon and her house, and move on in search for her own identity to San Francisco, to make a fresh start as someone who could be her "black, female, sexual, HIV-positive self" (10). She wants to move someplace where she doesn't have to "apologize for not disappearing because her presence made people nervous" (10). She feels that in Atlanta people are not ready to honestly deal with the issue of having an acquaintance who is HIV positive. Ava Johnson proactively chooses her identity on the basis of her being HIV positive, learning to define and reshape her values and her commitments and in doing so, giving texture and form to her future through the development of a liberatory discourse.

In order to prepare for her new life, and now that she is financially secure after selling her business and her house in Atlanta, Ava plans to stop in Idlewild, a small town in Michigan where she grew up. There she hopes to relax for a few days, in the company of her relative and close friend Joyce, who she feels will be the emotional cushion she needs in order to rest and to put her ideas in order before her final move to San Francisco. According to Frances D. Henderson, Ava undergoes an "invagination spiral" in a reverse migration that "enables her to claim a female-centered and empowered self" (86). Usually this process entails the character experiencing the "death of a primary caregiver, emotional, physical or sexual abuse, and/or a sustained feeling of not fitting in with her environment or the people around her" (86) all of which can be applied to Ava. The invagination spiral is characterized by the personal trials the protagonist undergoes and that are brought on by the convergence of class, gender and/or race. In the case of Ava, a return home becomes necessary in her journey for personal and cultural healing.

In Idlewild Ava becomes involved with Joyce's youth program called the *Sewing Circus* run through the local church. Meeting the young women who are part of this group, Ava realizes how much help the younger people need in order to understand how to deal with sex, domestic violence and drug addiction. In a powerful voice brimming with irony and sarcasm, Pearl Cleage focuses on the vulnerabilities of the older generation, which strongly influence the self-destructive and violent behavior of the younger ones. Cleage deals with issues of survival when she notices the physical and psychological ditches in which both the older and the younger ones are buried. The issues of drug addiction, motherhood/parenthood, child abuse and domestic violence are dealt with exhaustively in this novel because Cleage observes that there are important wounds contemporary cities and villages all across America are nursing.

Upon her arrival in Idlewild and her meeting the *Sewing Circus* group, Ava realizes immediately the oppression they suffer by the local black church and the group's leader, the reverend's wife. Ava and Joyce understand that these young folk need a real program in sexual education based on respect, understanding, and agency while the reverend and his wife insist the only possibility is abstinence. Cleage applies the paradigm of Free Womanhood which she introduces in previous works such as her collection of essays *Deals with the Devil and other Reasons to Riot* (1994), as her proposal to black women who look for a true self based on a progressive black sexual politics, claiming a Black identity based in moral, ethical values that fully accept each African American individual. Cleage's novel, considered to be part of a sub-genre of African American literature called black conduct literature (Francis 32), is a text addressed to an African-American audience that refers to a shared cultural history insisting on social activism in order to combat racist ideologies. Functioning as a site of power and agency it searches for a methodology which embraces the construction and negotiation of individual and communal black identity. In Cleage's theory of Free Womanhood women themselves are the only protection they have against violence or injustice. As Hill Collins points out, "Black youth who have come of age during the four decades following the civil rights movement not only have not seen its promise of a beloved community come to fruition, they have been deemed the problem of America (not its hope for the future)" (301). As such, black youths in Idlewild lack a communal guide which would aid them in their search for strategies for empowerment and would foster critical thinking, much needed in their ordeal against prejudice, drug addiction and violence.

Joyce writes "ten things every free woman should know" in order to give more structure to the *Sewing Circus* program after they are expelled from the church because Joyce was teaching the girls about contraceptive methods. The only way the black church was fighting unwanted pregnancy was by preaching abstinence, and Joyce and Ava agree that this is not a valid option for many of the girls. Among the ten things every free woman should know, Joyce writes self-defense or basic first aid/sex education and midwifery followed by Ava's bolder ideas such as: "don't fuck people you don't like," "bring your own birth control," "practice safe sex everytime," "if it's hurting you, it shouldn't be exciting him," or "don't fake—demonstrate" (160). The guiding principle for the exchange between Ava and the girls in the circle is empathy, because Ava openly decides to recognize the source of the oppression and is willing to identify those aspects of the abuse that she shares with them. Ava signals some of her own diverse experiences as similar and rearticulates what she thinks her experience means. Consequently, true collectivity arises, and Ava is able to help those girls in need of counseling as much as the *Sewing Circus* women aid Ava to connect with her own wishes and to reclaim the erotic within in terms of her own sense of agency and her inner creativity in life.

As she becomes involved with the youth, with their problems, with the group, Ava also untangles her own addiction to alcohol, and her own fears about AIDS. In abandoning her fears she learns to accept her situation and to open up unconditionally to love. Ava decides to become proactive with the help of Eddie, her lover—a Vietnam vet survivor. When the *Sewing Circus* sisters learn about what

Ava, Eddie and Joyce are doing, they confirm their will to remain together learning and exchanging strategies for survival, convinced that things can change in Idlewild for the better. In the end, what has started out as a fragmented community ends up being a cohesive group, all the while retaining their heterogeneous identities. They find out that the interconnected parts pull in the direction of wholeness. The *Sewing Circus* sisters replace a corrupted and malicious church group which imposes unity not by connecting the interdependent opposites, and thus, fostering dialogue and understanding, but by basing their principles on coercion, excessive power, punishment, and abuse. Because the older generation has been corrupted, the newer generations are lost. Thus, by looking backwards and understanding the past, the individual and the group gains the necessary knowledge to act in the present and to change things for the future. This is an important aspect of the search for wholeness which is called ancestral spiritualism. Cleage's novel takes a constructivist approach towards identity, which enlightens the perception of identity in terms of the search for options, and the plurality of identity based on experience and agency.

HIV positive Ava has rejected her sexual self because she is full of guilt and skepticism towards sexual involvement with men. She denies herself sexual agency, almost erasing that aspect of her personality, influenced mostly by the prejudice against AIDS she has suffered in Atlanta and because of her fears of trusting men both sexually and emotionally in the future. On the one hand, the novel debunks the idea that only homosexuals are likely to suffer from AIDS, and on the other, she exposes the vulnerability of a young woman who has lost her faith in healthy heterosexual relationships.

Ava is also able to deal with her insecurities through her relationship with Eddie. She finds in Eddie more than a lover or a partner, a soul mate. Eddie carries the wisdom of someone who has seen death and suffering in the Vietnam war, and then has witnessed crime and abuse in his own community in the US. When he learns that Ava is HIV positive, he refuses to allow this situation to become a barrier between himself and Ava, approaching her without judgment, anger, or shame. He reaches for her body without fear, concentrating on those aspects of her sexuality which are safe, questioning her about what sort of things he could do with her, until she feels totally at ease with the limitations imposed by her condition as HIV positive, such as having to use a condom or not being able to exchange any body fluids. In the darkness of his skin, Ava finds herself whispering questions such as "can I touch your heart? Your soul? Your spirit?" (141). When Eddie hears Ava's insecurities after they have made love for the first time, he explains: "I'm not planning anything and I'm not pretending anything and I'm not expecting you to do anything except love me as hard and as strong as I'm going to love you" (143). As Ava confesses, "when it comes to making love, *reciprocity is everything*" (146). Although Eddie is a fine middleage black man, it is not Cleage's intention to introduce role models in her writing. He is a man dedicated to the safety of black women and children, he is sweet and romantic. Eddie is a conscious man, who just as Cleage, is able to see the beauty of black people anywhere he goes.

Fully committed to helping Joyce with her transformative project, Ava celebrates having found a body politics grounded in the concept of "the honest

body" (Collins 290) that will enable youngsters to reclaim agency lost to oppression. Following an ethic of honesty in her relationship with Eddie, she continues to instruct the *Sewing Circus* girls how they should feel within their own bodies by learning to interrogate their own individual consciousness, where the sphere of freedom remains. Helping Joyce to build a communal nurturing association is Ava's way of dealing with her fear of AIDS, and in this scheme, Idlewild becomes a site where she develops the skills to mediate life's challenges through affirmation. In the end there is the possibility that Ava might infect her lover with HIV, or maybe she will not be able to escape AIDS, but rather than sinking into despair over her uncertain future, she decides to put to use the lessons she has learned through life, allowing herself to be reborn with the experiences she shares with family, friends, lover, and the *Sewing Circus* girls.

3. CONCLUSION

Following Audre Lorde's affirmation that black sexualities can be read as one expression of the reclamation of the despised black female body focusing on female desire and agency, sexuality is seen as a site where silence is disrupted, and a positive life-affirming sexuality is imagined. To this end, Sapphire and Cleage reclaim the female body and explore the concept of sacred sexuality as a dimension of the search for wholeness in African American women's literature, in light of the principles of the interconnectedness, interrelatedness and interdependency of everything. Lorde, Sapphire, and Cleage warn us of the dangers of separating the sexual from the spiritual, foregrounding the role of spirituality and arguing that there is a profound relationship among sexuality, spirituality, and the personal and political empowerment for women.

Both Sapphire and Cleage urge us to be aware of the costs of turning away from issues of gender in black communities, focusing on the devastating impact of the silences and shame around issues concerning HIV/AIDS. This disease has provided a window into "some of our deepest and more troubling feelings about our bodies, sexuality and gender" (Guy-Sheftall and Cole 179). Both novels encourage individuals to reclaim agency lost to oppression, promote an ethic of honesty within all relationships that involve sexual contact, and encourage discussions of gender and sexuality within African American communities. Each novel in its own way claims a black identity based on moral, ethical values that fully accept each African American individual, fostering critical thinking in their search for strategies of empowerment.

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TRAFFICKING IN POPULAR CULTURE: SEXUAL AND GENDER ABUSE IN MOREL'S *TAKEN* AND ATKINSON'S *ONE GOOD TURN**

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Abstract

This paper looks at the way in which popular narrative forms deal with the contemporary issue of trafficking. The analysis of Kate Atkinson's novel *One Good Turn* (2006) and Pierre Morel's movie *Taken* (2008), which address both the concept and current practices of trafficking and prostitution, are both written within the genre of popular crime. A comparative analysis of these texts will illustrate how the issue of trafficking is seen and analysed in popular cultural forms, while highlighting remarkable divergences in purpose and ideology. The dangers *Taken* evokes are clearly aimed at creating a "myth" of trafficking which rewrites nineteenth-century fears of white slavery with a complete disregard for the complex structure of the sex industry and migratory flows. On the contrary, by exploring the failures of both border control and the forces of law and order to prevent sex trafficking, *One Good Turn* clearly states the necessity of establishing other means to prevent female abuse, turning instead to consider issues of women's powerlessness and/or agency.

Keywords: sex trafficking, female sexuality, migration, *Taken*, Kate Atkinson, *One Good Turn*.

Resumen

Esta contribución intenta analizar cómo las formas narrativas populares utilizan el tema del tráfico de personas en los últimos tiempos. El análisis se concentra en la novela *One Good Turn* de Kate Atkinson (2006) y la película *Venganza* (2008) dirigida por Pierre Morel, debido a su tratamiento del tema de la trata con fines sexuales. Ambos textos se clasifican dentro del género de misterio, más específicamente del "thriller" cinematográfico y la novela de detectives. Un análisis comparativo de ambos textos ilustrará cómo se representa en la cultura popular la trata de personas con fines de explotación sexual, y demostrará interesantes divergencias en la ideología en que se inscriben. La película evoca peligros destinados a mitificar la trata en el contexto de los tradicionales temores sobre la trata de blancas, sin tener en cuenta la estructura amplia y compleja de la industria del sexo en combinación con los flujos migratorios. Por el contrario, al explorar los fallos de la política de controles fronterizos y la incapacidad de las fuerzas del orden para impedir la victimización de las mujeres, la novela se vuelca en la problemática de la indefensión o la agentividad de las mujeres en nuestra sociedad.

Palabras clave: trata con fines de explotación sexual, sexualidad femenina, migración, *Venganza*, Kate Atkinson, *One Good Turn*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Trafficking in general and trafficking mostly for the purposes of prostitution, or sex trafficking, have been widely addressed in popular culture in recent years and specifically in the film industry (Brown et al. 83-84).[1] As Baker reports:

> With the growth of a global movement against human trafficking over the last fifteen years, a plethora of films on sex trafficking has emerged, produced by activists, survivors, scholars, the news media, and Hollywood. These films are in multiple genres, including documentaries, dramas, educational films, cartoons (Ray 2010), and even fairy tales (McCormick 2011), and they address trafficking in countries around the globe, including Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Burma, Nepal, India), Mexico, Israel, and the US. (2014: 209)

However, it has been within the mystery genre (both the thriller and the crime story) that trafficking has been most often popularised.[2] In many popular texts, it has been shown to be a global phenomenon involving the so-called industrialised western world as the destination and neighbouring developing or third-world countries as point of origin (Jeffreys 308). As such, trafficking has been identified as a useful category in the police-procedure format as well as the action movie. For Evans, it is also a key factor in the genre of detection that focuses on social issues (146). Within the formal constructions inherent to these popular forms of the wider mystery genre, and specifically in the context of detection in cinema and television, trafficking has sometimes been separated from its foundational questions, those of migration—and the migrant—and human rights (Brown et al. 2), and has become merely the vehicle for the protagonist's own search for truth and justice. Although there are obvious exceptions, the most popular texts tackle the topic in a way that destabilizes and obscures the current practice of trafficking as one of the major global forms of female exploitation. In this respect, contemporary popular texts mainly

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[1] The definitions adopted here follow the ones given by the United Nations. Thus, trafficking in persons "shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation (UNODC 42). On the other hand, smuggling of migrants "shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident" (UNODC 54-55). And finally, definitions to differentiate between trafficking, human trafficking and sex trafficking as analysed here are (1) human trafficking: a term coined to create a distinction between humans and other beings victims of trafficking such as exotic animals; and (2) sex trafficking: a term coined to address specifically human trafficking aimed at prostitution.

[2] The generic categorization followed here is based on Cawelti's study on popular forms of fiction and Cranny-Francis' study on feminist generic fiction.

focus on issues of border control and citizenship, the implementation of justice within the established social order, and dominant fears of culture contamination. Likewise, at the core of the texts lie more general and ubiquitous questions related to female sexuality and female prostitution, most often entangled with situations of female dispossession and disempowerment.

Moreover, sex trafficking has entered the theoretical arena. Recent social debates on trafficking from a feminist standpoint highlight the ongoing controversy concerning prostitution within feminism, which Melisa Ditmore summarises as follows:

> Today, the rise of interest in trafficking in persons has been accompanied by a focus on prostitution. Those who have devoted the most time to this issue again fall largely into two camps. One regards prostitution as a form of labor that should be treated as work rather than as vice. The other considers prostitution to be necessarily a form of slavery that therefore should be addressed as traffic in women. These camps have been reductively labeled "anti-censorship" and "pro-sex" feminists who do not see prostitution as a human rights violation, and "pro-censorship" and "anti-sex" feminists who do see sex work as inherently victimizing. (154-55)

Not surprisingly, popular texts have fed from those theoretical debates and have considered the motives behind prostitution, a subject that has been compounded by fears about female abduction and prostitution that can be traced as far back as the nineteenth-century anxiety about white slavery.[3] Following Melissa Ditmore, who also acknowledges the common discourses between sex trafficking and nineteenth-century "white slavery" (87-88), one may argue that such anxieties have coalesced as well as mutated under the requirements of the conventions of popular narrative genres. Thus, instead of conveying the internationalization of the sex industry, these texts reductively convey its global flows through the frequent characterization of the trafficker victimizing women and benefitting from their exploitation as a member of a foreign community, more often than not one where women's status is that of second-class citizens. In fact, the usual treatment of the victims betrays the strength of traditional notions about femininity and sexuality. As will be discussed below, standard cultural texts generally select a male hero/detective/sleuth who stands for the patriarchal axis of law and order and its real-life agents. Furthermore, according to Jeffreys, trafficking for the sexual exploitation of women in recent years has been coupled with the declining value of women's status not only in the countries where trafficking has given birth to a commercial enterprise (308) but also in the receiving communities. In this respect, the two texts under analysis here, Morel's *Taken* (2008) and Atkinson's *One Good Turn* (2006), question these assumptions about the outsider position and alien nature of the traffickers in different ways,

[3] For further and in-depth discussion, see Romero-Ruiz 125-142. See also Sheila Jeffreys for other continuities between the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries (*The Idea of Prostitution*, 9).

drawing a new map of trafficking and prostitution that is closer to the homeland while, at the same time, staying on the margins of the community. The low status of women in combination with what Napier-Moore has called the "exclusive focus on trafficking" (6), that is, without an appropriate social analysis, are appropriated by cultural texts in order to draft a cautionary tale about women and sexuality which reinstates traditional roles for women and men.

In addition, (sex) trafficking has also been analysed within the legal and social arenas as reflecting the consequences of the movement of people across borders. In recent years the necessity of controlling the migratory masses has been advocated from several quarters, as shown by the recent Syrian refugee crisis among other events. One of the concerns in this essay is how standard norms of behaviour can be affected in host societies, especially on cultural and ideological grounds. Borders (or other obstacles to the free circulation of people), governments and (inter)national laws have proved unable to accommodate the large influx of foreigners or control the reactions of the receiving communities, among whom entrenched discourses of 'invasion' and the sense of cultural loss appear to dominate. Unsurprisingly, certain critics have claimed that the "western" world needs to reformulate the standard legal definitions of immigration in favour of anthropological conceptualizations of this "movement" of peoples. Thus, as Eriksen pointed out in 2007, "migration must increasingly be envisioned as a transnational venture rather than as a one-way process resulting in segregation, assimilation or integration in the receiving society" (93). Judging from this statement, there seems to be a clash between the standard (read 'legal') conceptualization of the migrant and the necessary (or 'sociological') redefinition, and it is this clash that popular cultural texts have capitalized on, most of all—as mentioned above—films, because as Baker states, "[f]ilm is a powerful medium for framing social issues and raising awareness as well as funds to combat social problems" (2014: 209).

Traditionally, migrants have been represented in cultural texts as posing a problem to the community, a tear in the social fabric by virtue of their cultural, racial or linguistic difference, that needs to be solved through assimilation and integration. While stories may vary in their approach, in general terms they tend to settle the matter by suggesting that both the incoming individual and the host group have to accept their differences to construct a new sense of community.[4] As a consequence of the War on Terror, these narratives have grown to further encompass the clashes between the belief systems of hosts and migrants in a myriad of new ways. However, the desired understanding and conviviality between both have not come to happen quite yet, leaving the narratives without satisfying closure in the midst of critical and ideological conundrums. The resulting questioning of the pos-

[4] Most examples in the twenty-first century emphasize the acceptance of minority cultures and their artistic representations, often through the positive portrayal of the hybridization of individual identity ensuing from both the exposition to the culture of the host community and from their own ancestral culture.

sibility of a shared community affects different forms of migration: war or economic refugees, labour immigrants, the undocumented, or even leisure migrants. There has also been a move to clarify the reasons that lead them to abandon their country of origin. According to Eriksen, these "push" and "pull" factors always reflect an economic basis for migration (93), as most of the categories mentioned above do derive their basic definition from an economic factor, which can then be divided into more subcategories. Another striking feature is that all the categories mentioned are drafted from one perspective only: their regulation *by border control*. At the core of it all resides a central truth: the migrant crosses borders in search of an economic welfare that is virtually inexistent in their communities of origin.

Deriving from border control policies and discourses is a migrant condition that Brinker-Gabler and Smith have described as characterized by vulnerability and risk. On the one hand, migrants are seen as both vulnerable in themselves and a risk for the community. Yet on the other, migrants are seen as threatening to receiving communities, making these communities vulnerable and migrants a threat (Brinker-Gabler and Smith 7). This condition, however, does not affect the "leisure migrant," that is, the "skilled vacationer who knows the cultural codes and rules regulating the role of the tourist" (Eriksen 100). Instead, the tourist or "leisure migrant" is welcomed around the world.[5] In fact, all considerations of vulnerability and risk fail to apply from the moment the migrant is identified as a "tourist." Additionally, this identification makes possible a conversation and exchange of views across ideological differences without putting at risk either the community or the "leisure migrant." Because this migrant figure is not in need of any sort of economic help on the part of the receiving community, the border relaxes its control and welcomes the tourist within the community. As a result, it seems that migration, by virtue of being predicated exclusively on economic terms, creates two distinct legal approaches; one celebrates the "leisure migrant" while the other ostracizes the refugee and the undocumented (and hence illegal) labourer. Whereas the tourist appears as a non-threatening migrant, the refugee and the undocumented labourer are denied their citizen rights by governments (Eriksen 93): "[B]oth exemplify the predominance of movement in the contemporary world, and between them, the refugee and the tourist give an accurate depiction of the uneven distribution of resources in the globalized world" (Eriksen 101). These nuances in the definition of migrancy are being seriously examined by recent cultural texts, and will be central to our later discussion and understanding of *Taken* and *One Good Turn*. Cultural texts usually celebrate the incorporation of the "leisure migrant" to their communities, the economic implications of their insertion and their ultimate return to their places of origin (Beeton 53); the tourist is generally defined as a subject that brings the unknown or the exotic closer to home through their tales and adventures, recalling

[5] Eriksen continues to explain how this type of migrant, "the tourist," "moves in a 'third culture' where everybody has a smattering of English, and can easily buy everything he needs" (101), specifying that "tourism entails leisure and easy, laid-back consumption" (100).

the traditional genre of travel writing. However, there is an underside to this celebratory feeling, as the "other", unwelcomed migrants are compelled to try to feign the status of tourist and to devise ways to circumvent the arbitrary regulations of border control which openly accept some and reject others. Such deceptive practices have been taken up in contemporary films, often by means of plots supporting the host society's negative ideological perception and involving some kind of punishment for the migrant who assumes the fake identity of a tourist (a case in point is Weir's *Green Card*, 1990).

Furthermore, border control is predicated on the assumption that restrictions are necessary to prevent violent clashes between the established community and the incoming migrant (Brinker-Gabler 7).[6] At the core of all these definitions and subtle or not so subtle distinctions what lies is a "proliferation of laws and regulations" whose aim is, in a nutshell, to

> differentiate the 'citizen' from the 'noncitizen' and to contain the 'foreign' in a clear and efficient hierarchy of categories of people. But there are many other means of containment, not least of which is the way in which "citizens" create the "foreigner within" as a scapegoat for disaffection, instability, poverty—all that is wrong with the imagined community. (Brinker-Gabler 7-8)

This ideological turn has been accompanied by the production of cultural texts exploiting the fears of instability and poverty which the undesired migrant brings along. What was restricted to bureaucratic and legalistic arenas has slowly but surely permeated sociological, ideological and cultural ones in which the "scapegoat" is the 'dishonest' migrant who assumes a feigned identity. Cultural texts have participated in the circulation of the notion that these migrants endanger the community's stability by enabling "trafficking, refugee situations, undocumented migration and smuggling" as side-effects of their desire to migrate (Napier-Moore 6). At the same time, the ideological standpoint of these artefacts has cleverly hidden away that these are just "smaller parts of the larger migration picture" (Napier-Moore 6). What is dangerous, according to this critic, is precisely the fact that they operate to create "the false impression that trafficking is a problem that can be solved by merely taking a few legal measures and providing assistance to those identified as trafficked" (1), which in turn thwarts any further attempts to an in-depth social analysis. In this respect, Napier-Moore's suggestion that we should look at the social reality from the standpoint of a "number of interconnected social factors" has been acknowledged by some cultural practitioners, such as the novelist under analysis here, as a means to modify standard behaviours and ideological codes towards the migrant who has

[6] These "restrictions" in the migratory movement have made migrants vulnerable and have led migrants-to-be to find alternative ways to subvert the regulations of border control. As is widely acknowledged, the acceptance of "leisure migrants" by all communities all over the world has had the side effect of promoting the rise of trafficking and smuggling rings that prey on the migrants' need to escape border control.

either chosen the path of being smuggled or has been forced into trafficking. It is not just the migrant's need to move away but also the migrant's community's desire for commodities beyond their reach that is at stake.

In the next section I will turn to the analysis of Kate Atkinson's novel *One Good Turn* (2006) and Pierre Morel's film *Taken* (2008), in order to make clear how they enact the ideological clashes and controversial positions described above as they strive to provide a contemporary narration and representation of migration, prostitution and female sexuality. A second, related aim of this part is to dismantle the patriarchal view of female sexuality, female migration, and prostitution that the film strongly appears to endorse.

2. TRAFFICKING IN POPULAR CULTURE: MOREL'S *TAKEN* AND ATKINSON'S *ONE GOOD TURN*

Trying to define what popular culture is always entails a narrowing in focus of the complexity of both the term and the discussion around it. Since the emergence of Cultural Studies, the concept of culture (and within it, popular culture) has invited a vast amount of research. However, it is interesting to point out that whereas Morel's film clearly stands within the boundaries of the most traditional definition of the term "popular" (which is most of the times paired with the qualifier "mass" in scientific terms), Atkinson's novel is harder to characterize, as it works towards a blurring of the boundaries created by the distinction between "popular" and "high" culture. For the purpose of this study, I will subscribe to the definition given by Zeisler in *Feminism and Popular Culture* (2008), in which she does not only include the texts usually counted in the field but also those paramount events of everyday life that have been imprinted on a certain community's imaginary. Thus, for Zeisler popular culture can be defined as "that which entertains masses of people by 'distracting' them and by calling on their common references" (1). Morel's *Taken* is a clear example. Even on a superficial first viewing, it becomes clear that the director has not attempted to question received notions about female behaviour or male/female interactions. On the other hand, Atkinson's novel is (as I will develop below) very much at odds with that definition of pop culture but, given the novel's marketing and reception as genre writing, it could be contended that this novel is closer to popular than to "high culture" as, with the birth of Cultural Studies, "the barrier that once existed between high culture and low culture has been whittled away to the thinnest of shards" (Zeisler 5).

Both texts can be categorized as belonging to the genre of detection. Morel's film *Taken* could be described as a "rescue narrative"[7] that revises and updates the

[7] Baker states: "As in the past, rescue narratives have been powerfully articulated in contemporary discourses on the sex trafficking of women and girls. The rescue narrative that dominates trafficking discourses begins with an evil trafficker or pimp who abducts, deceives, or lures a young,

hard-boiled crime formula of twentieth-century detection, whereas Atkinson's novel *One Good Turn* undertakes a subversive revision of that traditional "rescue narrative" within the crime genre. The popularity of the genre of detection both in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has fared differently in fiction and in film; though both texts display striking similarities in plot selection, their portrayal of the topic of sex trafficking is ideologically quite different. By assuming a common ground of set beliefs and assumptions, the film works towards the necessity of revenge, given our worst fears of female sexual exploitation and the formula established by contemporary renderings of the traditional "rescue narratives" (Baker 2013: 2). The novel, on the contrary, frames major questions as to the very conceptual categories in play and their implications within existing hierarchies of power and powerlessness.

As mentioned above, the sensationalism and conventions of popular culture work to displace the concept of trafficking and to completely erase or else commodify the actual migrant. Trafficking is portrayed as a danger for young women in which they are helpless victims because, as Martínez has stated, "rescue stories are guided by a masculinist politics, in which men but never women can stand up for their rights" (277). In addition, trafficking is perceived only as a "crime," deriving from the enforcement of border control, instead of being portrayed as a complex gendered social issue, which affects the migrant. This handling encourages victimization and helplessness and, therefore, creates a simplistic moral tale. In fact, most of the filmed stories are distorted to support this moral tale and its ideological viewpoint about females and sexuality.[8] A case in point is the TV mini-series *Human Trafficking* (2005), in which the ultimate goal of the police forces is to extract the information that could bring the trafficker under the law, regardless of the danger it poses for the trafficked female(s). This sort of narrative representation places the stress on the mistaken notion that what matters is the restoration of legal conditions and the safe re-inscription of bodies as "legal" or "illegal," "criminal" or "victim," while, as Julietta Hua asserts, "[t]he important question is not so much who is being victimized and how, but what mechanisms shape the legibility of sex trafficking's victimization" (202).

Taken and *One Good Turn* have similar plots. In *Taken*, seventeen-year old Kim travels to Paris with her friend Amanda but on arrival they are kidnapped, drugged, and sold to sexual slavery by an Albanian ring, forcing Kim's father Bryan, a retired CIA agent, to come to her rescue. The film was a great success, turning actor

innocent, helpless, and often naive girl into a prison-like brothel and controls her with brutal violence until a heroic rescuer comes to save the day. The trafficker is often a man of colour or from a foreign country, and the rescuer is often a white, Western man. In this narrative frame, the solution to sex trafficking is capturing and criminally prosecuting the trafficker. This rescue narrative appears, in different degrees, in images and texts produced by the US government, anti-trafficking organizations, and the news media, as well as in film" (Baker 2013: 2-3).

[8] It also could be argued that the city, with its duplicity and defining opposites is set as the dangerous setting where the worst could happen, strengthening already existing dualities such as poverty and wealth, beauty and ugliness and finally, virtue and vice.

Liam Neeson overnight into a celebrated action movie star, a status confirmed in two further films, *Taken 2*, 2012, and *Taken 3*, 2015. In *One Good Turn*, the second book in Atkinson's Jackson Brodie series, Lena and Tatiana are economic migrants that have left their native Russia for the UK on a tourist visa and end up being trafficked in Edinburgh, where Lena's body is found by Brodie during the Festival. Plot elements in both remain quite constant: two female tourists who become trafficked, one of whom will die while the other survives, a male protagonist, an organized criminal gang, a tourist destination, and humane treatment of the dead victim. Yet, there are also divergences in the treatment of the issue of sex trafficking which clearly set both texts apart. Morel's *Taken* (2008) still employs traditional roles of femininity and masculinity. In fact, the movie has been accused of "demean[ing] that topic by removing from it any of the complexities that naturally are involved" (Brown et al. 213). On the other hand, Atkinson's *One Good Turn* (2006) struggles against these traditional roles and viewpoints to offer a more nuanced portrait of the trafficked females even while staying within the format of the crime novel.

As Kelly states, Morel's film "is an old story retold" (2).[9] The film represents, as Kelly suggests, a rewriting of the traditional fears in western societies. There is an issue with both gender and race which brings back memories of colonial struggles with the 'natives' (2) even while one may go even further back in history and remember the "xenophobic undertones" of cultural myths of origin (1). Moreover, "the film's representation of sex trafficking as a superlative evil and omnipresent danger awaiting young women who leave the safety of home and country establishes the need for strong male protection against uncivilized, foreign and racialized enemies" (2). However, by focusing on issues of "white male heroism" and "young women's purity" (3), Kelly's analysis disregards the question of migration, making leisure migration as portrayed in the text virtually invisible and underanalysed.

On the contrary, Atkinson's *One Good Turn* foregrounds the figure of the migrant while it tackles the issue of trafficking and sexual exploitation in the subplot of the narrative. Atkinson refrains from using the traditional rescue narrative to offer a very complex view of (sex) trafficking. The novel's protagonist is not the all-powerful avenging male hero Morel is partial to, but a PI whose accidental discovery of the female corpse of the trafficked female sets him off on a search for her identity and her story. Even though both texts address the same issue, by focusing on how migration and trafficking are portrayed, the film reinforces societies' worst fears about female sexuality and illegal migration whereas the novel tries to raise awareness on the exploitation of women and migrants. Prostitution is the focus in *Taken* whereas it is a secondary plot in *One Good Turn*, yet the fate of the two

[9] Drawing on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Kelly affirms: "Though they are fictive texts, films play an important role in cultivating hegemonic ideals on issues of race and gender by equipping popular audiences with dominant cultural logics, inviting them to identify with and inhabit idealized subject positions, and attesting to the common-sense of the images and narratives produced on screen" (3).

female pairs is presented as the occasion for the discussion of sexuality, trafficking and migration. As one of the trafficked women in the novel states:

> But the girl was stupid to have gone with him. She cried for days afterwards, spilling tears on to nice polished surfaces and using up clean towels. She was a virgin, she said, but she needed the money. Everyone needed the money. Lots of the girls were here illegally, some had had their passports confiscated, some disappeared after a while. Sex traffic. It would happen to the Romanian girl, you could see it in her eyes. There were rumours about bad things that had happened to some of the girls who worked for Favours, but there were always rumours and there were always bad thing happening to girls. That was life. (Atkinson 229-30)

Against the victimization of the young female characters in *Taken*, *One Good Turn* concentrates on the portrayal of a complex situation in which females are powerless, not because they are by definition helpless victims of predatory male sexuality and in need of protection, but because they *have become* helpless as a result of the failure of the system law and order to prevent trafficking (Sullivan 98-99). In this sense, it seems that the film agrees with the move toward the victimization of females which endangers their personal and political agency and autonomy in favour of some forms of governmental control by creating the notion that females are safer if they are not out in the public sphere. This has been widely denounced as an ongoing redefinition of women as helpless and in need of protection: "[T]he recent (regurgitated) official discourse of 'victimhood' justifies government regulation, criminalisation and exclusion of women and children involved in prostitution" (Sanders, O'Neill and Pitcher 12).

While the basic plot elements in both texts may appear to be identical, they are not handled in exactly the same way, nor are their characters' actions assigned the same causes. In Atkinson's novel, Lena is murdered and Tatiana saves herself while trying to take revenge on Lena's murderers. In the film, Amanda dies whereas Kim, lacking agency, is saved by her father. Both texts portray females who are abducted and also how the consequences of their abduction are related to a social conceptualization of female sexuality. According to Kelly, Amanda dies as a result of her openness towards sexuality. She is not only prostituted but also constantly drugged because, for the purposes of the film, Amanda is already a commodity, having lost her virginity before the gang kidnaps her. Her death establishes the cautionary moral of the film and differentiates the two women's worth both within the sex industry (Kelly 4-5) and in the larger society presented in the narrative. In Atkinson's text, Lena dies not for her sexual transgression—which is also Tatiana's—but because her intimate knowledge about the gang and its modus operandi endangers its continuity and success. Both Lena and Tatiana are sexually active females who try to cope with the trafficked situation into which they have been thrown. However, neither the plot itself or the narrative voice work towards the "representation of sex trafficking as a superlative evil and omnipresent danger," as Kelly describes the film (2), even though sex trafficking is seen and defined as such. What the novel really focuses on are the economic factors which forced the women to migrate. At the

same time, both are defined as victims but not victimized on the same terms as the females in the film are. Lena and Tatiana leave their country of origin in search of economic wellbeing. Their migrant status is concealed by their fake status as tourists and their subsequent hiring as housemaids (that is, legal workers) as a means of survival. Within the conventions of popular culture as described above, Atkinson's female characters have used their status as leisure migrants to subvert the regulations of border control and would therefore be deserving of punishment, yet the male protagonist in the narrative never questions their status as citizens. Even though these women do not belong *legally* to the community, it is made evident to readers that they too are worthy of the protection provided by a democratic nation-state, and their cases brought to justice.

In the film, neither Kim nor Amanda is expecting sexual exploitation to be part of their Paris adventure—echoing the eighteenth-century "Grand Tour;" being white, middle class tourists affords them a sense of entitlement and safety that other migrants lack; they are free of the vulnerability and risk impinging on the experience of migrants. Yet, the fact is that they undergo an ordeal that will cause Amanda's death. When the avenging father in *Taken* finds the body of his daughter's friend, there is room for empathy and a deep feeling of regret, and when Lena's body is found by the male private investigator in the novel, he wants to make amends for what has happened to her (Atkinson 137). Both Amanda in the film and Lena in the novel are victims of the sex trafficking industry; yet, how the stories are told makes a world of difference. The camera and the narrative voice respectively, have concentrated on showing, on the one hand, how Amanda is a victim of her own sexuality and, on the other, how Lena is a victim because of her sexual relationship with the gang's leader. Lena is an undocumented migrant and Amanda isn't but both have been forced by circumstances to accept the roles and choices the gangs have given them. The relationship these females have with the male protagonists from both texts, as well as the narrator's viewpoint, also establishes substantial departures. Even though both female victims are portrayed as needing protection, the *kind* of protection that the ideology of the texts offers is essentially different. It becomes clear that Amanda needed protection from herself in the first place, and her present situation and ultimate death is a consequence of—a punishment for—her willing entry into sexuality. The incapability of the film's protagonist to save this female is thus justified by her "flaw." Saving Kim also becomes a way of blaming Amanda. On the other hand, Lena needs protection of another sort. Her death is a consequence of the failure of the forces of law and order to implement their duty and of the protagonist's own failure as the agent for the restoration of order. The novel's private detective, Jackson Brodie, is able neither to save the female victim nor to guard the body till the forces of law and order arrive, perhaps because, unlike Kim's father in the film, he is not the representative of patriarchy. Lena then becomes a haunting presence for the private investigator, a female victim whose corpse has gone missing and, as such, who does not exist. This haunting presence—visible for some, invisible for the majority—is a much more interesting representation of the trafficked subject in contemporary western societies, both highly visible on occasion and highly invisible most of the time. The film's cautionary tale erases the transformation of the tourist

into a forced migrant and transforms this category into a simple sexualized body set as an example of the dangers of autonomous female sexuality. Moreover, the film's re-enactment of the traditional harem fails to disclose what the novel highlights: firstly, the diminishing social status of women in contemporary societies and how their value is set according to their sexual behaviour and, secondly, the economic and political factors within migration. This social value is, in fact, granted to Kim, the protagonist's daughter in the film, because of her purity. Hence, by being "certified pure," the same traffickers who exploit Amanda "protect" her. On the contrary, in Atkinson's novel the surviving sister Tatiana, is presented as a smart woman who is able to grasp how the world labels her and to successfully negotiate her way through that classification. The narrative suggests Tatiana works as a "call girl" who secures, in the end, the economic stability she is looking for. Moreover, Tatiana is —together with the private investigator—the avenger in the narrative who tries to make the traffickers pay. If Kim is denied any sort of empowerment by making her just a victim in need of protection and rescue, Tatiana is constantly proving her empowerment throughout the narrative. Her acceptance of the ways of the world, her practicality of mind and her unique sense of justice reinforce Atkinson's message. Even though the narrative is constantly questioning her status as a trafficked victim, this woman does not fall into the helpless female victim categorization the film so happily embraces. It is with the help of Tatiana that closure and justice are brought into the narrative and it is her invaluable help that allows the detective to put a name—and an identity—to the haunting presence of Lena:

> 'I know people who miss her', Jackson said. 'She was called Lena Mikhailichenko. She was twenty-five years old. She was born in Kiev. Her mother still lives there. She was an accountant back in Russia. She was a Virgo. She liked disco, rock and classical music. She read newspapers and crime novels. She had long blond hair and weighed one hundred and twenty-two pounds and was five foot five inches tall. She was a Christian. She was good-natured, kind, thoughtful and optimistic, they all say optimistic. She liked going to the gym and swimming and she had a completely misplaced "confidence in tomorrows" so perhaps her English wasn't as good as she claimed. I think that's another way of saying optimistic again. And parks. They all like parks, in fact they all say more or less the same thing. You can see a picture of her at www.besrussianbrides.com where she's still up for sale, although she left Russia six months ago to see if Edinburgh's streets were paved with gold. That was when she fell in with Favours and met her nemesis in the shape of Graham Hatter. I think if you look you might find that our Mr Hatter was involved with Favours, as well as God knows what else. (Atkinson 385-6)

At the same time, with Tatiana's story, the narrative establishes Lena's innocence regardless of her sexuality. As could be also said of Amanda—although the film does not—Lena is a "good person" who "meets bad people" (Atkinson 460). Tatiana's statement establishes the wide ideological gap between the two texts and positions the novel's treatment of the issue of trafficking and prostitution within the scope of migration. The film just establishes the desirability of the female members of the community as commodities marketed and circulated by the alien gang as

well as their ensuing need for protection. On the contrary, the novel sets forth the inevitable consequences of migration when considered only through the perspective of border control and of traditional conceptualizations of female sexuality.

Finally, the way in which fears of cultural contamination is treated in both narratives deserves some attention. As mentioned above, the global operations of trafficking are often reductively and pejoratively represented in popular culture texts by "foreign" gangs. As Baker argues, "[s]ex trafficking films [...] often portray non-US cultures, particularly in developing nations, as backward and in need of intervention, positioning Westerners as morally superior saviors" (2014: 209). In the film, the male hero fights an Albanian gang whose foreignness is emphatically stressed. By doing so, the film appeals to those atavistic fears of the other and the unknown which make it easier for some members of the community to blame female commodification on foreign conceptualizations and practices. Thus, "this 'rescue narrative' reinscribes traditional gender, racial, and national hierarchies that in fact bolster systems of inequality that are the root cause of trafficking" (Baker 2014: 209). However, the portrayal of foreigners as criminals does not totally prevent 'contamination' from spreading throughout the community, as the case of the corrupt officers of the French police makes clear in the film. Hence, the protection of women is perceived as tantamount to preventing the corruption of the forces of authority and, at the same time, it is framed as an opportunity allowing the male protagonist to assert his "manhood by rescuing the females, thereby re-establishing patriarchal authority" (Baker 2014: 212). This feature is portrayed completely differently in the novel, in which the trafficking gang is made up of members of the host community whose criminal engagement has nothing to do with foreign corruption and contamination. The usual conflation of criminal with foreign and victim with native is thus turned on its head, as the novel subverts the pattern of traditional rescue narratives in the representation of the (masculine) Other as alien and uncivilized and the (feminine) member of the community in need of protection. In fact, the male protagonist in Atkinson's novel perceives it is "home" (the UK) that is dangerous for women, not necessarily "abroad." In this respect, Atkinson's text demystifies the conceptualization of "home" as "safe" and "abroad" as "dangerous" and dismantles "the threat to and reestablishment of racial and national dominance" (Baker 2014: 212) which *Taken* so successfully exploits.[10]

[10] For a discussion of other trafficking films, such as Kreuzpaintner's *Trade* (2007), see Baker 2014. A similar representation of the dangerous Other is present in other trafficking visual products in TV series such as *Criminal Minds*, *Cold Case* and *The Closer,* which devote at least one episode in the series to the topic of (sex) trafficking.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The dangers *Taken* evokes are clearly aimed at creating a "myth" of trafficking which rewrites nineteenth-century fears of white slavery with a complete disregard for the complex structure and characteristics of the contemporary sex industry and migratory flows. In fact, what the film does is to legitimize the male control of female sexuality, a control which is promoted as enough in and of itself to prevent the existence of trafficking gangs and an international commerce of sex slaves. By playing on society's fears of *the Other* and of *the Orient*, *Taken* utterly neglects to address the paramount importance of the actual phenomenon behind sex trafficking: the sex industry. The novel, on the contrary, by establishing the traffickers as part of the receiving community and by asserting the uselessness of current policies of border control, problematizes the issue of sex trafficking in different ways. These trafficked women may have entered the community as tourists but they have been forced by that same community to live on the fringes of society. At the same time, their liminal position renders them invisible and, as such, the mechanisms of law and order are unable to restore their rights. Consequently, by exploring the failures of both border control and the forces of law and order to prevent sex trafficking, *One Good Turn* clearly states the necessity of establishing other means to prevent female abuse, which must address issues of powerlessness and agency if they are to succeed. Moreover, the positioning of the women not as helpless victims but as agents in their own right makes it possible to determine who has to be targeted to prevent trafficking in general, and sexual trafficking in particular, in these communities. The call for patriarchy's hero to stop sexual exploitation and abuse dominating the film is countered in the novel by portraying a male protagonist who cannot fight without the help of the rest of the community, and more importantly, the women themselves.

Finally, by portraying US female citizens as victims of sex trafficking, *Taken* obliterates the actual migratory movements involved in the sex industry, as Iordanova points out (212-13) and renders invisible the migrant females who are the actual target of traffickers and their unique status within the wider migratory picture. The film thus sets off on a well-paved path to exploiting traditional myths about white slavery and female sexuality by using them as cautionary tales about female agency and autonomy regarding sexuality when it should instead have done "path-breaking" work and examined the "element of gendered relations of power" in migration, together with "the ways in which borders and visa regimes affect trafficked women's lives" (Andriajesevic 257-58). Atkinson's novel, though treating the topic only as a sub-plot, manages to engage with the specific nature of sex trafficking from the multiple perspectives of agency, female sexuality, and migration in complex and nuanced ways that speak to the core of its marginal situation and challenge deeply entrenched discourses in many supposedly advanced and democratic contemporary societies.

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INTERROGATING THE BOUNDARIES OF PERFORMANCE AND TRANSACTION: URBAN EMBODIMENTS IN LOUISE WELSH'S *THE BULLET TRICK**

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Abstract

This article explores the representation of the female body in entertainment in the novel *The Bullet Trick* by Louise Welsh, an author of reference in contemporary Scottish fiction and the tradition of Tartan Noir. Considering the female body as central for the development of the plot, this paper analyses the strategies by which the novel contests traditional gender dichotomies as well as makes visible the agency of female corporeality in entertainment transactions. It will be argued that the body becomes an instrument for finding alternative ways of confronting violence and objectification, as well as for interrogating the apparently impermeable limits that separate performance from reality. The article also acknowledges the protagonist role that urban spaces have in contemporary crime fiction and in the articulation of the novel, thereby addressing how they can also contribute to the feminist reading of the novel.

Keywords: gender, female body, urban space, women's crime fiction, Scottish literature, Louise Welsh.

Resumen

Este artículo explora la representación del cuerpo femenino en el mundo del entretenimiento a través de la novela *The Bullet Trick*, de Louise Welsh, quien se ha convertido en una de las autoras de referencia en el panorama literario escocés actual y la tradición del "Tartan Noir". Considerando el papel central de la corporalidad en el desarrollo de la novela, analizaremos las estrategias mediante las que la autora consigue visibilizar la agencialidad del cuerpo femenino en las relaciones sociales y económicas. Asimismo, estudiaremos cómo el cuerpo femenino se convierte en un instrumento para explorar formas alternativas de enfrentar la violencia y cosificación del cuerpo, así como para cuestionar los límites entre actuación y realidad. En el artículo también se explora cómo los espacios urbanos que articulan la novela y tienen un notable protagonismo en la ficción criminal contemporánea contribuyen al análisis de la misma desde una perspectiva de género.

Palabras clave: género, cuerpo, espacios urbanos, ficción criminal, literatura escocesa, Louise Welsh.

1. INTRODUCTION

Anne Cranny-Francis begins her monographic study of the body, *The Body in the Text*, by pointing out that when researching on the body she often felt like a detective, looking for the elements and concerns that would offer clues into what, by the mid-nineties, seemed a relatively recent fascination with the body (ix). The exploration of the body, as well as the study of the city, constitute the two more prominent 'fascinations' that have contributed considerably to the development of feminist theory since the late twentieth century. This paper focuses on the analysis of the representation of female corporeality from a gender perspective in the context of crime fiction and acknowledges how the centrality of urban spaces in the genre can also contribute to achieving a feminist reading of the novel.

According to Ian Rankin, one of the most relevant figures in contemporary Scottish crime fiction, "all readers are detectives, trying to solve the message coded in the plot, trying to work out symbols and layers of meaning" (10). In *The Bullet Trick,* readers explore the objectification of the female body in entertainment, decoding the strategies that lead to the subversion of preconceptions and dichotomies associated to gender. Thus, the novel provides an excellent platform for interrogating gender normativity, as it blurs the limits between performance and reality and reveals the implications of culturally-accepted forms of entertainment in the construction of gender relations. However, the study of the importance played by female corporeality in questioning normativity also needs to acknowledge how urban spaces can contribute to this aim, as the city has a prominent role in the articulation of *The Bullet Trick*. In addition to that, feminist research has shown many connections between bodies and cities that offer interesting insights to examine the subversive potential of their depiction in fiction. Consequently, the analysis of corporeality in *The Bullet Trick* will be mainly focused on the postulates of Elizabeth Grosz, due to her comprehensive accounts of the intersections between power, the body and the city that have been widely influential in contemporary feminist research.

The plot of *The Bullet Trick* is structured around city spaces. Chapters are entitled "Berlin", "Glasgow" or "London," depending on their location. These city spaces, and therefore the progression of the novel, are deeply embedded and conditioned by the revision of the cultural objectification of the female body in entertainment. In this regard, *The Bullet Trick* expands on a concept already explored in Welsh's critically acclaimed and commercially successful first novel, *The Cutting Room* (2002),[1] in which the discovery of a mid-twentieth-century photograph of a naked woman with her throat cut leads to the revelation of Glasgow's current

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[1] Welsh's *The Cutting Room* received the Saltire First Book of the Year Award as well as the John Creasey Memorial Dagger, granted by the Crime Writers' Association.

involvement in human trafficking. *The Bullet Trick* takes *The Cutting Room* to the stage, questioning the performed cutting or intentional harm to a woman as a socially-accepted form of entertainment. *The Bullet Trick* opens in London, when the protagonist, the conjuror William Wilson, is called to perform at Montgomery's retirement party in a club in Soho. However, the owner's real intention when hiring William is that he steals an envelope containing Montgomery's secret. This secret, which readers will later discover, proves the latter's involvement in the disappearance of a woman called Gloria Noon. However, Montgomery discovers the envelope's theft at the time William flees from the city. The narration follows William to his new job in a Berlin cabaret, where he meets empowered female characters like Sylvie, who will become his assistant and the protagonist of the performance of the final bullet trick. This experience will eventually be the cause of William's self-destruction in Glasgow, believing he has committed a crime. The novel alternates the William/Sylvie and Montgomery/Gloria Noon intrigues towards the climax that resolves both, exposing readers to a revision of the implications of gender through the objectification of the female body in entertainment. Thus, it could be argued that analysing the staged representation of the female body in *The Bullet Trick* also contributes to a further exploration of the feminist potential of *The Cutting Room*, a novel that, as Len Wanner asserts, broke with traditional detective fiction's ease in the portrayal of women "as silenced objects of male desire and abuse" (42).

2. AKNOWLEDGING THE FEMALE BODY, OPENING URBAN SPACES IN CONTEMPORARY CRIME WRITING

Ian Rankin defines crime fiction as "the perfect tool for the dissection of society", as it tackles issues such as violence, abuse or exploitation (13). Over the last century, urban spaces have acquired a fundamental role in that revision of social issues. The city becomes much more than a background to the plot and plays an active part in its development and ultimate success (Erdman 274). Likewise, Denis Porter argues that the urban landscape of the crime novel is as ideologically important as its style or its protagonist may be (189). Consequently, Laura Marcus contends that understanding the social and historical circumstances of the crime novel is fundamental for the complete comprehension of the issues it raises (246). Thus, crime fiction offers an excellent ground for the analysis of female corporeality in the context of urban spaces, as well as for the exploration of the role that the literary representation of both the body and the city can play in raising gender awareness towards cultural and social preconceptions. According to Grosz, texts "do things, perform actions, create connections, bring about new alignments" (*Space* 126), thereby justifying the potential of analysing their depiction in crime fiction for the field of gender studies. In this sense, Marie-Odile Pittin-Hedon argues that Louise Welsh belongs to a trend of Scottish crime authors like Denise Mina or Val McDermid that have opened a "transitional space" located "at the crossroads of gender and genre, in order to go beyond both gender and generic stereotype", thereby leading readers to question their preconceived assumptions about the rep-

resentation of the feminine (33, 37). In this regard, *The Bullet Trick* illustrates how the representation of the female body in crime fiction can become an instrument for questioning gender stereotyping in the context of the city.

One of the predominant issues in *The Bullet Trick* is the interrogation of the objectification of corporeality from a gender perspective. As Liz Bondi points out, Western tradition of thought is articulated around interrelated dualisms, such as mind and body or reason and emotion. Nevertheless, feminist critique has contended that these cannot be taken for granted as they are discursively constructed rather than given in nature and can thereby be contested (*In Whose Words* 245-46). Accordingly, Elizabeth Grosz argues that bodies have all the explanatory power that minds have and, even more so, for the study of the question of sexual difference (*Volatile,* vii). In addition, this author also states that bodies act interactively and productively, generating the new, the surprising and the unpredictable (xi). In *The Bullet Trick*, the body is vindicated as the metaphorical "mind" that guides the development of the plot of the novel, but it is also essential for generating alternative strategies and performances that interrogate dichotomies associated to gender and contribute to the acknowledgement of sexual difference.

Grosz also claims that rethinking the body has implications beyond the interests of philosophy, changing the ways in which, for instance, space, power, exchange or social and cultural production are conceived (*Space* 2). Therefore, the study of bodies from a gender perspective in crime fiction can be considered essential for rethinking and encouraging a more comprehensive analysis of social issues in the urban environment that characterises the genre. For Grosz the city is the "condition and milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually, and discursively produced" ("Bodies-Cities" 298). Gender and sexuality, then, lie at the core of how urban spaces are perceived, used and produced (Edensor 126) and thereby bodies and spaces can be considered to share a role as protagonists in the maintenance/defiance of patriarchal power, thus becoming a fundamental part in the development of gender studies and their questioning of the patriarchal establishment.

Bodies have been shown to be mediated by power, for instance in the form of laws, rules or standarised discourses. Similarly, urban spaces are also an essential part in the exercise of power, as theorists such as Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault or Henri Lefebvre have argued. From a feminist perspective, authors like Sarah Ahmed or Daphne Spain have demonstrated how city spaces and the discourses associated with them modify the behaviour of women, often leading to the restriction of their movement in the city which leads to a limitation of women's access to knowledge and power and contributes to the maintenance of gender dichotomies. Consequently, authors such as Heidi J. Nast and Steven Pile encourage thinking about how bodies and places are understood, made and interrelated, as human beings live their lives "through places, through the body" (1).

However, in order to recognise the spatial potential of the representation of the female body in the *The Bullet Trick*, it is also important to bear in mind that several authors have underlined the possibility of subversion also embedded in urban spaces from a feminist point of view. In this sense, Bondi contends that "cities are places where embodied meanings and experiences of gender are not necessarily

reproduced according to dominant norms, but can be challenged, reworked and reshaped" (*Gender* 6). Similarly, Grosz points out that, although bodies are socially coded and subject to power, they can also become sites of struggle and resistance (*Space* 36). In spatial terms, this resistance can involve, as Henrietta Moore affirms, "using space in a different way or commandeering space for new uses or invading the space of others" (83). Consequently, due to the centrality of urban spaces in crime fiction, developing an analysis from the perspective of gender that acknowledges the subversive potential of the female body in the context of the city can, not only expand the scope of social analysis inherent to the genre, but also contribute to finding ways in which issues of gender can be interrogated and negotiated beyond the fictional realm.

3. *THE BULLET TRICK* FROM A CORPOREAL, URBAN AND GENDER PERSPECTIVE

The Bullet Trick highlights the leading role that female corporeality can take in interrogating gender preconceptions and raising gender awareness in the urban context of crime fiction. In this way, the novel manifests one of the strengths of Welsh's approach to feminism, as readers are encouraged to question gender normativity autonomously, through the centrality of the body and the city in her texts, as well as through a multiplicity of discourses. The depiction of the characters in *The Bullet Trick* plays a fundamental role for this aim, becoming essential for subverting gender stereotyping and vindicating the agency of female corporeality in social and economic relations. Paul Hamilos claims that Welsh never judges her characters but allows them to behave in sometimes controversial ways, never telling the reader what to think. In this sense, Welsh's approach can be situated within a tendency that Priscilla L. Walton and Manina Jones identify in their work *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition*, and which they believe is extremely effective for filtering feminist ideology through crime fiction. These authors, in line with Anne Cranny-Francis' ideas collected in *Feminist Fiction*, maintain that the inclusion of gender issues in this literary genre, together with the subversion of patriarchal principles, must be carried out by infiltrating in the system, rather than by overtly trying to overthrow it. This is so, according to these authors, because a more confrontational approach could be perceived as a political or propagandistic appropriation of fiction and could bring about a loss of readership (39, 60).

Thus, all the main characters in *The Bullet Trick* are flawed, but all of them have a specific function for the readers' revision of the objectification of the female body in the world of entertainment. The protagonist, William Wilson, explicitly rejects the mistreatment of women (*TBT* 11, 13, 29) and appears as an empathic character who worries about the women in his life and those he encounters (41, 155). Nevertheless, he also contributes to the maintenance of gender stereotypes by entering the game and defending a clear-cut differentiation between performance and reality that the novel progressively blurs. Therefore, William's role becomes crucial because the reader can identify with him in his/her own questioning of gender normativity,

given the character's vacillation between following gender mainstream thinking and reacting against it. The novel's portrayal of dual yet strong female characters is also essential. Sylvie, in spite of being depicted as an anti-heroine, is in control of the use of her body and constantly defies gender expectations. She plays the game but always shows agency and questions the systematic categorization of women as virgin, mother or prostitute (Jones 2000, 127), simultaneously engaging readers in her subversive performance: "What's so terrible about being called a whore?" (243). Sylvie also demonstrates her skill in saving William from Montgomery in their confrontation in William's hotel room in Berlin, where Montgomery has broken in to recover the envelope (287). Likewise, there are other secondary characters, like The Divines or Ulla, who are always shown in control of the situation, making autonomous decisions about their bodies and the spaces they occupy (20, 272, 357). Nevertheless, it is also important to point out that these female characters manifest no feeling of sisterhood, often treating each other as commodities and perpetrating stereotypical discourses, for instance when The Divines talk about the "chubby [girl] downstairs" and, while laughing, they bet that she will act as William's assistant for very little money (21). Another instance of this idea appears in the confrontation between Ulla and Sylvie, when Sylvie is found having an affair with Kolja, Ulla's boyfriend (241). However, all female characters are agents in one way or another and this agency is mainly shown by means of the body, which becomes the central component of the novel's feminism.

In *The Bullet Trick*, the female body is not portrayed as a passive object, but female characters and their bodies are portrayed as active participants. Thus, one of the best means to observe how these female characters are in control and subvert corporeal gender normativity is through analysing the active role they play in entertainment transactions. Grosz points out that patriarchal oppression relied on a body/mind dichotomy to legitimise itself, limiting women's access to social or economic roles associated with the male realm, and associating the female with "(pseudo) biological" functions (*Volatile* 14). Consequently, female bodies can be considered to have traditionally been conceived as commodities, used and exchanged by men and contributing to ensure the maintenance of the patriarchal social order (Irigaray 84). This idea can be observed in *The Bullet Trick*, for instance, when Bill, the owner of the club in Soho, introduces The Divines to the audience and hesitates before pronouncing the word "dancers", which makes the audience laugh (*TBT* 25). Bill also calls the dancers "whores" and asserts that whether they are OK or not "doesn't come into it" (41). Thus, women are perceived as merchandise, even if The Divines prove to be capable of managing themselves and their job from the very beginning of the novel (20, 37). This circumstance is further confirmed, in spatial terms, when The Divines eventually become the managers of that same urban space, the Soho club (357).

The conception of the active role of female corporeal agency that is portrayed in the novel can also be illuminated by the reversal of the penetration metaphor that JK Gibson-Graham interrogates. This author acknowledges that in order to refer to market transactions at a global scale, often the metaphor used is that of male penetration (33). Nevertheless, Gibson-Graham questions whether such male

penetration paradigm is just a one-way penetration, or if actually both participants may be mutually influential (38). This metaphor and its reversal is explicitly at work in *The Bullet Trick*, for instance, in the purchase by the American audience of the staged murder of Sylvie in Berlin which represents the idea of the female body as commodity, with the penetration of the bullet in the female body metaphorically representing the domination of patriarchy (*TBT* 320-21). However, in the novel's performance of the bullet trick, this transaction goes both ways: the female body enters the transaction and subverts its outcome, tricking both the audience and the magician (360-61). The reversal of this metaphor is further confirmed when William returns to London after Montgomery's case is solved and finds Sylvie at the Soho club, now managed by The Divines, performing a magic trick in which her corporeality is central (359). The importance of this moment for the reversal of the penetration metaphor is also reinforced by the fact that, throughout the novel, William had underlined the value of skill in performance and portrayed the successful conjurer as a God-like figure capable of everything on the stage: "He can saw a lady in half, stick her together, then run her through with knives... A successful conjurer can challenge gravity, defy nature, escape any restrain and sidestep death – as long as he's on stage" (160). This view on the magician is finally invalidated, ironically, by William being tricked by his own performance of the bullet trick, thinking he has actually killed Sylvie. Moreover, Sylvie makes explicit with her performance in Bill's former Soho club now managed by The Divines that she is the master of her own magic trick and her corporeality. Thus, the end of the novel evidences the actual penetration of the female body as an active agent in the patriarchal sphere that at first sight appeared to dominate it.

However, even if the *The Bullet Trick* plays a fundamental role for interrogating and subverting the principles and metaphors that have conceived the female body as passive, perhaps one of its most important contributions is that the novel searches for alternative ways of confronting violence against the body or managing the urban spaces in which the plot is developed. JK Gibson-Graham argues that in the gendered understanding of violence, women are often perceived as victims, weaker than men, and therefore the subject of fear, their bodies being vulnerable and open (24). *The Bullet Trick* subverts the principle of the female body as vulnerable and incapable of confronting male domination, not by equating male staging of violence, but by finding alternative ways of empowerment, as it can be seen in the aforementioned example of Sylvie's appropriation of magic and her redefinition of William's successful conjuror. Such an approach to gender therefore fits Elizabeth Grosz's claim that a feminist text must not only be critical towards patriarchy, but should also contribute to the generation of new, previously unconsidered, discursive spaces which may include new forms of analysis, new styles or new genres (*Space* 23). By the end of *The Bullet Trick,* it becomes evident that female characters have confronted staged and non-staged violence against their body in several ways that enhance equality in difference, as at no time do they try to imitate male behaviour. In this context, regaining space —physical space in the case of The Divines' new management of the Soho club, or metaphorical space in the case of Sylvie's appropriation of magic— becomes a crucial exponent of female

empowerment through their bodies. Likewise, it is essential to consider that such acts of self-affirmation through corporeality occur in urban spaces associated with the commodification of the female body which have been reinterpreted by the female characters of the novel in a way that validates Grosz's analysis of the city as "the place where the body is representationally reexplored, transformed, contested, reinscribed" ("Bodies-Cities" 301).

On the other hand, the revision of the implications of the objectification of the female body in terms of violence is also undertaken by the novel's blurring of the apparently unassailable limits that separate the performed from the real. William often highlights the existence of a clear-cut difference between performance and reality (*TBT* 31, 33, 159), not questioning why culturally-accepted performance requires the presence of a beautiful woman that is made disappear or penetrated by being sawed in two or cut open (160, 337). Nevertheless, situations taking place throughout the novel show that this difference is not as obvious as it should be. For instance, some reactions of the audience to William's tricks in which he saws a woman or performs the bullet trick are "Shoot the bitch through the heart" (232), or "Shit, he's put her back together again" (32). Likewise, Uncle Dix contributes to confirming the real consequences of it when, regarding William's performance of the bullet trick with Sylvie, he asks William whether the audience wanted to see a magical trick or if they wanted to watch him cut her open, and suggests that there would be people who would pay a lot of money to see William murder her (176). Welsh has argued that violence is a way of filtering and unveiling reality and society (Hamilos) and, in *The Bullet Trick*, corporeal violence lies at the core of the questioning of the limits of the performative value of violence enacted against women on the stage. One of the clues for this interrogation is Zelda's explicit challenge to William. After Sylvie and Ulla's participation in the magic trick of cutting a woman in half and then sticking her back together, Zelda addressed him as follows:

> 'You chop women in two, stick them full of knives then shoot them.'
> There was an edge to her words that I hadn't expected.
> 'It's just an act, Zelda.'
> 'Yes? ... So as long as you pretend that's OK?'
> The conversation seemed to have snaked out of my control.
> 'I think so, yes'
> ... 'You're good, William. But you don't need women's blood to make you look talented.' (*TBT* 237)

Violence against women on the stage is repeatedly excused by William as being a part of a well-established cultural performance, but in the final enactment of the bullet trick, when William assumes he has murdered Sylvie, violence is revealed as very real. All the power of the performance evaporates, putting the focus instead on the materiality of the men who have paid for the staging of the murder of a woman as an entertainment commodity. By means of this strategy, readers are further encouraged to reconsider the treatment of the female body in the entertainment industry.

Furthermore, the mingling of the two intrigues of the novel can also be considered as one of the main instruments for the questioning of the limits between apparently inoffensive performance and reality. At the beginning of the story, the trick William performs at Montgomery's retirement party in the Soho club in London consists in sawing his female assistant in two, which, as William asserts in his retrospective narrative, used to amuse "the kind of audiences I entertained" (30). William seems to be lying in a non-critical duality at this point, just letting himself go. However, on a very representative occasion, William first takes the picture out of the envelope stolen from Montgomery and as narrator states: "This photograph had caused me a lot of grief in Berlin. In a way it was responsible for everything that had happened there, and I had no idea what it meant" (99). This can be indeed interpreted as one of the clues for a feminist reading of the novel: the body of Gloria is absent from the picture, but it has been a constant throughout William's facing of the implications of gender of his performance in Berlin. In this sense, the novel's initial crime, Montgomery's crime, is about the hidden body of a woman whose truth is revealed after a necessary step: the interrogation of the effects of performance in reality and the acknowledgement of the agency of the female body in Berlin. Thus, the final bullet trick, when the consequences of acted violence become real, marks the definite blurring of performance and reality and constitutes one of the climaxes of the novel, being narrated at the same time the murder of Gloria Noon is discovered. In this sense, even the absent female body becomes the subject in the unfolding of the plot, thus contributing to the disruption of the mind/body binary as well as others such as the subject/object embedded within it.

In such conception, it is important to mention that looking at the plot from the male protagonist's perspective also contributes to this feminist reading of the novel. Louise Welsh has argued that, since *The Bullet Trick* is a novel that explores the objectification of women in entertainment, it seemed logical following the gaze of a male protagonist. She also added that if she had been writing in the seventies she would have felt her duty to tell the story from a female perspective, but she does not feel that need now (Freeman). Moreover, in the context of Scottish detective fiction written by women, Margaret Elphinstone contends that using male subjects offers possibilities of irony that she believes crucial to good fiction (109). In *The Bullet Trick*, irony can be seen, for instance, when having the God-like figure of the magician tricked by his own bullet trick or when the clear separation between reality and performance is blurred. Nevertheless, it is also through William's urban experience that the role of the female body as an agent in the development of the plot and the mingling of performance and reality are further confirmed. William often appears as imbued or "colonized" by urban spaces which deeply influence his subjectivity. In this regard, the fact that William is faced with the blurring of performance and reality thinking he has murdered Sylvie triggers his experience of the city of Glasgow as a prison (*TBT* 134), but his commitment in the investigation of Gloria's murder (220-21) changes his relation with the city and eventually fuels his release in spatial terms (352). This also coincides with Sylvie's corporeal performance in the Soho club now managed by the Divines, where Sylvie tells William that believing he would kill her "was central to the effect... You couldn't have faked

it" (361). This situation also constitutes the final blow to William's sound separation between performance and reality. Thus, addressing spaces from the point of view of male subjectivity not only contributes to reinforcing the centrality of the female body as the metaphorical "mind" of the novel, but also reveals one of the strengths of *The Bullet Trick* as a feminist text, since it evidences alternative ways and perspectives from which a feminist reading of crime fiction can be achieved while not renouncing to an explicit vindication of the agency of female corporeality in the urban context of the crime novel.

4. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, *The Bullet Trick* foregrounds the female body, while illuminating its objectification and questioning the implications of culturally-accepted forms of entertainment. One of the aspects that evidence this idea is the portrayal of flawed but strong female characters, whose agency mainly derives from the control of their bodies. This contributes to the novel's vindication of female agency in transactions, as well as to the blurring of the apparently clear-cut limits between performance and reality in entertainment. This can also be seen in the interaction between the two intrigues of the novel, one performed and the other real, but both sharing many parallelisms that encourage readers to revise preconceived modes of understanding gender.

The analysis of embodied subjectivity in the novel also acknowledges the central role that the city plays in the revision of social issues that characterises crime fiction. For instance, female characters' strategic use of spaces shows alternative ways of confronting violence and objectification that do not aim at equating male action. Moreover, urban spaces lie at the core of the novel's formal structure and even the male narrator's urban experience contributes to the feminist reading of the plot, as it further evidences the central role of female corporeality as an active participant in the development of the story. Thus, one of the most interesting elements of this novel is that its feminist reading is achieved through a variety of alternative perspectives that enable the reader to interrogate gender preconceptions.

As a result, *The Bullet Trick* can be considered as a novel with a significant potential for gender studies, as it evidences the leading role literature can play for the generation of alternative strategies and performances that interrogate dichotomies associated with the female body. In addition to that, this novel also integrates its exploration of embodied subjectivity with the centrality that urban spaces have in crime fiction. Consequently, it offers interesting insights for further research on the literary analysis of the intersections between bodies and the city from a feminist perspective, which may also contribute to developing a more comprehensible account of the social issues addressed in crime fiction.

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MISCELLANY

HIGH-LEVEL COGNITIVE OPERATIONS AND THE RESULTATIVE CONSTRUCTION: A CASE STUDY*

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Abstract

The resultative construction has sparked the interest of many researchers from different traditions, mainly from formal, functional, and constructional strands. Our proposal is much in line with cognitively-oriented constructionist approaches to language, especially the work by Goldberg (1995, 2006) and Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal (2008, 2011). This study is a qualitative and usage-based analysis of some specific instantiations of the resultative pattern in which the resultative element is the prepositional phrase *to sleep*. Three main objectives are pursued in this proposal: (i) the identification of the different groups of predicates (from among those put forward by Levin, 1993) that are felicitously incorporated into these particular examples of the resultative construction; (ii) the examination of the external constraints (mainly high-level metaphor) that license lexical-constructional fusion for each of the different sets of predicates; and (iii) the reasons why the expressions that are the object of study are pragmatically plausible.

Keywords: resultative construction, lexical-constructional fusion, external constraints, high-level metaphor.

Resumen

La construcción resultativa ha suscitado el interés de diversos investigadores pertenecientes a diferentes tradiciones, especialmente a las perspectivas formales, funcionales y construccionistas. Nuestra propuesta se ajusta a los principales postulados de las teorías construccionistas de orientación cognitiva, especialmente a los recogidos en las obras de Goldberg (1995, 2006) y Ruiz de Mendoza y Mairal (2008, 2011). Éste es un análisis cualitativo y basado en el uso de algunas realizaciones específicas de la construcción resultativa en que el elemento resultativo es el sintagma preposicional *to sleep*. Se persiguen tres objetivos principales en este trabajo: (i) la identificación de los diferentes grupos de predicados (de entre los propuestos por Levin, 1993) que son compatibles con estos ejemplos concretos de la construcción resultativa; (ii) el examen de las restricciones externas (especialmente la metáfora de alto nivel) que permiten la fusión léxico-construccional de cada uno de los diferentes grupos de predicados; y (iii) las razones por las que las expresiones objeto de estudio son plausibles desde un punto de vista pragmático.

Palabras clave: construcción resultativa, fusión léxico-construccional, restricciones externas, metáfora de alto nivel.

1. INTRODUCTION

This proposal makes use of some of the theoretical tools developed within cognitively-oriented constructionist approaches to language (especially following Goldberg, 1995, 2006, and subsequent developments in Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal, 2008, 2011) in order to analyze some predicates that combine with the resultative use of the prepositional phrase *to sleep*. Our starting point is the list of predicates provided by Boas (2003) that are compatible with the resultative phrase *to sleep*, to which we will add some other verbs (e.g. *bore, hum, laugh*, *lull, read, weep*). Then we resort to Levin's (1993) work with a view to classifying all these predicates into different groups according to their semantic nature and constructional behaviour. We thus obtain verbs of non-verbal expression (e.g. *cry, howl, sob*), of manner of speaking and of sound emission (e.g. *chant, murmur, mutter, sing*), of modes of being involving motion (e.g. *rock*), *amuse* verbs (e.g. *lull, soothe*), *eat* verbs (e.g. *eat, drink*), *send* and *drive* verbs (e.g. *send*, *drive*), *captain* verbs (e.g. *nurse, parent*), *talk* verbs (e.g. *talk*), *get* verbs (e.g. *get*), besides verbs of putting (*put* verbs).

Our second aim will be to study the factors that license or block out the integration of these predicates into the resultative construction. The constructicon consists of all form-meaning or function pairings at all levels of linguistic description (Goldberg, 1995). The lexical specifications in the constructicon run on a series of principles. For instance, the Override Principle states that the meaning of lexical items is adapted through coercion to the meaning requirements of the higher-level constructions in which they partake (Michaelis, 2003). The way in which lexical items fuse with constructions is coerced by both internal and external constraints. According to Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal (2008, 2011), internal constraints license the adaptation of lexical meaning to constructional meaning in terms of the internal semantic make-up of the items involved in the process of fusion. For instance, in application of the lexical class ascription constraint, which stipulates that the degree of compatibility or incompatibility of a verb with a construction is determined by the lexical class to which the predicate pertains, *destroy* verbs cannot felicitously participate in the causative/inchoative alternation since they are not verbs of change of state but verbs of existence. On the other hand, external constraints are cognitive in nature and are spelled out in terms of high-level metaphors and metonymies. The verb *laugh* can be subsumed within the caused-motion construction (e.g. *They laughed the poor guy out of the room*) thanks to a process of subcategorial conversion whereby this experiential predicate (a predicate in which the object is psychologically —emotionally or intellectually— affected by the action) is metaphorically mapped onto an effectual action (e.g. *hit*, which depicts a state of affairs in which an entity is physically affected by the action of the verb). Moreover, in terms of this high-level metaphor, 'the poor guy' is figuratively construed as an affected

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object. Our main focus will be on the external constraints that limit the seemingly unconstrained nature of coercion and that complement the semantic principles put forward by Goldberg (1995) and Michaelis' (2003) Override Principle. More specifically, we will explore the different external constraining factors that regulate the combination of the above mentioned predicates with the resultative sense of the prepositional phrase *to sleep*.

Our proposal is usage-based and the examples under study have been mainly gathered from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (*COCA*) and *Google* (especially from *Google Books*). As is well known, the use of the Internet as a database for research in linguistics has gained widespread acceptance over the last few years (Kilgarriff and Grefenstette, 2003; Renouf, 2003; Bergh and Zanchetta, 2008) and has allowed us to enlarge Boas' (2003) initial corpus, whose examples had been exclusively retrieved from the *British National Corpus* (*BNC*).

2. SOME THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

In this section, we will offer a brief overview of the main essentials of the resultative construction and will discuss the notions of high-level metaphor and metonymy.

2.1. The resultative construction

In spite of the upsurge of studies on the resultative construction from different perspectives in the last decades, mainly from a formal viewpoint (Levin, 1993, 2006; Levin and Rappaport, 1990, 2006; Rappaport and Levin, 1998, 2010), from a functional perspective (Halliday, 1967), and from the constructional viewpoint (Boas, 2003, 2011ab; Broccias, 2003, 2004; Goldberg and Jackendoff, 2004; Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal, 2008, 2011), researchers agree on a general definition of this pattern as a goal-oriented (and usually telic) transitivity pattern that expresses a change of state or property of the affected object. Supporters of a broader conception of this configuration that also encompasses the caused-motion construction as partaking in the resultative family state that this pattern can also convey a change of location and this is the definition we adopt in our proposal.

The distinction between the caused-motion and the resultative constructions has been addressed by several scholars who hold different points of view. According to Goldberg (1995, 2006), the resultative construction is but a metaphorical extension of the caused-motion construction. She argues that the resultative element of adjectival resultatives (e.g. *flat* in *The gardener watered the tulips flat*) can be interpreted as a metaphorical goal. In contrast, researchers like Broccias (2001, 2007), Boas (2003), Luzondo (2014), and Ruiz de Mendoza and Luzondo (2016) assign the resultative construction a leading role within the family of resultative constructions. Finally, Peña (2009) posits a cognitive continuum between the caused-motion and the resultative patterns.

Regarding the classification of resultatives, apart from intransitive resultatives (e.g. *The pond froze solid*), Goldberg and Jackendoff (2004) distinguished selected and unselected transitive resultatives. While in the former, the verb independently selects the object (e.g. *I broke the stick into pieces*), in the latter, the object is not subcategorized by the verbal predicate (e.g. *They drank the pub dry*). Fake reflexives are a subtype within unselected transitive resultatives whose object is a reflexive pronoun coindexed with the subject that cannot alternate with other NPs (e.g. *John talked himself hoarse*).

In terms of form, the resultative pattern is represented as follows: "NP_1 V NP_2 Resultative Phrase." The resultative element can be either a prepositional phrase (e.g. *A soldier bayoneted him to death*) or an adjectival phrase (e.g. *John talked himself hoarse*). As advanced, the resultative construction conveys a change of state or property. In Boas' (2003), Luzondo's (2014), and Ruiz de Mendoza and Luzondo's (2016) approaches, which consider the caused-motion construction part of the family of resultatives, this pattern can also codify a change of location. Property resultatives involve a change of property or state and can be further subdivided into PP property resultatives (if the result is expressed via a prepositional phrase, as in *Harry coughed himself into insensibility*) and AP property resultatives (if the result is conveyed through an adjectival phrase, as in *He ate himself sick*). On the other hand, spatial or location resultatives designate a change of location and the result is realized by a prepositional phrase (e.g. *I marched myself down to the public library*).

The resultative construction is a causative configuration in which the subject causes the entity filling the slot of the object to be affected by the action of the purported verbal predicate. No matter whether the caused-motion construction is perceived as dependent on the resultative pattern or the other way round; the linguistic instantiations that are the object of study in this proposal are PP property resultatives that describe a change of state (the subject figuratively moves from a state of being awake to one of falling asleep, as in *He cried himself to sleep*) as if it were a change of location. In other words, in our examples, a change of state is metaphorically regarded as a change of location.

2.2. High-level metaphor and metonymy

In this proposal, we adopt the standard definitions of conceptual metaphor and metonymy in Cognitive Linguistics (Lakoff, 1987; Ruiz de Mendoza, 1999; Barcelona, 2000). While conceptual metaphor is a mapping across domains (e.g. PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS —as in *John is a pig*— where the source domain, 'animals', allows us to understand the target domain 'people'), metonymy is a mapping within domains (e.g. SHOES FOR SHOELACES —as in *Tie your shoes*—, where the domain of 'shoes' affords conceptual access to one of its subdomains, 'shoelaces').

The classification of metaphor and metonymy has spurred much debate. The level of genericity at which both figures of thought work lies at the basis of the distinction between high-level and low-level metaphor and metonymy (Kövecses and Radden, 1998; Radden and Kövecses, 1999). Low-level metonymies involve

non-generic cognitive models (for example, PICASSO FOR HIS WORK, as in *I have just bought a Picasso*). In contrast, high-level metonymies work at a higher level of abstraction and exploit generic cognitive models (Panther and Thornburg, 1999, 2000; Ruiz de Mendoza and Pérez, 2001) (for instance, PROCESS FOR ACTION, as in *The door opened*. In this example, a process —defined as an action lacking the subdomain of agent— stands for an action in which an implicit controlling entity brings about the purported state of affairs).

In the same way, a twofold distinction can be made between low-level and high-level metaphor. In low-level metaphor, vs. high-level metaphor, the source and target domains are non-generic (for instance, PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, as in *John is a pig*). On the contrary, the source and target domains of a high-level metaphor like AN EXPERIENTIAL ACTION IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION are generic (as in *They laughed the poor guy out of the room*).

3. PREDICATES COMPATIBLE WITH THE RESULTATIVE PHRASE *TO SLEEP*

According to Boas, there exist a series of predicates that combine with the resultative phrase *to sleep*. They are shown in the following table:

TABLE 1. BOAS (APPENDIX, P. 174)

VERB	NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES
Put	63
Cry	24
Sing	5
Rock, soothe	3
Drink, send	2
Chant, drive, eat, murmur, mutter, nurse, sob, talk, teach	1

Boas' (2003) proposal provides the list of verbs and the number of occurrences of these predicates that are compatible with the resultative sense of the prepositional phrase *to sleep*. However, no detailed description is made of the motivational factors why these verbs fuse with this prepositional phrase and why others block out such compatibility. As has been advanced, this proposal goes beyond Boas' study in two main respects:

– First, a number of verbs are added to Boas' original list by resorting to the semantic groupings of predicates put forward by Levin (1993).
– Second, in order to endow our analysis with explanatory adequacy, we will spell out the constraints that licence or block out a number of predicates with the resultative sense of the prepositional phrase *to sleep*.

Our analysis reveals that there are several groups of verbs that are compatible with the prepositional phrase *to sleep* in its resultative sense:

– Verbs involving the body (especially verbs of non-verbal expression): e.g. *cry, howl, sob, weep, laugh,* as in *That night she cried herself to sleep* (*COCA* 2006).
– Verbs of communication (more specifically verbs of manner of speaking)[1] and verbs of emission (particularly verbs of sound emission): e.g. *chant, murmur, mutter, sing*, *hum*, as in *Pythagoras could chant his disciples to sleep* (https://archive.org/stream/Papyri_Graecae_Magicae/Papyri_Graecae_Magicae_djvu.txt).
– Verbs of existence (more specifically, verbs of modes of being involving motion): e.g. *rock*, as in *Nobody has to... rock him back to sleep* (*COCA* 2008).
– Verbs of psychological state (especially *amuse* verbs): e.g. *lull, soothe*, *bore*, as in *Play some soft, soothing music that will lull you to sleep* (Google Books: *Lost your Job? Save your House!* by Robert Jeffreys, 2009. Accessed on May 25, 2014).
– Verbs of ingesting (particularly *eat* verbs): e.g. *eat, drink*, as in *For years afterward, he drank himself to sleep each night* (*COCA* 2005).
– Verbs of sending and carrying: (especially *send* verbs and *drive* verbs): e.g. *send, drive*, as in *The endless incomprehensible stream of language was sending Alan to sleep on his feet* (Boas' appendix).
– Verbs with predicative complements (more specifically, *captain* verbs): e.g. *nurse, parent*, as in *The only way to soothe him was to nurse him back to sleep* (*COCA* 2009).
– Verbs of communication (particularly verbs of transfer of a message —e.g. *read*— and *talk* verbs —e.g. *talk*—): as in *Uncle Kerim... could talk his patients to sleep* (Google Books: *The Orphan Sky*, by Ella Leya, 2015. Accessed on January 2, 2015).
– Verbs of obtaining (more specifically *get* verbs): e.g. *get*, as in *We could get her back to sleep more quickly with less effort* (*COCA* 2007).
– Verbs of putting (especially *put* verbs): e.g. *put*, as in *We'll put the baby to sleep* (*COCA* 1990).

4. HIGH-LEVEL PHENOMENA UNDERLYING THE RESULTATIVE CONSTRUCTION

In application of the second aim of this proposal, this section offers an account of the compatibility of the groups of verbs that have been identified in the previous section in expressions that instantiate the resultative construction with the

[1] The verbs of manner of speaking have been grouped into the same set as verbs of sound emission (rather than within the same slot as the verbs of transfer of a message and *talk* verbs) because they share their main features. Together with verbs of non-verbal expression, they will be also treated as if they belonged to a single set in section 4.1 because of their similarity.

prepositional phrase *to sleep* in terms of some of the theoretical tools of Cognitive Linguistics, mainly high-level metaphor and metonymy, especially high-level metaphor.

4.1. Verbs of non-verbal expression, verbs of manner of speaking, and verbs of sound emission

In this section, we are mainly concerned with the study of three groups of verbs —verbs of non-verbal expression (which are a subset within verbs involving the body), verbs of manner of speaking (which belong to the general category of verbs of communication), and verbs of sound emission (which are a subgroup of verbs of emission)— because they behave similarly as far as the resultative construction is concerned.

Consider examples (1) and (2), which are fake reflexive resultatives:

(1) That night *she cried herself to sleep* (*COCA* 2006).
(2) I felt his grasp wilt as *he sobbed himself to sleep* (*COCA* 1991).

The reflexive object is but a contribution of the resultative construction. *Cry*[2] and sob are intransitive verbs and have to undergo a process of subcategorial conversion from intransitive to transitive predicates in order to be able to take part in the transitive resultative construction.

According to Pérez and Peña (2009: 70) "the external constraints that regulate the processes of constructional subsumption are not only cognitive in nature, as proposed by Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal, but pragmatic aspects of what constitutes acceptable human behaviour are also at work here." Goldberg and Jackendoff (2004: 546) also concur with this idea since they observe that no grammatical stipulation is needed in the case of examples like (1) "because it arises from our world knowledge of what is likely to cause what. It's hard to imagine making someone else go to sleep by crying." And, needless to say, we can argue that the same goes for *sob*.

Nevertheless, take the following examples:

(3) a. *She sang herself to sleep* (Google Books: *Always a Bridesmaid*, by Renea Overstreet, 2004. Accessed on May 25, 2014).
    b. *I was singing little Hareton to sleep* when Catherine came in (Google Books: *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Brontë, 1847. Accessed on May 25, 2014).
(4) a. *I chanted myself to sleep* (*COCA* 1995).
    b. *Pythagoras could chant his disciples to sleep* and heal body and soul through musical words (https://archive.org/stream/Papyri_Graecae_Magicae/Papyri_Graecae_Magicae_djvu.txt).

[2] The verb *cry* can be also used transitively to specify the kind of crying (e.g. *She cried tears of joy*).

(5) a. when the nurse had nearly succeeded in *murmuring herself to sleep*... (Google Books: *Excursions in India*, by Thomas Skinner et al., 1832. Accessed on May 25, 2014).

b. *She would murmur him to sleep* in her arms humming old Polish folk songs in the corner of their decrepit room (Google Books: *Some Kind of Remedy*, by Alissa Dwyer, 2012. Accessed on May 25, 2014).

Examples (3) to (5) are instantiations of normal unselected transitive resultatives and not of fake reflexives even though the slot of the direct object can be occupied by a reflexive as well. For instance, it is pragmatically plausible that someone makes someone else go to sleep by singing, chanting, or murmuring.

Another observation that can be made at this point is that all these verbs involve some repetitive action that leads the direct object to a state of sleep. In fact, iteration is but a way of making non-durative events extend through time; i.e. the iteration of a punctual event has the same time effect as the duration of a non-punctual event. So, for practical purposes, iteration can be used, the same as duration, in constructions that require extension through time.

The verbs pertaining to the domains mentioned before are liable to participate in the resultative construction through the activity of the high-level metaphor AN ACTIVITY IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION. Researchers like Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal (2007, 2008) have argued that predicates should conform to the characteristics of effectual actions in order to meet the requirements of the resultative construction. As remarked, a prototypical effectual verb is *hit*. In *Peter sometimes hits his son*, the object is physically affected by the action conveyed by the verbal predicate. In the examples we have been studying, the high-level metaphor AN ACTIVITY IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION allows us to interpret the different predicates in terms of a transitive structure of the actor-object kind that involves a change of transitivity type. Another metaphor that underlies the construal of these examples is CHANGES OF STATE ARE CHANGES OF LOCATION. The high-level metaphor STATES ARE LOCATIONS[3] is a deeply-entrenched conceptual system that displays more specific manifestations like CHANGES OF STATE ARE CHANGES OF LOCATION (e.g. *He went from innocent to worldly*) or CAUSING A CHANGE OF STATE IS CAUSING A CHANGE OF LOCATION (e.g. *Her mother forced her into an abortion*). States are metaphorically mapped onto locations as a result of conceptual conflation through experiential co-occurrence. In (1) to (5), an affected object experiencing a change of state is seen as if it were an object changing location. In other words, the state of being asleep is metaphorically construed as moving to a given location.

[3] For an exhaustive treatment of the metaphor STATES ARE LOCATIONS, see Ruiz de Mendoza and Luzondo (2016: 53).

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4.2. Verbs of modes of being involving motion

Take the following examples:

(6) *Nobody has to... rock him back to sleep* (*COCA* 2008).
(7) *My mother rocked me to sleep* when I was little (Google Books: *Winter's No Time to Sleep*, by Poppy Green, 2015. Accessed on December 23, 2015).

Examples (6) and (7) are instances of selected transitive resultatives in Goldberg and Jackendoff's terminology since the object is independently selected by the verb. The resultative phrase is not compulsory for the feasibility and grammaticality of the expressions. Thus we can say 'He rocked me' and 'He rocked me to sleep.'

The high-level metaphorical system that licenses the fusion of the predicate *rock* with the resultative construction is again AN ACTIVITY IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION. The activity of rocking someone is metaphorically regarded as an effectual action in which the object is physically affected by the action. Moreover, as was the case in the previous group of verbs, the CHANGES OF STATE ARE CHANGES OF LOCATION metaphor also operates in this group of expressions. One person rocks another (that is to say, a person forces another person to move) and the prepositional phrase *to sleep* expresses the figurative direction of motion. The meaning of these expressions is that someone rocks another person and as a result that person falls asleep.

Additionally, the full import of these instances is determined if we take into consideration the fact that it is pragmatically plausible to make someone sleep by rocking him/her because rocking someone involves a repetitive action that can lead to a state of sleep.

4.3. *Amuse* verbs

Examples (8) and (9) illustrate the incorporation of some verbs of psychological state (mainly *amuse* verbs) into the resultative construction.

(8) Play *some soft, soothing music* that *will lull you to sleep*. (Google Books: *Lost your Job? Save your House!*, by Robert Jeffreys, 2009. Accessed on May 25, 2014).
(9) Mum was able to soothe her back to sleep without lifting her (Google Books: *The Baby Sleep Guide*, by Stephanie Modell, 2015. Accessed on December 23, 2015).

Examples (8) and (9) are selected transitive resultatives. You can both lull and soothe someone and not specify anything else as to the result of that lulling or soothing or you can possibly add a prepositional phrase like *to sleep* that expresses the result of your action.

Both *lull* and *soothe* are experiential action verbs. They must be mapped onto effectual actions so that the experiencer is regarded as an effectee (the affected entity) and these predicates can take part in the resultative construction. In other words, the

high-level metaphor that licenses the adaptation of the lexical meaning of the verbs to the constructional meaning of the resultative configuration is AN EXPERIENTIAL ACTION IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION. Moreover, the change of state from being awake to falling asleep is metaphorically conceptualized as a change of location.

As far as the pragmatic plausibility of these expressions is concerned, it seems reasonable to think that soft and soothing sounds (like music or murmuring) are logical causes of sleeping. Furthermore, if people feel calm, they are likely to sleep, as is also the case with the predicate *soothe*.

4.4. *EAT* VERBS

Within the group of verbs of ingesting, *eat* and *drink* can combine with the resultative pattern, as shown by the following examples:

(10) *She ate herself to sleep* (Google Books: *Jealousy*, by Marsha Jenkins-Sanders, 2008. Accessed on May 25, 2014).
(11) For years afterward, *he drank himself to sleep* each night to smother guilt-spawned nightmares (*COCA* 2005).

Eat and *drink* are activity predicates. Both of them need a metaphorical reconstrual whereby they are seen as effectual actions in order to meet the requirements of the resultative construction. In sum, this integration is licensed by the high-level metaphor AN ACTIVITY IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION. In addition, in (10) and (11) CHANGES OF STATE ARE CHANGES OF LOCATION.

Igarashi (2009: 123-124) discusses the example *Mary ate the baby asleep*, which is a property resultative in which the outcome of the action of the verb takes the form of an adjectival phrase. This scholar argues that the relation between the verb and the resultative phrase in resultatives has received scant attention in the literature on the resultative construction. He also claims that examples like (12b) should be further explored because of the unexpected nature of the adjective if the meaning of the verb is taken into consideration. On the face of it, according to him, there seems to be no logical connection between eating and falling asleep in the context of (12b). It is at this point that the importance of pragmatics comes into play. To this end, Igarashi (2009: 124) contrasts the following examples, the second of which he considers odd:

(12) a. Mary sang the baby asleep.
b. # Mary ate the baby asleep. (Rothstein, 2004: 111)

Igarashi (2009: 124) agrees with Rothstein (2004: 111) that most native speakers consider (12a) acceptable because the contextual relation between singing and a baby becoming asleep is easily understood. The singing activity develops through time and favours sleep. However, Igarashi claims, (12b) is usually regarded infelicitous because there is not a similar contextual relation between the verb *eat* and

the baby getting asleep. Nevertheless, Igarashi observes that if a suitable context is provided, (12b) could be felicitous. While we take sides with Igarashi's opinion on the pragmatic plausibility of (some of) what he calls seemingly wayward examples, we believe that (12b) cannot be feasible in any context. Igarashi himself does not offer any context against which (12b) can be interpreted as an acceptable instance of the resultative construction. While the connection between feeding someone and this person getting asleep is easily recognized,[4] this does not hold for (12b), since the verb *eat* does not include any causative element in its semantic makeup. While you usually feed a baby, old or handicapped person, this is not the case with *eat*. The beneficiary of the action of eating is the agent itself, as evidenced by (10). This is the reason why (10) (and because of a similar reasoning process (11)) is acceptable but not (12b). This is related to the fake reflexives used in expressions (10) and (11). In these examples, the reflexive pronouns cannot alternate with other noun phrases. The reflexive object is a contribution of the construction itself and the entity affected by drinking or eating is the person who drinks or eats. If someone drinks too much,[5] the effects of alcohol will surely make that person fall asleep. Or if someone eats too much food, they have to digest it and this process of food digestion has some consequences like falling asleep or almost asleep. The consumption of alcohol in (11) or of food in (10) is seen as having a physical impact on the agent in terms of the metaphor AN ACTIVITY IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION.

4.5. *SEND* VERBS AND *DRIVE* VERBS

Within the group of verbs of sending and carrying, *send* and *drive* verbs can be distinguished.

The verb *send* is an intrinsically resultative verb and verbal resultatives incorporate the causative and resultative components into their meaning. Therefore they are readily available for constructional subsumption and no metaphorical system is required in order to license the fusion of the verb into the resultative construction, as shown in (13). However, the resultative phrase calls for some metaphorical development on the grounds of the metaphor CHANGES OF STATE ARE CHANGES OF LOCATION. Consider the following example:

(13) *Alcohol* is a bad nightcap - it *sends you to sleep* (Boas' appendix).

The case of *drive* is different. (14) requires the activation of the high-level metaphor AN ACTIVITY IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION. Again, the metaphor CHANGES

[4] Think for instance of a child suffering from severe malnutrition. It seems unlikely to imagine that this child can become asleep easily. In contrast, when children are fed, the appropriate conditions for sleeping hold. It is well known that babies usually wake up when they feel hungry and when they ingest food, they can sleep again.

[5] *Drink* is often used metonymically to make reference to the ingestion of alcohol.

OF STATE ARE CHANGES OF LOCATION licenses the expression of a change of state as if it were a change of location.

(14) She sat with her until *the exhaustion of grief finally drove Ana to sleep and silence,* (Boas' appendix).

The verb *drive* must be further metonymically developed in this example since its original meaning of moving or travelling on land in a motor vehicle is a subdomain of and provides conceptual access to the matrix domain of moving. In other words, *drive* has been grammaticalized into a causative verb without lexical meaning to indicate change of state. This has taken place through a metonymic shift from 'move in a vehicle' to 'cause to move in a vehicle', then to 'cause to move', and finally, through CHANGES OF STATE ARE CHANGES OF LOCATION, to 'cause to change state.'

A final observation is in order in this section. According to Goldberg and Jackendoff (2004: 540), "*drive* allows only a range of adjectival and prepositional phrases that all refer to demented mental states." We do not take sides with this statement since silence or sleep are not demented verbal states.

4.6. *CAPTAIN* VERBS

The verbs *nurse* and *parent*, which belong to the subset of *captain* verbs within the more general category of verbs with predicative complements according to Levin (1993), are examples of zero derivation or conversion. In (15) and (16) they undergo a process of categorial conversion from nouns into verbs. The metonymy that underlies their construal is AGENT FOR ACTION. According to this, (15) means 'The only way to soothe him was to get him back to sleep by acting as a nurse' and (16) 'Babies need someone that acts as a parent when they want/have to sleep.'

(15) The only way to soothe him was to *nurse him back to sleep* (*COCA* 2009).
(16) *Babies need to be parented to sleep*, not just put to sleep (http://www.askdrsears.com/topics/health-concerns/sleep-problems/8-infant-sleep-facts-every-parent-should-know).

As was the case with most of the previous groups of predicates, the expressions in this section are grounded in the high-level metaphorical conceptual system AN ACTIVITY IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION in combination with CHANGES OF STATE ARE CHANGES OF LOCATION.

4.7. Verbs of transfer of a message and *talk* verbs

Within the set of verbs of communication, those of transfer of a message (e.g. *read*) and *talk* verbs (e.g. *talk*) can be felicitously incorporated into the resultative construction.

Talk is an intransitive verb that needs to undergo a process of subcategorial conversion in order to become a transitive predicate and conform to the requirements of the resultative construction. This subcategorial conversion process is licensed by the high-level metaphor a communicative action is an effectual action. The receiver of the message is regarded as if directly affected by the action of talking. Additionally, the metaphor changes of state are changes of locations allows us to disentangle the meaning of both (17) and (18).

(17) *She talked them to sleep* about her father (Google Books: *The Rachel Papers*, by Martin Amis, 1973. Accessed on May 25, 2014).
(18) *L'Engle reads herself to sleep* at night with books on astrophysics (*COCA* 1998).

In (17), the subject's speech seems to be so boring or she seems to speak so much about her father that someone else falls asleep. Observe that the target of 'talking', 'them', (cf. *She talked to them*) is here treated as if it were an effectual object that experiences an induced change of state. For this reason, the object ('them') is not expressed syntactically by means of a prepositional phrase but by means of a noun phrase.

A similar analysis holds for (18). The only difference is that *read* is an activity and, as such, it has to be metaphorically construed as an effectual action in order to be compatible with the resultative construction. That is to say, in contrast to (17), this example abides by the high-level metaphor an activity is an effectual action. L'Engle is conceived of as causing her own boredom, which leads her to a state of 'sleep,' through reading. She is both the initiator of the action of reading and the affected entity.

4.8. *Get* verbs

As was the case with *send*, *get*, which is a verb of obtaining in Levin's (1993) terminology, can also be a verbal resultative. When this verb means 'to cause something to happen or cause someone or something to do something', as is the case in (19), the causative and resultative elements are incorporated into the meaning of the verb, which makes this verb readily available for subsumption into the resultative construction. This means that no metaphoric or metonymic development is required for the construal of expressions like (19) except for the metaphor changes of state are changes of location.

(19) Some new advice on getting kids to sleep is just ahead (*COCA* 2002).

4.9. *Put* verbs

Finally, we will consider the verb *put*, which is also a causative verb that does not call for any metaphorical or metonymic activity in order to felicitously fuse with the resultative construction. However, the resultative phrase prompts a metaphorical construal of the expressions in this section in terms of the metaphor CHANGES OF STATE ARE CHANGES OF LOCATION.

There are some interesting observations that can be made in connection with the resultative phrase *to sleep*. In this proposal, the examples have been analysed as abiding by the metaphor CHANGES OF STATE ARE CHANGES OF LOCATION since the change from a state of 'non-sleep' to one of 'sleep' takes the form of motion from one place to another. In addition, some other meaning implications arise from a careful examination of this PP. This change of state can be taken literally (that is to say, actually someone becomes asleep) or metaphorically depending on contextual factors. For instance, (20) is literal. Nevertheless, examples (21) to (23) require further discussion because of the figurative nature of their PPs.[6] (21) emphasizes the fact that journalists can bore people to the extent of seemingly making them sleep. (22) is a euphemism for 'kill.' It refers to 'kill gently usually by means of an injection' or to 'make unconscious by means of anaesthetic drugs.' Finally, (23) means 'to make disappear.' The explanation for these meanings is related to the fact that when people are killed, they may appear to be sleeping. This gives rise to a euphemistic way of expressing the ideas of making people feel bored, of killing a person or an animal, and of making something disappear. These euphemisms exploit the following metaphors: MAKING PEOPLE BORED/KILLING PEOPLE OR ANIMALS/CAUSING ENTITIES TO DISAPPEAR IS PUTTING THEM TO SLEEP.

(20) To ensure the safety of an infant sleeping in a crib, *put babies to sleep* on their backs and follow these pointers (*COCA* 1998).
(21) There's nothing worse than *journalists who put people to sleep* and who claim to be objective while being extremely boring (*COCA* 1999).
(22) Remember that *even the most loving families*, although they may be shedding tears as they do it, *put pets to sleep* (*COCA* 1993).
(23) When harvest came, *the people could put Hunger to sleep* (Google Books: *The Transformation of Medieval England 1370-1529*, by John A.F. Thomson, 1983. Accessed on May 25, 2014).

[6] This analysis can be also applied to some of the other groups of verbs studied in this proposal. For instance, sobbing/crying oneself to sleep and singing someone or oneself to sleep can involve boredom and drinking oneself to sleep can mean that someone drank so much that he/she became unconscious (in fact, we can alternatively say that someone drank him/herself to sleep or that someone drank him/herself unconscious).

5. CONCLUSION

In this proposal, drawing on cognitively-oriented constructionist approaches to language, we have offered a qualitative analysis of the predicates that felicitously fuse with the prepositional phrase *to sleep* in resultative patterns. To this end, Levin's lexical classes have been taken into account. Our second aim has been to provide a fine-grained examination of the external constraints, mainly cognitive mechanisms like high-level metaphor and metonymy, especially the former, that license or block out the integration of each set of predicates with PP property resultatives. High-level metaphors like AN ACTIVITY IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION, AN EXPERIENTIAL ACTION IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION, OR A COMMUNICATIVE ACTION IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION have been found to play a fundamental role in this process of lexical-constructional subsumption. Additionally, the metaphor CHANGES OF STATE ARE CHANGES OF LOCATION allows us to construe a change of location (from a starting point of 'non-sleep' to a destination of 'sleep) as a change of state (from a state of 'non-sleep' to a state of 'sleep'). Finally, pragmatics has been proved to contribute to the overall interpretation of our examples.

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ANNUAL REPORT: *RCEI* EDITORIAL PROCESS

The average time that the *RCEI* editorial staff takes to publish an essay submitted to this journal is 9 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* 2016 issues: 25.
No. of essays accepted for publication in *RCEI* during 2016: 19.
Average number of reviewers per essay: 2,3.
Average time between submission and acceptance: 6 months.
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