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LIFE WRITING:
PRACTICES AND THEORIES

Isabel González Díaz and
Dulce María Rodríguez González,
guest-editors

INTRODUCTION

Three decades have passed now since the vast contribution of theories on women's autobiography began to penetrate the, until then, traditionally male-oriented field of autobiographical criticism. Looking over the debates generated by feminist scholars in that relatively short span of time, the overall impression is that a long and fruitful journey has been accomplished: from the early days, when the emphasis was on discovering the differences between male and female texts, we have arrived at the present day, when the male/female dichotomy has been dismantled and gender is understood from different perspectives in the analysis of life writing. Certainly, all the disciplines which deal with life writing and gender have one point in common: the never ending discussion of the concepts developed in the analyses. The effort behind those discussions seems to be directed towards constructing a more inclusive common ground in which all subjects, all categories, all the ways of reflecting selves/subjects/identities can find expression. The field of life writing could be seen, then, as a receptively open one, which does not restrict itself to the claustrophobic definition of genre in the singular. Both in the practice and in the theory of life writing it seems that more often than not, words become insufficient; they are not precise enough to mean all that we want to say when referring to ourselves or to others' selves. This explains not only the constant revision of concepts, but also the reason why the written word is not the only medium used to portray lives, and the recourse to oral and visual forms has come to enrich the genre(s) with photography, painting, film, video, quilts, music, web sites and blogs, to mention but a few.

In the 1990's, the emphasis that postmodern and postcolonial theories gave to the many differences among subjects was reflected in women's autobiographical criticism, resulting in the revision of the very concept of "autobiography"; for, as Laura Marcus explained in 1994, "'autobiography' as conventionally defined is often judged to be a limited and inappropriate means of representing (...) non-hegemonic subjectivities and identities" (223). In the search for more appropriate and inclusive concepts Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, in *Reading Autobiography:*

A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives (2001), have finally distinguished between life writing, life narrative, and autobiography, agreeing that *autobiography* is a Western, canonical term "that has been vigorously challenged in the wake of postmodern and postcolonial critiques of the Enlightenment subject" (3). For them, *life writing* can be understood as a general term "for writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject," be it biographical, novelistic, historical, or an explicit self-reference to the writer, whereas *life narrative* would be a narrower term "that includes many kinds of self-referential writing, including autobiography" (3).

Furthermore, in her article "Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects" (1992), Caren Kaplan, evoking Derrida's essay "The Law of Genre," made reference to the "critical anxiety" (117) provoked by the "conditions and limits" of being enclosed in a genre. She suggested, therefore, thinking in terms of "*out-law*" genres, which "often break most obvious rules of genre" (119), and which, in her opinion, were at that moment mixing two conventionally "unmixable" elements: "autobiography criticism and autobiography as thing itself" (119). Her analysis of these alternative genres included "prison memoir, testimonial literature, ethnographic writing, 'biomythography,' 'cultural autobiography,' and 'regulative psychobiography" (119), in an attempt to challenge the restrictive conventions of autobiography and to propose that Western feminist criticism move into "transnational coalition work" (135). Some examples illustrate the plurality of genres specifically concerned with feminism which have been offered throughout these decades: Domna C. Stanton proposed as early as 1984 the use of "autogynography", Leigh Gilmore would later put forward the more genre-transgressor word "autobiographics" (1994), and Jeanne Perreault suggested the term "autography" in 1995. These, amongst many other terms, were included in the list of fifty-two genres —not exclusively gender-oriented— of life narrative proposed by Smith and Watson in 2001 (*Reading* 183-207). And the list is continually growing.

In recent decades, concepts such as "woman," "experience," "agency," or "truth" have been revised by feminist theories of autobiography, which have also focused on the body "as a site of cultural inscription and practices of embodiment" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 134). It was also in the 1990's that "the trouble" with gender and the importance of bodies and sexualities were put forward by the philosopher Judith Butler, and since then not only life writing, but many theoretical disciplines in the Humanities, have come to a broader understanding of sex, gender and sexuality. Butler's concept of "performativity," that "reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (120) has proved to be a helpful tool which has enabled feminism to get rid of the burden of essentialism; and in the particular case of life narrative it has provided "a vocabulary for describing the complexities of the relationship of regulatory discourses of identity and material bodies, as well as autobiographical agency" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 143).

This special issue of the *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* offers some examples of the different concepts and perspectives which can be applied to texts dealing with written lives. The first essay discusses the state of contemporary criticism as regards life narratives and feminism; it presents three of the most important

theoretical concepts to be used in the analysis of autobiographical acts and practices —amongst them "performativity," shows how they intersect with gendered positionalities and relations, and applies them to six domains of women's life narrative. The second essay focuses on one of the genres of life narrative, that of the personal essay, offering an analysis of four recent books by two women and two men from different nationalities: Spaniard Rosa Montero (*La loca de la casa*), Canadian Margaret Atwood (*Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*), Mexican-American Richard Rodriguez (*Brown: The Last Discovery of America*) and European-born, Jewish-American George Steiner (*Errata: An Examined Life*); both gender and genre issues are discussed in this transnational comparative analysis. The following two essays deal with contemporary texts whose subjects do not belong to the Western mainstream. One is the analysis of *Meatless Days*, the book published in 1989 by Pakistani writer Sara Suleri; the reflections on the private and public lives of the author and the food imagery she uses are discussed, together with the different classifications of the text as autobiography, memoir or fiction. The other essay concentrates on Chicano writer Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, first published in 1972; the main focus of analysis is on the construction of masculinity in the text, but issues having to do with ethnicity are also discussed, whilst the text is described as "fictionalized autobiography." The two remaining essays focus on the lives of women born in the 18th and 19th centuries. The biographies of three British actresses of the early years of the eighteenth century are analyzed in the first essay —the only one in the present issue which discusses that mode of life writing; the author reflects on the evaluation and judgement of the sexuality and virtue of these actresses, contending that the authors of those biographies made an effort to explain and to forgive their subjects' public and private behaviours. The final essay offers an analysis of the autobiographies of two women at the turn of the nineteenth century connected to the world of art in the wake of the modernist period: Margaret Anderson and Isadora Duncan; the focus of the analysis is on their relationship to the spaces they inhabited, a reflection of the distancing themselves from domesticity which some women of their time were able to achieve.

With the first decade of the 21st century coming to an end, and the general feeling that, for better or for worse, the world is entering a "New Era," different subjects and subjectivities will undoubtedly come to the fore. The dismantled global economic order, together with the latest political changes in the United States, will necessarily be reflected in the texts produced in the various disciplines around the globe —such is still the influence of the Western world. The arrival of Barack H. Obama to office awakens hopes and expectations regarding, amongst other things, the reorganization of what now appears to be an obsolete Capitalist system with its shattered economy and its destructive consequences such as global warming. Indeed, the recently elected president of the most powerful nation in the world is an indisputable example of a new kind of subject. Unfortunately, the story of the not-so-long-ago disenfranchised subject who has become such a powerful figure may not turn out to be the pattern for the writing of lives in the near future. We will probably have to witness multiple aspects of violence, both in the public and pri-

vate sphere, due to the personal sense of failure provoked by, among many other circumstances, this economic crisis and the intricacies of political systems which do not take into consideration the individual. Nevertheless, it is reassuring to think that the story of the lives of those new —and in most cases disempowered— emerging subjects might reflect an upcoming new order in which gender, race, class, experience, performativity, positionality, relationality, and contradiction, among other concepts, will break new ground and uncover possible new genres.

Finally, we would like to take the opportunity to say how honoured we feel to have among our contributors scholars of international renown who have been willing to participate in this special issue, and we would like to thank them for the cordiality, generosity, and patience they have shown throughout the process of edition. Additionally, we would also like to express our gratitude to Dr. Ann MacLaren, who has generously helped us in the process of correction and edition of the present issue.

Isabel González Díaz
Dulce María Rodríguez González

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NEW GENRES, NEW SUBJECTS: WOMEN, GENDER AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY AFTER 2000

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ABSTRACT

This essay presents three theoretical concepts —performativity, positionality, and relationality— for exploring how autobiographical acts and practices intersect with gendered positionalities and relations. It then applies these concepts to six domains of women's life narrative since 2000: Transnational Lives; Graphic Lives; Online Lives; Modernist Citizen Lives in the nation state; Vulnerable Lives; and Embodied and Material Lives. It concludes that, although feminism has become commodified in new ways under global capitalism, it can be energized and adaptively reoriented by acts of personal narration. As these domains of life story production intervene to theorize the contested grounds of experience and identity, they indicate how contemporary feminism, in Ella Shohat's words, continues to be "a polysemic site of contradictory positionalities" (1-2).

KEY WORDS: Life narrative, genres, gender, performativity, positionality, relationality.

RESUMEN

En este ensayo se proponen tres conceptos teóricos —performatividad, posicionalidad y relacionalidad— para explorar cómo los actos y las prácticas autobiográficas se entrecruzan con posicionalidades y relaciones de género. Estos conceptos se aplican a seis dominios de las narrativas de vida de mujeres desde el año 2000: vidas transnacionales; vidas gráficas; vidas en línea; vidas de ciudadanas modernistas en el estado nación; vidas vulnerables; y vidas personificadas y materiales. Concluye que, a pesar de que el feminismo se ha mercantilizado de diversas maneras bajo un capitalismo global, se puede revigorizar y reorientar de modo flexible a través de actos de narración personal. Al intervenir en la teorización de los discutidos ámbitos de experiencia e identidad, estos dominios de la producción de historias personales indican cómo el feminismo contemporáneo, en palabras de Ella Shohat, continúa siendo "un lugar polisémico de posicionalidades contradictorias" (1-2)

PALABRAS CLAVE: narrativas de vida, géneros literarios, género, performatividad, posicionalidad, relacionalidad.

Our essay —"New Genres, New Subjects: Women, Gender and Autobiography after 2000"— gives us an opportunity to reflect, on the 10th anniversary of our edited collection, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, on the field of women's autobiographical writing in the last decade. We take our project as two-fold: first, to provide a very brief overview of the key terms in theorizing women's autobiographical practices at this historical moment; and second, to survey six major sites of women's autobiographical production in this time. We will foreground three theoretical concepts: performativity, positionality, and relationality. And we will focus on six domains of production: Transnational Lives; Graphic Lives; Online Lives; Modernist Citizen Lives in the nation state; Vulnerable Lives; and Embodied and Material Lives.

We begin by noting that the topic "women's autobiography" now has a rather antiquated ring to it. It seems a decidedly second wave feminist project of the 1980s to assume the fixed position of woman and the fixed attributes of femininity. Many theoretical challenges have eroded the signifiers "woman" and "women": the critique of the universalizing effect of woman and redirection of attention to the more relational, dynamic, and complex analytic of "gender." A second intervention has involved the fracturing of the notion of a unified signifier woman through the project of intersectional analyses of differences and power asymmetries among women. And a third direction of confusion has been the contesting analyses of the relation of bodies, genders, and sexualities such that any certain argument for alignment is insufficient to account for the complexities and contradictions of people's experiential histories, multiple positionalities, and desiring bodies. Moreover, in life writing studies the idea of "autobiography" as a fixed genre of reference has been challenged in the increasing attention paid to many popular genres of contemporary life narrative, including online forms and graphic memoir, testimonial writing and autoethnography, film and video, and installation art. Genres of the autobiographical have proliferated, just as gendered positionalities have.

In this context certain theoretical terms are particularly useful and illuminating.

Performativity, in postmodern theory, designates autobiographical occasions as dynamic sites for the performance of identities that are constitutive of subjectivity. In this view, identities are not fixed or essential attributes of autobiographical subjects. Rather they are enacted and reiterated through cultural norms and discourses, and remain provisional and unstable. Much contemporary discussion of life narrative as performative is informed by Judith Butler's deconstruction of a binary gender system and her assertion that gender is performative. For Butler, performativity "must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (*Bodies* 20). Responding to Butler's assertion that "the "I" neither precedes nor follows the process of... gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves," Sidonie Smith notes that "the interiority or self that is said to be prior to the autobiographical expression or reflection is an "effect" of autobiographical storytelling" (18). In theories of performativity, then, critics of life narrative have found a vocabulary for describing the complex relationship of regulatory discourses of identity to material bodies, as well as autobiographical agency.

The concept of *positionality* has become increasingly important in narrative studies to designate how subjects are situated at particular axes through the social relations of differential power. Foucault's analysis of "technologies of the self" as imperatives for constituting the "disciplined" self through multiple confessional practices established a vocabulary for specifying subject positions as discursive locations. Leigh Gilmore, in reading the "autographics" of women's life writing, attends to the subject positions that narrators negotiate within the constraints of discursive regimes as they present themselves within genres that both prompt and prohibit that speaking. Issues of positionality and the geographics of identity are especially complex in narratives of de/colonization, immigration, displacement, and exile, encouraging theorists to employ multiple terms for describing autobiographical subjects in process, among them *hybrid*, *border*, *diasporic*, *nomadic*, *migratory*, *cosmopolitan*, *glocal*, *transnational*.

Relationality is a third term of reference in life narrative that has been useful for gender studies. Recent retheorizing of the concept of relationality argues that autobiographical narrative is not a solitary but a relational story, that it offers, according to P. John Eakin, not only "the autobiography of the self but the biography and the autobiography of the other" (58; see also Miller, "Representing"). The narrator's story is often refracted through the stories of others, as in the autoethnographic constitution of the community of identification, or in the confessional dramas of familiality and familiarity.

Relationality is narratively incorporated through what Bahktin terms heteroglossic dialogism, that is, the multiplicity of "tongues" or the polyvocality through which subjectivity is enunciated.[1] This concept of polyvocality enables us to think about the subject as always a subject of the other, of social discourses. That is, the very words through which the story is "said" or written are the language of the other, social discourses through which autobiographical subjects imagine and reflect upon themselves. Rhetorically, relationality is implicated in the addressee(s) posited by the narrator, those others to whom the narrative is directed and through whom it is imagined and circulated. Relationality, then, points to the ways in which the subject is always in process and in relation, never autonomous.

Relationality is also an aspect of the subject's vulnerability and the ethics of self-narration. More recently, Butler has elaborated on the self's opaqueness to itself (*Giving* 19), arguing that the self is founded in the vulnerability inherent in its embeddedness in social conditions, its engagement with others, and its recourse to cultural norms of narration in telling the story of itself. "The 'I' who begins to tell its story," writes Butler, "can tell it only according to recognizable norms of life narration... to the extent that the 'I' agrees, from the start, to narrate itself through those norms, it agrees to circuit its narration through an externality, and so to

[1] Françoise Lionnet turns to Edouard Glissant's concept of creolization to propose a theory of autobiographical textuality as a "métissage" or braiding of disparate voices in subjects whose cultural origins and allegiances are multiple and conflicting.

disorient itself in the telling through modes of speech that have an impersonal nature" (52). Autobiographical subjects are thus multiply vulnerable, to their own opaqueness, to their relationality to others, and to the norms through which they externalize themselves. It is this vulnerability, according to Butler, that informs the ethics of giving an account. Agency derives from our willingness to narrate our opacity, our fragmentation, our limits of knowability, to narrate, that is, "the way in which we are constituted in relationality: implicated, beholden, derived, sustained by a social world that is beyond us and before us" (*Giving* 64). Butler here shifts the idea of agency from the subject's exercise of control over its interpretation of its life to the subject's openness to its opacity and vulnerability and to its ethical obligation to the other.

Theorizing performativity contests the notion that autobiography is a site of authentic or pre-discursive identity. Theorizing positionality, with an eye to situatedness, contests the normative notion of a universal and transcendent autobiographical subject, autonomous and free of history. And theorizing relationality contests the notion that self-narration is a monologic utterance of a solitary, introspective subject that is knowable to itself. Critics have deployed these terms to decenter the notion of the unified, stable, autonomous individual that has often been assumed by readers to be a masculine subject of privilege. They speak of a subject that is in process, a subject in context (historical, social, geographical), a subject whose self-knowing is always implicated, discursively and dialogically, in "the forms of ideological environment" (Wong 169). As we consider the complex ways in which new genres and new subjects may now be energizing one another, these concepts enable more flexible reading practices and more inclusive approaches to the field of life narrative.

TRANSNATIONAL LIFE WRITING

New genres of the autobiographical have emerged as a result of transnational collaborations across national, class and religious differences. Transnationality refers to acts and practices that are enabled or constrained by the changing logics of nation states and of globalization in late capitalism (Ong 1-26). Of course, much has been written about the everyday life of globalization: flows of money, goods, people and ideas across national boundaries and regions; time-space compression via new technologies; the emergence of new identities, often multiple and overlapping; the hybrid sites of inhabitation such as global cities and borderzones; and new forms of organization and activism. Feminist scholars have explored processes of globalization: the production and circulation of heterogeneous masculinities and femininities; the gendered configuration of new labor markets; gendered patterns of migration from one global location to another; women's rights in the nation and as global citizens; and the intersections of patriarchy and globalized formations such as neoliberalism and religious fundamentalisms. And feminist activists around the globe have responded to the post-1995 agenda put forth in the Platform for action at the United Nations' Fourth World conference on Women in Beijing, China, in

1995.[2] The platform for action targets the increasing poverty of women; inequalities in access to health care and education; unequal power-sharing and decision-making between men and women that prevent women's advancement; the harm of violence against women domestically and in armed conflict, as well as against refugees and migrants; the continued stereotyping of women in media and their limited access to communication systems; and continuing discrimination against girl-children.[3]

New forms, forums and projects bring women into conversation across their differences, prompting new understandings of the heterogeneity of feminisms and the power dynamics of activism.[4] Attending to the fractured agendas of women working for change around the world, transnational feminism recognizes the radical differences of women's conditions of living, the disjunctures (Appadurai 5-6) of flows, modernities, inequalities, discourses, and changing conditions on the ground. It also complicates analyses of gendered processes and identities by thinking about they are related to the hierarchies established in categories of race, economic class, sexuality, and ethnicity, since gender, in isolation from other axes of signification, is an inadequate analytic. Thinking transnationally calls for a *relational approach*, attendant at once to contexts within the nation-state, and to those between and beyond the nation-state framework. This relational approach illuminates the connections among nations, patriarchies, colonialisms, racisms and feminisms. An integral aspect of transnational feminism involves self-reflexive practices designed to engage women's positions of privilege along these axes of signification. In this way women are asked to examine and account for their own locations and assumptions "as part of a permeable interwoven relationality" (Shohat, "Area" 68).[5]

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[2] The forces of globalization have also brought new forms and arenas of agency and independence and energize new forms of collective action and analysis, what Arjun Appadurai has described as "globalization from below" through "creative forms of social life that are localized transit points for mobile global forms of civic and civil life" (6-7). NGOs working on women's human rights and women's issues transnationally are part of this civic and civil life.

[3] Focusing, above all, on the girl-child as the victim of many kinds of economic and sexual exploitation, the Declaration asserts that "discrimination against women begins at the earliest stages of life and must therefore be addressed from then onwards" and calls for recognizing "the dignity and worth of the girl-child" (UN Documents Cooperation Circle). Yet the report points to evidence that the rights of the girl-child are endangered in many ways, from prenatal sex selection and female infanticide to genital mutilation, child marriage, incest, forced prostitution, and unequal access to nutrition, health care, and education. Thus the concern with gender must begin by addressing the many inequities in which girl-children continue to be raised, and their access to universal human rights asserted and protected.

[4] Confronting the differences among women across global circuits, "transnational" feminism focuses on the asymmetries of access and power among women and between men and women in global circuits, institutions, and processes, specifically the two related processes of the feminization of labor markets and female proletarianization (Valentine M. Moghadam). It attends to the geopolitics of women's relations, the politics oscillating across national borders as well as the economic, social and cultural borders of class, religious affiliation, and ethnicity within nations and diasporas.

[5] The transnational subject does not identify with a single nation-state because her or his national identity is located at the site of global social and economic flows.

We point to two kinds of life writing projects that emerge out of this project of transnational women's activism.

The first is the Global Feminisms project at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Michigan. A multi-year, multi-site project, Global Feminisms assembled a collection of oral histories of feminist activists in Poland, China, India, and the United States. Putting in play feminist praxis, the Global Feminisms project involved layers of collaboration. Teams on the ground in each country decided on the ten feminist activists to be interviewed about their personal histories, their feminist visions, and the contexts and agendas of their activism. The local teams also determined the questions for and format of the interviews. The local teams met together twice "to review each other's materials and to discuss the disparate ideas about the body, the public-private divide, the state, law & jurisprudence, and publishing that have emerged from the interviews" (IRWG website). The production and transcription of the oral histories involved the collaboration of subjects, interviewers, videographers, and transcribers across global locations. Finally, the opportunities such an archive offers to students and scholars imagines a larger collaborative project, one that will transform understandings of the diversity of feminisms from which people organize and interpret both their life stories and their actions. This larger collaborative effort is made possible because the oral histories have been made available in transcript form in English and in their original languages and as videotaped interviews on DVD. This archive is mounted on the Global Feminisms website at the University of Michigan and available to students, activists, and researchers.

The project's generative location was dispersed and multi-nodal, its projection of feminism glocal, that is, always contingent on the conjunction of the local and global. The multinational archive in effect produces at once a collective of voices from around the world *and* a kaleidoscope of differences among activist women as subjects of different "national histories and women's movement histories" (IRWG website). Further, the set of site interviews project differences among women within each country. In effect, the project staged an intervention in the common discourses about the "globalization" and the "internationalization" of feminism, the first of which projects a suspiciously unified subject of feminism and the second of which projects a suspiciously unidirectional flow of feminist ideals and ideals.[6] The Global Feminisms project thus houses an archive documenting heterogeneous feminist subjects in conversation with their pasts, their national locations and imaginaries, and their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

[6] The website reads: By documenting individual life stories of activists and scholars, and considering them in their particular historical and cultural contexts, the project records important differences in women's activism in specific local sites, and questions constructions of 'global' feminism that assume a common (Western) set of issues as universal to all women. In addition, the project questions conventional notions of global feminism as the "internationalization of the women's movement," which often assumes a transfer eastward of western feminist ideals (Global Feminisms).

The individual stories present rich oral narratives that complicate the notion of "feminism." This is the case with the narrative of Li Huijing, a Professor of Sociology and Assistant Director of the Women Research Center of the Central Party School. Li is a nationally recognized leader within the Communist Party who has developed gender studies in cadre schools and advocated for women's rights. Li's narrative presents a coming-of-age story, as she organizes the story of her life in three parts: her childhood during the "genderless age" of Red Guard Maoism; young adulthood and her dawning consciousness of gender inequality in the late 1970s; and her subsequent embrace of feminism with Chinese characteristics as a way of living and a mission to change society.

Through her retrospective narrative, Li interprets her coming-to-gender consciousness narrative through the contemporary discourse of a hybrid feminism that combines concepts from western feminism with the historically contextualized concepts of Chinese "feminism" applied to the specific characteristics of Chinese society and culture, in order to craft glocal interpretive frameworks and theories adequate to analyzing the conditions on the ground in China. What is fascinating about her narrative is the way in which the values and characteristics of the Maoist period, when she came of age as a Red Guard girl, are sustained, providing continuity to her representation of herself in both the past and the present in what is a narrative of transformation; and conversely the way in which the feminist vision of her narrating subject position extends through her interpretation of the past. As she tells her personal story and discusses her work of educating and training the cadre students in issues of gender studies, she continuously defines what "feminism" is, often by clarifying what "feminism" is not and by distinguishing between "Western feminism" and "Chinese feminism." Indeed, she positions Western feminism as the "other" to Chinese feminism. While she often invokes, implicitly and explicitly, important concepts of Western feminism ("agency," "the gendered division of labor"), she emphasizes their "Chinese characteristics." But her oppositions are also specific to her Chinese context: she positions herself as a child of the "genderless age" of Maoist China who continues to value the ideals of that period, thus distinguishing herself from women coming of age in the 1980s and 1990s whose concept of feminism is routed through the discourse of difference, of the feminine-ism that had been suppressed during the Cultural Revolution. These are the new modern women exploited by and in the expanding market economy. Discourses of "individual rights" and "personal space" are invoked to explain her dissatisfaction with gender inequality in the late 1970s and 1980s, discourses translated into Chinese and circulating among Chinese intellectuals during the decade of the 1980s as people reinterpreted the Cultural Revolution as a pariah past.

Narratives such as Li's reveal the national locations of the narrating "I" and the complex global crossings of feminist discourses with other discourses through which subjects interpret their life stories and perform lives in feminism (IRWG website). Collectively, the oral histories archived in the Global Feminisms Project constitute a transnational feminist community of individuals unknown to one another, individuals attached to their specific local and national contexts and circum-

stances, yet connected transnationally through discursive meshworks and the virtual, digitized library now available for searching.

Another exciting project to emerge from transnational collaboration is the 2006 book entitled *Playing with Fire*. It is the result of an autoethnographic project of the Sangtin Writers, a collective of Indian women who, assisted by a group leader and Richa Nagar, an Indian feminist scholar teaching in the United States, produced a collaborative life narrative that became the basis for community action. Their project, translated and available in book form (first published in Hindi in New Delhi in 2004, and later translated into English and published by the University of Minnesota Press), turned a collective reflective lens on the asymmetries of power and influence within a local Indian NGO. Since NGOs have become the dominant organization unit for advancing women's human rights and for connecting elite women with marginalized and relatively voiceless women, *Playing with Fire* joins women in their differences into a force for retheorization and reformation at the center of feminist praxis.

Playing with Fire narrates the group's "journey" (*yatra*) of understanding their lives through extensive memory work, writing, discussion-based revision, and theoretical analysis. By situating their personal life histories collectively, the nine women in Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh, India, attempted to address the forms of domination of an NGO that, in their view, spoke as the voice of Indian women in the region, yet effaced their experience and in some cases the complexities of their caste positions. The women understood their project as experience-based collective action to raise consciousness about Indian women's lives through a collective method that would not, as ethnographic projects typically did, leave them vulnerable to overwriting or appropriation as voiceless subalterns. Throughout, the group's personal journals and the postscript written by Richa Nagar reflect on the problematics of who can produce knowledge in a postcolonial context and what methods enable this process.

Playing with Fire represents a significant new transnational moment precisely because it inverts the framework of ethnography in several ways. It takes the self-study of women's lives as an originary point for a collective assessment of class position and the dynamics of power in a community. It maps multiple stages of the process by which individual reflection —"memory work"— and the writing or telling of personal narrative might not only contribute to individual transformation but become a basis for collectivized self-understanding with potential for intervention in a repressive public sphere. It thinks about the project of life writing as sharable and a stage in the formation of group consciousness through incorporating and revising personal stories. While the collaborative work in *Playing with Fire* cannot escape the effects of social inequalities and hierarchies —only two of the nine women wrote out the stories told by the seven others— the project is arguably not an ethnography in which the more cosmopolitan members served as interviewers of local informants, but a genuinely relational and intersubjective autoethnographic narrative that achieves a collectivized voice.

By incorporating multiple group conversations on the drafted narratives of life stages generated by each member of the group, *Playing with Fire* locates critical

moments of the life cycle for this group of Indian women who, despite their differences of caste, class, religious affiliation, and sexual desire, are united by gender-specific concerns that become a basis for their collective ethics and action. In assessing the stages of their project, the initially hostile reception to it within India, and its potential as a model for gathering life narratives of indigenous women whose status has often been considered "subaltern," this autoethnography becomes a viable model of producing collaborative life narrative with potential for social transformation in the developing world.

GRAPHIC LIVES

Graphic memoir, now called in Gillian Whitlock's term, "autographics," is a rich site of self-representation and one that is reimagining gender relations. While cartoon books and the "funny pages" of newspapers have been available for at least a century, since 1972 there has been a revolution in the focus, and the uses, of autographics (Gardner 787-806). In France, Canada, the United States, South Africa, and elsewhere, the telling of autobiographical stories through cartoon books has produced new kinds of stories with potential to intervene directly in social and political debates, not least because they link the cartooning form of popular culture to the narrative practices and theoretically informed positions of contemporary literature. Graphic memoirs have become a site for telling complex stories of gender, sexuality, family, and nation that reach millions of readers and have the potential to circulate worldwide as they "open up new and troubled spaces," in Gillian Whitlock's terms ("Autographics" 976).[7] Subject positions are differently negotiated in cartoons, as the drawn portraits of cartoonists function as avatars that "engage with the conventions of comics" (Whitlock, "Autographics" 71). Scott McCloud has suggested, because the cartoon is a "vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled," we do not just observe the cartoon, "we become it" (36). That is, readers are differently addressed, as we identify in reading them and imaginatively "complete the narrative" (Gardner 800) that the cartoon's segmented boxes and gutters initiate and interrupt.

Two recent autographics by women suggest the potential of this form to address potent issues of gender, sexuality, and nation, and to circulate widely, new multimodal stories of gendered processes and perceptions.

Marjane Satrapi's two books of autographics about revolutionary Iran, *Persepolis I and II* (translated from the French), link the coming-of-age story of this only child in a Marxist-leaning, multi-generational bourgeois family descended from

[7] Autographics are not simply translations of written memoirs; rather, Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven argue that "the medium of comics is cross-discursive because it is composed of verbal and visual narratives that... remain distinct" (769).

the kings of Persia to events in Iran between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. In the embedded multi-temporality of *Persepolis*, Satrapi interweaves the long history of Iran in the twentieth century from the ascension of the Shah to his overthrow, to the ascendance of an Islamic fundamentalist regime which took power after months of factional struggle and the assassination of dissidents; then the long war with Iraq which led to brigades of teenage martyrs and the cultural revolution. This last introduced rigid gender separation, which has had severe consequences for the rights of women and girls: it imposed laws that required women and girls to be veiled, forbade unmarried women to associate publicly with men, and restricted girls' and women's education and ability to engage in public debate. In this memoir, the family's history is entwined with the history of the nation. (Satrapi's graphic memoir in two parts was also revised for a 2007 film that is circulating internationally.)[8] Through the stark abstraction of bold black-and-white cartooning, Satrapi visualizes the psychic life of her childhood and early adulthood selves, the communal struggle of the family against and in the midst of the Iranian revolutionary masses, and the complexities of Iran's national struggle to forge an Islamic national imaginary.

The artist-in-exile in France creates an autobiographical avatar "Marji," the child protagonist who tells, in stark black-and-white cartooning, how the family's lives changed under these conditions, and recounts her own increasing rebellion, which motivated her parents to send her into exile in Vienna in 1984. As a teenager there she critiques the construction of Iranians by Europeans as Arabic fanatics and uncivilized "others." On her return to Iran, the complexity of growing up female is dramatized in a society where socializing between young women and men is strictly policed by groups of women tied to the regime; yet parties and flirtations abound, sexual education proceeds by whispers, and she enters into an unfortunate marriage to avoid trouble with the regime. Throughout, *Persepolis* reflects particularly on how the subject positions of young women, their mothers, and grandmothers are undermined by a repressive regime that, paradoxically, also stimulates resistance from within Iran and cannot prevent the circulation of Western cultural values. In its charm, wry humor, and insistence on educating the West to the struggles in Iran over the last three decades, *Persepolis* asserts the vigor of feminist critique and the power of cartoons to persuade by engaging viewers both intellectually and emotionally.

For Satrapi, graphic narration, with its invitation to the reader to co-construct the coming-of-age narrative, offers a transnational communicative circuit through which Western readers are invited to adjust their understanding of Iranian history and culture and to correct their misperception that Iranians speak Arabic

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[8] The translation of the graphic narrative to filmic version involved reordering the narrative sequence, reconceiving the memoir's chronology, and shifting from the frame-by-frame representation in graphic memoir of boxes on the page to an unsegmented visual style of cartooning with voices dubbed in French by several actors.

and that Iranian women "either have no place in our society or that they are hysterical black crows," in Satrapi's ironic phrase.[9]

Different possibilities of autographics are mobilized in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006). A provocative exploration of sexuality, gendered relations in the American family, and Modernist versions of what Bechdel calls "erotic truth," *Fun Home* is a memoir deeply invested in imaging and imagining memory and those intricate, intersubjective acts of storytelling that bind and rend families. Specifically the story concerns a family in 1960s rural Pennsylvania whose father is by profession an English teacher and funeral home director, by temperament an interior decorator and fanatic landscaper, and, by desire and perhaps family legacy, a repressed homosexual who has liaisons with the family's babysitters and his students. This last implies he practiced what heteronormative American society would call "perversion"; and it may suggest why he seems to have committed suicide —unless his being run over by a truck was an accident— when Alison was 20 and he 44. *Fun Home* is also a memoir of both coming-of-age and coming-out for "Alison," the avatar of Bechdel, a lesbian artist, who has for over two decades published a biweekly comic strip "Dykes to Watch Out For."

This autographic entwines the story of being formed as feminine by her repressed father to the discovery of her own transgressive desire, and routes both his and her stories through references and images of several kinds of print texts: Modernist literature, above all Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* and Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; lesbian feminist manifestos, from *Word Is Out* (Adair and Adair) to *Lesbian Nation* (Jill Johnston) and including Colette's *Earthly Paradise*; letters between her parents during their courtship and her teenage years; newspapers pages that announce not only personal events, such as her father's death, but the Watergate hearings occupying the nation during the 1970s under the Nixon presidency; and her own childhood diaries which she began keeping at the age of 10. The autographic here becomes a space of collage and counterpoint, nowhere more than in her careful drawing of family photographs. In studying those images and inviting readers to see her and her family differently through the sexual tensions and reversals of gendered positions she uncovers in it, Bechdel creates a new kind of family album —one that is both an homage to her dead father and a charting of shifts in the theory and the practice of gendered relations in later-twentieth-century America. Moreover, in her autographic of her father's biography,

[9] "I wanted to put a few things straight," explains the narrating Marjane from her studio at Place des Vosges, one of the oldest districts of Paris. "When I arrived in France, I met many people who expected me to speak Arabic. So many Europeans do not know the difference between Arabs and Iranians. They don't know anything of our centuries-old culture. They seem to think Iran has always been a country of religious fundamentalists, that Iranian women either have no place in our society or that they are hysterical black crows. In fact, Iranian women are not downtrodden weeds: my mother's maid has kicked out her husband, and I myself slapped so many men who behaved inappropriately in the street. And even during the worst period of the Iranian Revolution, women were carrying weapons," Marjane declares with conviction (Kutschera).

Bechdel counters Second Wave feminism's injunction to women to think back through their mothers and transgenders or queers the narrative of genealogical recovery.

Many more graphic memoirs and novels are now being produced around the world by cartoonists such as Julie Doucet and Phoebe Gloeckner. Their emphasis on representing faces and bodies indicates that our ideas of autobiographical subjectivity and our readerly identifications will increasingly be shaped by this conjunction of visual and verbal representation. That is, we turn to comics for not just pleasure and humor but for the unique way they register gender in our times and motivate a relationality through which the graphic artist and reader co-construct narratives across gutters and frames.

MODERNIST CITIZENS AND THE STATE

There is an increasing number of narratives published since 2000 that emerge out of the powerful transformations taking place in nations around the world and the realignments of national interests across regions of the globe. These narratives engage the relationship of modernity, the nation, and women's citizenship in the 21st century.

Probably the most widely read and translated political life narrative has been Hillary Clinton's *Living History* (2003). Sold for several million dollars and bought by several million people around the globe, Clinton's narrative is the story of her self-making as a viable presidential candidate. It narrates the modernist story of the individual's rise to prominence and success in her profession and her deeply personal calling to serve the country.[10] As a celebrity narrative, Clinton's *Living History* offers blue-prints and talking points, fables of origin in "Middle America" and performances of credentials on the world stage, testaments to character and calls to identification, apologies and manifestos; its publication has offered sources of income for the campaign and sound bites for the media.

Produced in the shadow of scandal and in anticipation of a presidential run for the White House, *Living History* can be read as a narrative weighed down by its multiple agendas. Those multiple agendas are projected through the heterogeneous subject positions that the narrating "I" takes up. The "Hillary" who narrates *Living History* assumes the political subject positions of sitting senator, former first lady, and presidential aspirant. Clinton attempts to consolidate the figure of the first woman presidential candidate as American, woman and winning politician, at once intimately human and remotely experienced and confident. To refute her detrac-

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[10] Of course this association of bourgeois individualism, the ideology of national progress, commodity capitalism, and autobiographical narration is at least two and a half centuries old in the United States. So, too, is the understanding that the life story can be a lucrative venture, or at the least can bring in capital (financial, moral, cultural).

tor's caricature of her as a "femi-nazi" and reposition herself as a centrist candidate/senator whose values align with the normative values identified with women's role and identities, she also must project her normative femininity through the feminized subject positions of daughter, mother, wife, and wounded spouse who suffered but stuck by her man. At the same time, she must project her claims to political viability through the subject positions of patriot, policy wonk, and battler. She does this in part by invoking the metaphor of politics as "war," figuring herself as a warrior and survivor of scarring battles. And always she has to situate her defining identity as quintessentially "American," a self-understanding that locates her origins in "middle America" and her values as spiritual and liberal.

As a promise of electability, *Living History* becomes a vehicle that enables Clinton's reader to imagine a woman as president. Through it, Clinton confronts the bias against women in high office, exposes the workings of gender ideology in responses to her, affirms her long struggle to change the terms of women's participation in public life, and claims her story as a break-through story of overcoming the gender barrier to presidential leadership. She thus figures herself as the embodiment of social change: "I represented a fundamental change in the way women functioned in our society" (5). Projecting herself as a "symbol" of the change in women's lives, identities, aspirations, and achievements in the United States, the Clinton of *Living History* imagines herself as the new face of the nation itself, and her political trajectory as the realization of the promise of "America's" liberal democracy.

Elsewhere around the world women have also been producing narratives of their "rise" to public office. There are, of course, the official and unofficial biographies of such figures as Angela Merkel of Germany, Helen Clark of New Zealand, and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia. But women who have achieved high office have also been writing their own versions of their rise to public prominence. Such retrospective narratives rehearse through the performativity of self-narrating the progressive goal of women's advancement in the public sphere as viable candidates and effective politicians, despite the obstacles placed in their way. They, too, are claiming their lives as embodiments of the modernization of the nation.

In contrast, other narratives of the nation written by women use personal narrative to reposition themselves vis-a-vis gendered citizenship. Given the West's "war on terror" and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, it is not surprising that a proliferation of narratives by women coming out of Islamic nations and circulating in the West, there to be taken up in culture wars about the status of women in Islam and in the Islamic state. Gillian Whitlock describes such autobiographical narratives as "soft weapons" in the war on terror. In the last decade, for instance, memoirs by Iranian women have attained global prominence and circulated, in several languages, throughout both literary and popular culture. We have already noted the importance of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (written in France) as an autographic addressed to the West that offers a revisionary history of the Iranian Revolution and, in so doing, makes a substantial critique of British and American imperialism, as well as in-house fundamentalism, in maintaining a dictatorial regime in Iran. Satrapi's is only one memoir to come out of the aftermath of the Iranian Revolu-

tion. Since 2000, three other memoirs by Iranian women have been circulating internationally in English: the well-known *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi (2003), *Lipstick Jihad* by Azadeh Moaveni (2005), and *Iran Awakening* (2006, written with Moaveni) by Shirin Ebadi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for her work on women's rights.

Nafisi, daughter of the mayor of Tehran before the revolution, was a professor of English literature at its University of Tehran but was expelled in 1981 for refusing to wear the veil and did not teach again until 1987. Her memoir chronicles how, in 1995, under surveillance by the authorities, she left the university and held regular secret meetings with seven of her female students at her house to read and discuss great novels of the Western tradition, such as Nabokov's *Lolita* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, from a post-revolutionary Iranian perspective. In 1997, Nafisi left Iran for the US, where she wrote the memoir and where she currently teaches (Johns Hopkins). "I left Iran, but Iran did not leave me," Nafisa notes in a memoir that intertwines the pleasures of reading Western novels with nostalgia for a world and culture left behind. Given Nafisi's current location in the American academy and her powerful evocation of the danger of discussing Western literature illicitly in Iran, some reviewers have noted the book's excessively pro-Western stance and remarked on the political context in which it circulates, inviting Western readers to reaffirm stereotypes of Iranian Islamicism and thereby providing a soft weapon in the "war on terror."[11]

While Nafisi's memoir has circulated internationally, Azadeh Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran* is less well-known. As a writer for *Time* magazine whose family moved to California when she was a child, Moaveni is curious about an Iran she never knew and so relocated there for over a year to write a memoir of discovering post-revolutionary Iran. Moaveni critiques the regime as a "culture of lies," but is also drawn to life in Tehran. Her memoir traces how she made friends among the upper-class youth culture in Tehran during the days of the short-lived pro-democracy movement around 1997-2001, and assesses the complex mixture of resistance and fundamentalist ideology that informs young people's views of themselves and the world. She describes herself donning a head scarf to appear in public, where she visits malls and cafés to find a youth culture that is, beneath its surface proprieties, permeated by eroticization expressed in drugs, dancing and sex. Moaveni observes that for secular women the opportunity for education increased after the revolution, but for traditional women life became more restricted, and women generally have difficulty finding positions and validating the independence that they have come to expect. Her critique of the persistence of gender-specific norms despite a shift in national ideology and values has important implications, particularly for nations in which Islamic practices, such as head scarves, become a matter of policy.

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[11] See Theresa Kulbaga's review in *College English*.

Another kind of response to shifts in concepts of gendered work and practices in the nation is articulated in *Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope* by Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi, which was published in 16 languages but not in Farsi. As someone who had been, at 31, a leading woman judge before the revolution and critical of the US-backed regime of the Shah, Ebadi remained in Iran throughout it, although she was gradually demoted because she was a woman, and finally stripped of her position. She became a human rights lawyer protesting through the courts the premeditated killings of dissidents, at considerable danger to herself. In her memoir, she argues that Iran's legal system betrayed the revolution by diminishing women's rights (because under the new penal code, a woman's life was declared worth half that of a man). But her memoir also narrates how she challenges the regime day by day in the courts, in the name of patriotism and morality. And she mingles her history of post-revolutionary Iran with accounts of her domestic life as a mother balancing the demands of home and its gendered labor. She then details her time in Tehran's Evin prison —she is imprisoned in 2000 because she videotaped the testimony of a key witness to the killing of a young activist during student riots in 1999— where women inmates are assumed to be prostitutes. And, in this book addressed in particular to a United States that labeled Iran part of the "axis of evil," Ebadi makes a case for the possibility of social justice in the new nation, asserting that a progressive version of the Islamic Republic can be compatible with modern democracy (see Boustany).[12]

ON-LINE LIVES

The burgeoning modes of online self-expression are shaping new modes of self-presentation. Some, such as blogs, adapt written genres of self-writing. Other mixed-media forms such as social networking sites generate composite modes of digital life narrative. Yet others, such as massively multiplayer online games, use avatars that allow users to reimagine themselves —with different gender, ethnicity, bodily features. Consider how the following sampling of online sites are changing our concepts of what constitutes the gendered self.

Journalistic web-logs or blogs are the most obvious link to written life narrative. On them users write extended personal narratives, update them regularly, and air deeply personal experiences and thoughts. But the majority of blogs are unlike diaries in that they are interactive sites for communities which allow users to comment interactively by raising questions, offering the comfort of shared experience, and "being there" for others in the network of friends, most never met in the flesh. Such websites as *Xanga* provide a means of translating between languages, which

[12] See the review by Nora Boustany and the *New York Times Book Review* piece by Laura Secor.

facilitates international exchange and encourages diasporan users to communicate with others in their home countries.

The public site *LiveJournal* offers bloggers a method of both self-expression and self-help. While they may post photos, images, and music, it is driven by diary-like entries, grouped in forums that users join to engage in dialogue. On the Depression Forum, for example, members discuss a range of feelings from teenaged angst to struggles with mental illness and self-harming practices, such as cutting, that they may have engaged in. Although users attest to its therapeutic value and the comforts of having a responsive community, a skeptic might raise some issues: to what extent are clichés of depression rehearsed by self-dramatizing writers adopting stereotypic personas? What of the voyeurism encouraged especially among users who consume others' posts without participating? It is of course not possible to validate the authenticity of those posting, though regular users often claim someone is "posing"; but many seem unconcerned about accuracy if the "authenticity effect" is sufficient. On the other hand, interactive blogs encourage the sharing of self-experience and promote a view of the self as flexible, responsive and dynamic. They enable users in remote and rural areas to discuss sensitive issues of sexuality, gender dysfunction, and experience which may promote greater education and foster resistance to repressive community norms.

Lest we assume that life narrative blogs are always liberatory, however, consider such sites as the so-called "Pro-ana" and Pro-mia" blogs of anorexics and bulimics, which are popular among young women worldwide. These sites focus on how the community of users can achieve and maintain hyper-thin bodies. They reject the notion that such practices constitute mental illness, and encourage self-surveillance and discipline by encouraging confession of lapses, posting "thinspirational" songs and images of stick-thin models that link the hyper-thin body to fame and wealth. Concerned that such sites, typically only open to users, are contributing to illness and death, MicroSoft shut down four of them in 2007 (Catan); but some believe that such censoring only drives true believers underground and strengthens their sense of persecuted dedication.

We cannot discuss the many other kinds of online sites that are reshaping ideas of life writing, but the following are particularly provocative:

– *PostSecret*, a website created by Frank Warren to showcase postcards that people mail in. The option for anonymous confession of dark secrets and participation in the voyeuristic pleasure of reading them have made this site a favorite for the public performance of intimacy.
– *YouTube*, which emphasizes online performance, has a category called self-videos, where videomakers perform the self. These are seemingly solo autobiographical presentations (although they require either a crew or a webcam) and videomakers often adopt personas and imitate other characters as they confide "private" feelings. Thus impersonation is everywhere on YouTube, and the line between disclosure and performance is a fluid, even illusory, boundary. YouTube was notoriously the site of the popular LonelyGirl 15 videos, which in 2006 were revealed to be, not the haunting disclosures of a teen-

ager, but the performance of a woman in her twenties stylizing moments of adolescent angst. Will YouTube self-performance, with its instantaneous circulation and global audience, become a mode of sustained and introspective self-narration? Who knows whether, a century from now, we will all record our life narratives in video capsules for posterity, thereby producing an extensive archive realizing the call to narrate the personal (with or without the political).

– *Social networking* sites such as FaceBook and MySpace have taken the younger generations, those in their teens and twenties, by storm. On such sites, our students navigate the anonymity of the large research university and the complexities of life without family and old friends. Such sites enable users to join collectives linked by their creation of a user profile and to gain numerous online "friends," but the formats sharply curtail possibilities for self-narration because of their question protocols and limited formats. Because business interests use them for advertising and for gaining information on the consumption habits of users, one might ask to what extent such social networking sites work against a concept of the complex and interiorized self? Regarding users as social beings defined by consumer tastes and the size of their friend group suggests a conformist sense of personhood. At the same time social networking sites enable transnational exchange among those in the world's developed nations with the means and leisure time for such networking.
– *Avatar Selves/SecondLife* offer opportunities for enhanced self-referencing. While many online sites suggest that users are "authoring" themselves —as makers, filmers, expressers— virtual self-presentation can also occur on simulation sites that allow users to choose fantasy personas to act out their desires as avatars, or alter egos. SecondLife, perhaps the best known of these, is defined as an unstructured virtual role-playing environment[13] in which users can create new, dramatically different personas, extending themselves online to escape the constraints of their everyday lives. An avatar may be a creature with wings (since everyone can fly), horns, or bestial features, or a hybrid of several beings. The central activity of SecondLife is consumption through economic transactions. While this may hone entrepreneurial skills and reward a Franklinian notion of enterprise, the potential uses for autobiographical narration through role-playing are as yet limited, although the potential they afford autofictional reflection through visually projecting oneself "otherwise" are intriguing.

[13] More specifically SecondLife is an example of massively multiplayer online games (MMORPGs). See the discussion by Tracy Wilson in the newsletter from <http://howstuffworks.com> (Fall 2007?) exploring the deep connection between the user and the avatar: <http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/mmorpg.htm>.

Digital life writing introduces new questions for scholars of autobiographical narration. When virtual self-recording is for unknown, communities, how are self-presentation, and indeed self-experience, changed? In what ways is the previous reliance of life narrative on a stable self with recognizable features thrown into question? We are only at the beginning of this transition from analog writing to digital self-presentation, but such questions will increasingly occupy theorists.

VULNERABLE SUBJECTS: NARRATIVES OF TRAUMA, TESTIMONY AND WITNESSING

Since the late 1990s, as scholars across the humanistic disciplines theorize trauma, those in literary and cultural studies have considered acts of testimony and witnessing. This activity within the academy has tracked the publication of testimonies and memoirs of radical trauma, political violence, physical, social and political vulnerability. The practice of witnessing informs such autobiographical genres as Holocaust narratives, identity movement narratives of rights, narratives of incest and violence in the family, disability narratives, and narratives of exile and displacement. It emanates from Western publishers, but also from the dispersed global sites of national storytelling such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and the Inquiry into the forced removal of indigenous children from their families (the inquiry into the Stolen Generation) in Australia. Such acts of personal storytelling are being employed increasingly in the service of nation-building and national projects of reconciliation.

Narratives produced and circulated within this regime of human rights confront readers with emotional, often overwhelming accounts of dehumanization, brutal and violent victimization, and exploitation. The speaker insists that the history of suffering and abuse he or she (of those for whom s/he speaks) experienced and remembered can no longer go un-narrated. Often, witnesses understand and position themselves as members of a collectivity whose story can and must be told. Readers and listeners are asked to recognize the risks of witnessing, to validate suffering and survival, to confer a different status on those who have been disparaged by history, and to play a role in protecting the humanity and dignity of the other. Narratives of witness thus make an urgent, immediate, and direct bid for the attention of the reader/listener and call the reader to an ethical response through their affective appeals for recognition.[14]

Such narratives are, at this time, often gender-specific. Over the last two decades, the majority of those people bearing witness to histories of profound degra-

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[14] Thus, while there can be many unpredictable responses to the publication, circulation, and reception of personal narratives of suffering and loss, scenes of witness are ones in which the narrator, the story, and the listener/reader are entwined in an ethical call to empathic identification and accountability, recognition, and oftentimes action.

dation, vulnerability, and violence (psychic and physical) have been women—mothers, wives, and children of those who disappeared through murder and torture. This was the case of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in South Africa. Two kinds of witness narratives are predominantly (though not exclusively) masculine: one is prison memoirs of common or political prisoners who may have been activists in or out of prison. The male witness is thus a victim of state repression. The other kind is narratives of child soldiers telling shocking stories of coming-of-age as gun-toting, brutally violent young men who are victims of campaigns of organized hyper-masculinization that turn them into perpetrators of violence. One such best-selling story of masculinization through violence is Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* (2006). In these two kinds of narratives the male witness is a victim of state repression, jailed for his intellectual (gendered masculine) activities.

In the production, circulation and reception of women's narratives of witness within the human rights regime, the figure of the victim has often been feminized as an oppressed subject of tradition or political oppression. She is represented as passive, physically and sexually vulnerable, and emotionally overwhelmed by the very act of remembering in public. Nonetheless, women's willingness to come forward to testify, however problematic in the contexts of human rights protocols and institutions, has produced critical acts of intervention in bringing to public attention the erasure of the kinds of violence suffered by women in contexts of radical harm.[15]

Recently, women have turned to personal narrative to play another role in projects of national truth and reconciliation. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died that Night* (2004) is a powerful example of the genre of standpoint reconciliation. A Harvard-trained psychologist and facilitator for victims at the TRC, Gobodo-Madikizela produces a hybrid narrative, part inquiry into evil, part meditation on forgiveness, part account of her interviews in prison with Eugene de Kock, the notorious perpetrator of apartheid responsible for killings and torture, and part psychological encounter with the "victim" within. From the positionality of black survivor of the apartheid regime, Goboda-Madikezela confronts her own vulnerability, the figure of the perpetrator who positions himself as victim of higher-ups, the moral ambiguities of binary regimes of adjudication, and the legacies of a dehumanizing history. In the case of Gobodo-Madikezela's memoir, the witness takes up the position of vulnerability not as victimization but as a standpoint, however unstable, for investigating the conditions of violence and returning intersubjective vulnerability to the other. As Butler suggests in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, the willingness to imagine oneself in the position of the other and remain vulnerable to the opacity of the other in giving an account of oneself is an important aspect of women's contribution to the human rights project of social justice and reconciliation after great violence (3-40).

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[15] The terms of reference of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for instance, failed to acknowledge gender-based violence against women: degradation, sexual and physical violence, and the social death that may result.

Marie Beatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter: The Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire* is also the narrative of genocide and survival combining the survivor's tale of violence, displacement, and vulnerability with the professional sociologist's standpoint of analytical objectivity. Like Gobodo-Madikizela, Umutesi takes her experience as a refugee as the ground and compulsion for her journey through the madness of violence unleashed and human abandonment sanctioned as she attempts to answer the question: "What led us to this extremity?" Her standpoint as a professional sociologist offers her compensatory structure and distance before the abyss of extremity.

In the personal arena, there has been an outpouring of life narratives of vulnerability that interpret gendered experience. Consider, for example, the story of mourning after the death of a loved one, whether a partner or family member, what critics have called "thanatography." This generic form was widely employed to express grief and outrage about the situation of those who succumbed to HIV-AIDS, where it was often used to confront and counter social intolerance of homosexuals (including the linkage of gay sexuality to the culture of drug addicts). And certainly survivors have often written memoirs of those lost to them as a form of consolation and a memorial to the deceased.

Some recent examples mark new departures in using thanatography as a public form of gendered mourning, and two quite different examples suggest how it links up with other areas we have discussed. Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2006) begins with the sudden death, one night at dinner, of her husband of nearly 40 years, and chronicles her non-rational responses to the event, acts aimed at bringing him back or denying that his death really happened. The event is complicated by the sudden and ultimately fatal illness of their 38-year-old daughter Quintana, who requires extensive hospitalization. Didion's journal is written in a raw prose evoking her feelings of pain and rage, as the narrative seeks a frame for understanding this uncharted experience and what it makes of being a "partner" and "mother." Interweaving textual scraps from poets, psychologists, doctors, and etiquette advisors, Didion also theorizes her own process as a way to gain distance from it and affirm that she can continue as a writer, despite great loss. Her story refuses the comfort that writing such stories are supposed to discover, the notion that "scriptotherapy" is indeed healing. In her bleak assessment and insistence on the fragmentary nature of contemporary experience, Didion charts a new kind of vulnerability that can invade the certainties of intimate life.

Edwidge Danticat, the Haitian-American author of several novels, also published a memoir of mourning in 2007, *Brother, I'm Dying!* Danticat chooses to tell her story quite differently, as a generational memoir of how the recent decades of dictatorship and violence in Haiti registered on her family divided between a home ravaged by the Tonton Macoutes, brutal soldiers of the Duvalier regime, and immigrant life in New York, where her father, Mira, a salesman, was reduced to driving a cab. It focuses on the deaths of her father and his brother, her uncle Joseph, within months of each other. This framing of how lives in the family as linked or divergent situates the story of how she and one brother were left in Haiti when their parents and the younger children moved north, how they dealt with feelings of abandon-

ment through letter exchanges and negotiated their dangerous world. Danticat thus tells a profoundly relational story that connects the extended, diasporan family to centuries of national history and shows the intersections of the personal with national and transnational histories of colonial violence in the Americas.

While reviewers praised the "healing power" of this family story, with its use of memory to construct a family memoir, Danticat is, like Didion, less sanguine about the demise of her relatives and the transnational story of casual violence revealed in their deaths. Her uncle, who had lost his voice to a radical laryngectomy, left Haiti at 81 and was detained by US agents on arrival; he died a day later. Her father wasted away from pulmonary fibrosis. Both were buried in a remote New York cemetery, far from home. Although she is pregnant with new life in the family, it does not compensate for these indignities. In observing "I wish I knew that they were offering enough comfort to one another to allow them both not to remember their distressing, even excruciating, last hours and days," Danticat refuses the comfort that writing grief supposedly brings and underscores the vulnerability of refugees in these times.

MATERIAL LIVES

The body, in its senses and materiality, has been a central site for theorizing gender and subjectivity and for remembering the past and envisioning a future. Writers of many sorts who were positioned at the margins of discourse at various historical moments —women, slaves and colonized subjects, the dislocated and disabled— have used narratives of their experience to intervene in social arrangements and to seek amelioration of their condition. Many kinds of embodied narratives are being explored, particularly those of gay and transgendered subjects in narrative and performance. We will speak about shifts in the presentation of what Tom Couser has called the "some body memoir," the narrative that foregrounds the organs and desires of the literal body. We want to turn to a few particular kinds of life narrative that may not spring as readily to mind: the positioning of the body in activist disability narratives and the framing of materiality in food narratives.

The US is one of several nations in which social movements to address rights for the disabled have produced memoirs written by those with disabilities and impairment, people seemingly situated at the margins of mainstream culture. In many of these stories the authors have tended to portray themselves as victims, and disability as a personal illness or tragedy to be overcome by extraordinary effort. Arguments now being made by rights activists, however, suggest that if cultural conditions were changed, impaired individuals could be accommodated in society; further they insist that the social meaning of disability is stigmatizing and degrading of those with disabilities, and that discourses of "disability" reproduce able-ist norms that encode the differences of those with various forms and degrees of impairments as abnormative (Gerschick 1264). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson notes the analogical relationship of disability and gender as socially constituted axes of identity: "Disability, like femaleness, is not a natural state of corporeal inferior-

ity, inadequacy, excess, or a stroke of misfortune. Rather, disability is a culturally fabricated narrative of the body, similar to what we understand as the fictions of race and gender. The disability/ability system produces subjects by differentiating and marking bodies" (77).

The growing strength of the disability rights movement and the increasing sophistication of disability studies and theory are contexts through which recent memoirs experiment with alternative genres of the autobiographical that are explicitly in dialogue with the social terms of their narrators' identities as differently abled and the history of the social construction of abnormative bodies. Such dialogues can take the form of memoir and produce a kind of "writing back" to conventional victim narratives of wounded suffering, as they call for social change and enact or perform alternative subjectivities that claim, especially in the case of women, the possibility of a sexualized body outside the representations of disabled women as either desexualized or hypersexualized. In positioning themselves as disabled subjects who address the history of their marginalization, life narrators who focus on reframing their impairment not as disability, as stigmatized abnormality, but as visible difference, however, risk making a kind of side show or entertainment of themselves. Brief discussion of a few recent narratives suggests some of the stakes of writing a disabled life in both its vulnerability and its materiality.

In *Blind Rage: Letters to Helen Keller* (2006), Georgina Kleege engages with the narrative by the deaf and blind Keller, *The Story of My Life* (1903), written when Keller was 23 with the help of her teacher Anne Sullivan, as well as Keller's subsequent letters. Kleege, who has become nearly blind, troubles Keller's portrayal of the helpless, trusting female child and counterpoints it to her own experience of losing sight. Developing the concept of "blind rage" to signal her quarrel with the "plucky, chirpy self-reliance" expressed in Keller's narratives, she writes, "You set an impossible standard. You with your cheerfulness, your stiff upper lip, your valiant smile in the face of adversity" (190). In both critiquing Keller as "the first disability poster child" (192) and acknowledging the woman as a trailblazer who ironically cannot speak to her, Kleege stages an explicitly relational engagement with the disable other that challenges the disability paradigm of silent, valiant female suffering and suggests a new mode of dialogic intervention.

Similarly the recent memoirs of other disabled writers such as Anne Finger in *Elegy for a Disease: A Personal and Cultural History of Polio* (2006) take issue with their own positioning —as paralyzed in Finger's case— to focus on cultural conditions that have made it difficult for them to negotiate their lives. As Simi Linton asserts in *My Body Politic* (2005) forming collectivities in disability studies at this time enables people to refuse being identified as pathological or abject. They are enabled to refuse a marginal location as outsiders and to critique "how disability is represented in all kinds of texts —in literature, film, the annals of history" (Tuhus-Dubrow).

A focus on embodied materiality has also generated new kinds of memoirs, indeed new kinds of subjects, formerly relegated to the margins of life writing. A notable example is the widespread popularity of the food memoir as a way to tell stories of the family and the nation, of ethnic heritage and diasporan mixing. Although food has been a subject of narrative for as long as there have been cook-

books and eating diaries, the food memoir has become a mode of wide interest and enabled new narratives about production and consumption, a domestic domain formerly seen as the work of women or servants. "Gastrography" (Baena 105-16), as these memoirs are called, offers readers multiple kinds of pleasure and "food" for self-revision.

Some memoirs conjoin the food narrative with discovery of a vocation, such as adult food critic Ruth Reichl's *Tender at the Bone* and two subsequent memoirs, *Comfort Me with Apples* and *Garlic and Sapphires*. For Reichl, after growing up in a dysfunctional home in the 1950s, the pleasures of cooking, eating, and being recognized as an accomplished woman on her own terms are linked —literally, as with the tasty vegetarian casserole recipe of her days in a Berkeley commune. The relationality of Reichl's narrative is potentially a literal one: the reader, preparing the recipe, may "taste" Reichl's experience and share her remembered pleasure palpably. Thus the narrative grounds her —as former *New York Times* food reviewer and editor in chief of *Gourmet* magazine— in the authority of genuinely embodied experience. The food memoir, as a genre of food-laced memory for both readers and writers defining themselves through their culinary expertise, is also a genre in a gendered field. In the US as in much of Europe, the prominent chef is a powerful role usually the province of white males (from James Beard to Emeril Lagasse, Mario Batale, and Paul Prudhomme), and the upper echelons of chef-dom and reviewing still difficult for women to break into.

Increasingly, memoirs linking ethnicity and food have become a way to register difference and specify the coordinates of the writer's cultural identity, as is the case in the "soul food memoirs" of Nikki Giovanni in *Quilting the Black-Eyed Pea* (2002), where her grandmother's meatloaf becomes a way to tell the family's story over generations.[16] More globally food functions in our age of the internationalization of cuisine as a tangible means to evoke for readers the particularity of cultures they have not encountered, regions to which they have not traveled and may imagine only in negative stereotypes. *The Language of Baklava*, the recent first-person memoir of Diana Abu-Jaber, an Iranian in exile in Los Angeles, interweaves the pleasure of eating Persian food with other aspects of negotiating the family's lives as diasporan subjects.

While some narratives are assuredly gastrographies, others invoke food as both memory and metaphor, and suggest that readers may read *for* food, eating, hunger and the like as indices of shifts in subjectivity. The invocation of a particular food can serve multiple purposes: it can reference everyday materiality or be a lens through which identity is projected. It can be transubstantial, an object that is changed into something else in the course of the narrative. Characteristically these

[16] See also Vertamae Smart Grosvenor's *Vibration Cooking: Or Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl* as a narrative of the rise of an African American middle class. Stories of unsavory food and the scarcity of food, the specter of hunger, dominate many narratives. See, for instance, Marya Hornbacher's *Wasted*, a narrative of living with and trying to survive anorexia.

narratives may interweave close descriptions of the remembered pleasures of eating food with the politics of food —hunger and scarcity as a sign of class or economic positioning, particular diets as indicative of colonial regimes. The rise of gastrography may indeed signal the rise of a privileged, radically personal form of memoir, in which "you are what you eat," with its provocative suggestion that the subjectivity of another can be reproduced and tasted.[17]

CONCLUSION

What does it mean to raise issues of gendered difference and representations of gendered experience in the first decade of the 21st century? We have suggested some of the ways that early 21st century memoirs and witness narratives by women are contributing a shift in the terms of gendered representation and gender relations. We conclude by raising some questions for further inquiry.

– How does gender intersect with multiple axes of difference to produce, inform, contest, and transform transnational identities and relations? And how does the transnational feminist subject address the asymmetries of access and power among women, as well as between men and women, amid global circuits, institutions, and processes? What genres of the autobiographical might encompass and embody new transnational formations?
– How is the articulation of gendered relationships in visual/verbal media a new formation? In graphic memoir, for example, gender is marked visually in the avatar but gender itself may be destabilized through the narrative. If the different media of self-representation register gender distinctly, then the dissonances of codes of intelligibility and social meaning may be productively multiplied.
– How is the theorization of gender impacted by the technological shift to a virtual environment where new notions of the social as digital networks and the subject as layered, fluid, and interactive emerge in a context also characterized by constant surveillance, rampant commodification, and social paranoia? When subjects become avatars in such on-line venues as SecondLife, or when they consolidate as a multiplicity through life-streaming sites or are refracted through the more eclective tumblelogs, how might we theorize digital masculinity and virtual femininity? How are gendered representations differently negotiated in digital environments?

[17] We can imagine an engaging pedagogical exercise in which students are invited to write a brief food autobiography or to keep a food diary as an opening to discussions about food, culture, and the gendered body: eating disorders and the politics of fat; genetic modification of food and its impact on children; famine and scarcity in the developing world; and the gendering, in the home and professionally, of food labor.

– What are the new narrations of the citizen and the nation in late modernity to emerge from locations around the globe, whether the narrating "I" is a prominent public figure, a refugee, or a diasporan subject of post-immigrant generational return?
– How do we track the femininization of subjects of witness in the circuits of human rights activism, discourse, and protocols? And how do we access the ethical force of feminized subject positions as people give an account of themselves? How is vulnerability negotiated outside the framework of victimization, as in the many testimonials and memoirs where positions of passivity and victimhood are refused and redefined in ways that pose possibilities for accountability and agency? What re-conceptualizations of trauma, memory and mourning are becoming visible at this historical moment through narratives by women?
– How are gender and sexuality materialized in relation to the textualized body? And what does it mean to rethink the materiality and meaning of women's bodies in specific arenas, such as food or the environment?

The globalization of feminisms has brought the perhaps inevitable commodification of its venues of circulation and of women's life writing (with all the constraints attending that commodification). But that very commodification of feminism and the stories that ground and energize its circulation has linked women and women's stories with mass audiences in ways that prompt and circulate new relations and new knowledge. New genres of women's life storytelling, coming from dispersed global locations, from differently situated subjects, and through old and new media help us meet what Ella Shohat has described as "[t]he challenge... to produce knowledge within a kaleidoscopic framework of communities-in-relation without ever suggesting that all positionings are identical" (Shohat, *Taboo* 3). It is the inherent relationality of personal narration that is so promising for feminisms in situ and in communication as women enact and position themselves as subjects of contested histories. Shohat asks: "What kind of relational maps of knowledge would help illuminate the negotiation of gender and sexuality as understood in diverse contexts, but with an emphasis on the linked historical experiences and discursive networks across borders? (Shohat, "Area" 70). Feminisms continue to be energized by acts of personal narration that theorize the contested grounds of experience and identity.

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THE PERSONAL ESSAY AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A GENDER AND GENRE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The personal essay as autobiography is the generic landscape I will traverse along these lines. Within that field, I do a gender-oriented comparative analysis of four books that can be read as autobiography, although they really are written as personal essays, a genre of life writing described as "a self-trying-out; a testing of one's own intellectual, emotional, and psychological responses to a given topic." I explore recent hybrid autobiographical volumes written by Spanish Rosa Montero (*La loca de la casa*), Canadian Margaret Atwood (*Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*), Mexican-American Richard Rodriguez (*Brown: The Last Discovery of America*) and European-born, Jewish-American George Steiner (*Errata: An Examined Life*). Bringing into my trans-national analysis the works of two men and two women allows me to do a reliable comparative reading of a number of genre/gender oriented issues.

KEY WORDS: Personal essay, life-writing, autobiography, women's writing, gender studies, Rosa Montero, Margaret Atwood, Richard Rodriguez, George Steiner.

RESUMEN

El ensayo personal como autobiografía es el paisaje genérico que recorreré en estas líneas. En concreto, me propongo hacer un análisis comparativo de cuatro libros que pueden leerse como las autobiografías de sus autores, aunque están escritos como ensayo, incorporando en mi análisis aspectos doblemente genéricos (tanto de género literario como de género sexual). El "ensayo personal" es un género autobiográfico descrito como "un ponerse a prueba a uno mismo"; como "un testado de nuestras respuestas intelectuales, emocionales y psicológicas ante ciertos temas. Exploro, entonces, volúmenes recientemente publicados por la escritora española Rosa Montero (*La loca de la casa*), la canadiense Margaret Atwood (*Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*), el mexicano-americano Richard Rodriguez (*Brown: The Last Discovery of America*) y el judío George Steiner (*Errata: An Examined Life*). El incorporar a mi recorrido transnacional las obras de dos hombres y de dos mujeres me permite hacer un fundamentado estudio comparativo de algunos temas relacionados tanto con los géneros literarios como con el género sexual.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ensayo personal, escritura autobiográfica, autobiografía, escritura de mujeres, estudios de género, Rosa Montero, Margaret Atwood, Richard Rodriguez, George Steiner.

> Almost all essays begin with a capital I —"I think," "I feel"— and when you have said that, it is clear that you are not writing history or philosophy or biography or anything but an essay, which may be brilliant or profound, which may deal with the immortality of the soul, or the rheumatism in your left shoulder, but it is *primarily an expression of personal opinion*.
>
> Virginia WOOLF, "The Decay of Essay Writing."

In 1988 I began to do research for my doctoral dissertation on "Female Versions of Autobiography" and my point of departure was, as could not have been otherwise over twenty years ago, Estelle Jelinek's pioneering volume *Women's Autobiography*. In some ways, Jelinek's introductory essay "Women's Autobiography and the Male Tradition" was the female-written, gender-oriented counterpart to Philippe Lejeune's universalistic essay "The Autobiographical Pact." If Lejeune established some conventions and norms that every text accepted under the rubric of "autobiography" had to comply with,[1] Jelinek's ground-breaking essay also listed some thematic, formal, stylistic and identitarian characteristics that could be verified in most women's autobiographies —in contrast to men's. Thus, according to Jelinek, women's autobiographies emphasized to a much lesser extent the public aspect of their lives, the affairs of the world or even their careers, and concentrated instead on their personal lives —domestic details, family difficulties and people who influenced them. On the other hand, while men, Jelinek proposed, tended to idealize their lives or cast them into heroic moulds, or tended to project a self-image of confidence, women's self-image was projected in a variety of forms of understatement. Finally, while men shaped their life-stories into coherent, chronological and linear narratives, irregularity, fragmentation, disconnectedness and lack of linear chronology informed self-portraits by women. These forms, Jelinek contended, were analogous to the fragmented, interrupted, and formless nature of women's lives.

Ten years after Jelinek's essay was published I was already contesting it in my study of the autobiographies of Mary McCarthy, Gertrude Stein, Maxine Hong Kingston and Lillian Hellman. Of course, dozens of monographs and volumes published in the past twenty-five years about women's life-writing have shown how all the features once claimed as hallmarks of women's autobiography can be challenged as gender essentialism from within feminist theory. It is interesting, then, that almost thirty years after Jelinek's essay we are invited to keep re-considering "Life Writing and Gender," even if in our supposedly post-feminist era we have critically assimilated that the new geography of identity insists that we think about

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[1] Lejeune's well-known definition from the 1970s of "pure" autobiography: "Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality." It has to elicit what Lejeune calls the "autobiographical pact," whereby the reader "agrees" that the protagonist represents the author because he/she bears the same name as the author —a name that can be "certified" as referring to the real person it is known to represent.

men and women writers in relation to a fluid matrix that has substituted the outworn male/female binary. Given the case, however, it is clear that the debate around "genre and gender" is all but closed in the field of autobiography studies; it is clear too that this is not a static conversation but one that can and must be revisited and revised. Because the new subgenres that have attracted critical attention —autoethnography, autopathography, autothanatography, biomythography, postcolonial autobiography, disability, survivor, trauma autobiography, and other kinds of scriptotherapy, homosexual autobiography, immigrant and intercultural autobiography; academic autobiography, performative autobiography, to name but a few[2]— claim so much for theoretically generic approaches, as they do for gender-focused critical analyses within the specific subgenre.

"The personal essay as autobiography" is, thus, the generic landscape that occupies these pages. Within that field, I will be doing a gender-oriented comparative analysis of four books that can be read as compilations of essays on specific literary and cultural issues that at some point "get personal," to use Nancy K. Miller's expression, but also as "Personal Essays," a genre of life narrative "that is literally a self-trying-out; a testing of one's own intellectual, emotional, and psychological responses to a given topic" (Smith and Watson 200). As Smith and Watson put it, "since its development by Montaigne as a form of self-exploration engaging received wisdom, the personal essay has been a site of self-creation through giving one's perspective on the thoughts of others" (200). I shall come back to generic issues in the folds of this essay.

I belong to that side of feminism that believes that men also have a gender, which explains why I have opted for the four books that constitute my textual corpus. If I wanted to do a comparative gender approach, my corpus had to be of at least four authors; two men and two women. Moreover, if the subgenre under scrutiny is a hybrid form between autobiography and cultural essay (mixing different tones and "voices": the confessional, the locational, the academic, the scholarly, the political, the religious, the prophetic, the narrative, the argumentative, the anecdotal, the conversational), I wanted my map of analysis to also be as mixed, open and comprehensive as possible, and not to reduce it to the Anglo-American sphere. Finally, chronological vicinity is important in comparative approaches, in order to reach sound conclusions. So, my four texts belong to the closing decade of the twentieth century, in order to be able to establish some possible "generational tendencies" within the writing of personal essay.

Thus, I will be exploring recent hybrid autobiographical volumes written by Rosa Montero (*La loca de la casa*),[3] Margaret Atwood (*Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*),[4] Richard Rodriguez (*Brown: The Last Discovery of America*)[5]

[2] For definitions of these terms, see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson.

[3] All the translations of this book from Spanish into English are my own. Future references to this book will appear in the body of the text with the initials "LLC."

[4] Future references to this book will appear in the body of the text with the initials "ND."

[5] Future references to this book will appear in the body of the text with the initial "B."

and George Steiner (*Errata: An Examined Life*).[6] These texts were produced in very different parts of the world but within a time span of only six years (1997-2003); moreover, their authors are well-known, award-winning, established best-selling writers in their own countries, but they are also internationally renowned (especially George Steiner as a critic and Margaret Atwood as a novelist). But, apparently, those are the only bridges one could build between them. Thus, any attempt at doing a joint analysis of such a textual corpus is a risky adventure, for we are here mixing gender and sexuality (male, female, homosexual), race and ethnicity (white and coloured), religion (Catholic, Jewish, Protestant), as well as national cultures.

Rosa Montero is a Spanish novelist, a journalist and a biographer acclaimed for many novels —*Beloved Master,* and *The Cannibal's Daughter* among others; Margaret Atwood is a Canadian poet, novelist, and literary critic best known for some of her novels —*Surfacing, The Edible Woman, Lady Oracle*, and many more; Richard Rodriguez is a gay, Mexican-American (arguably Chicano) writer and journalist, best known for his (in)famous controversial autobiography *Hunger of Memory*; George Steiner is a European-born, Jewish-American literary and cultural critic, essayist, philosopher, translator, novelist and academic whose critical work on the relationship between language, literature and society (*Language and Silence, In Bluebeard's Castle*, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*) has become landmarks of twentieth-century humanism. Normally, these four authors would be studied in different groupings: "women's autobiography," "Chicano autobiography," "gay autobiography," "Jewish memoirs," "Hispanic life-writing" could be some of the possible critical boxes. As Shirley Neuman has pointed out, the simultaneous appropriations of and challenges to the dominant humanist and poststructuralist theories of autobiography have led to a plethora of poetics of the genre, which all seek to describe how particular identity groups function in the discursive creation of the 'self' in autobiographies/memoirs by women, ethnic or religious minorities, homosexuals and so forth. The problem with these theories of group identity is that they are constructed around a very specific and monologic category, and therefore tend to be reductive in that they engage in an "essentialism of otherhood," and in that they do not consider differences within hegemonic or non-hegemonic identity.

There is, of course, an ethnic and a national identity, just as there is a gender identity, as writers and thinkers have proclaimed for many millennia. Is literature an expression of national, racial, sexual and gender identity? Of course it is, but with some nuances, and this is what we seem to forget: that autobiographers have a gender, a sexual inclination and an ethnic or national origin, but they also have a social class, a specific *zeitgeist*, a cultural training, a profession, a psychic mood, a generation and an existential atmosphere that shape their identities as individuals and create links with other individuals across and beyond the boundaries of gender, race and nationality. Such a new geography of identity demands that

[6] Future references to this book will appear in the body of the text with the initial "E."

we think about writers in relation to a fluid matrix instead of man/woman, white/colored or gay/straight binary oppositions.

As Rosa Montero explains in one of her chapters,

> I probably have a lot more in common with a Spanish man of my age, born in a large city, than with a black South-African woman of eighty who has lived under the apartheid. Because the things that separate us are many more than those that link us (LLC 171).[7]

So, I am deliberately going to depart from some of the enclosed territories that some literary studies have created of late. Of course, I could "get personal" and justify what could be judged as an eclectic and arbitrary selection, on the grounds that these four books have affected my ways of looking at autobiography in a very deep manner —both as a teacher of autobiography and as a critic; they have ratified my natural tendency towards a transnational appreciation of literature and a de-ghettoized classification of authors and genres. But, there is much more to it. These four books belong to that very open and comprehensive "genre" situated at the crossroads between intellectual life-writing, the autobiographical or personal essay, personal criticism and scholarly memoir. All four authors share a version of life-writing as "odysseys of a mind." That is, their hybrid texts deal not so much with an eventful life, but with the life/development/progression of the mind; of their thoughts and ideas; of their writing and that of others; of their cultural and intellectual influences; of their sense of identity; of their ideological views and opinions. Thus, their radiography of a mind becomes, by extension, that of a cultural landscape.

I would argue that these books do not join in the ever-growing list of scholarly or "academic autobiographies," if only because their authors (except for George Steiner) are not academics in the proper sense of the word (they do not teach on a regular basis at an academic institution). So-called academic memoirs focusing on issues of the academy written by academics with influential scholarship have been read as new approaches to the discourse of intellectual history and culture in our age, but also as the substitute for the fairly exhausted genre of the academic novel.[8] According to Eric Leushner the last two decades have witnessed the blooming of a genre that is making headway in supplanting the academic novel in terms of being a window into the academic's office. In fact, feminist critic Nancy K. Miller begins her own academic memoir *But Enough about Me* by aligning the vogue in academic

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[7] "Lo más probable es que yo tenga mucho más que ver con un autor español, varón, de mi misma edad y nacido en una gran ciudad, que con una escritora negra, sudafricana y de ochenta años que haya vivido el *apartheid*. Porque las cosas que nos separan son muchas más que las que nos unen."

[8] See, among many, Elaine Showalter (*Faculty Towers)*, Nancy K. Miller (*But Enough about Me)*, Paul Fussell (*Doing Battle*), Frank Kermode (*Not Entitled),* Terry Eagleton (*The Gate Keeper*), Edward Said (*Out of Place), Alice Kaplan (French Lessons*), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (*A Dialogue on Love*) or Shirley Geok-Lin (*Among the White Moon Faces*).

memoir, noting some of its other names, such as "autocritography" and "new belletrism." These autobiographies, Miller points out, appeal at "the desire to read about someone like oneself, someone else who has experienced graduate school, the job market, departmental and university politics, the conference scene, teaching, tenure, and post-tenure, although perhaps someone who is unlike oneself, tenured or launched into the galaxy."[9]

These books of essays are not, however, clear cases of "Autocriticism" either. In autobiography studies this term has recently been used to refer to autobiographies written as theory; that is, to autobiographical narratives which arise from, or speak to, the theoretical foci of cultural studies (literature, feminism, queer theory, psychoanalysis, aesthetics, postcolonial studies, trauma studies, etc.). Autocriticism would include those autobiographies which are in themselves of theoretical import to the discipline, or which develop insights into the theory they frame or from which they arise. Although Montero's and Atwood's books would partake of some of these characteristics, three of my four authors are just writers, and only Steiner is a scholar and a literary theorist. So, whatever theoretical notions may have wandered into their books, they have entered them by the usual writerly methods, which, as Atwood puts it, "resemble the ways of the jackdaw: we steal the shiny bits, and build them into the structures of our own disorderly nests" (ND xix).

Nor are we here discussing obvious instances of what Nancy Miller herself terms "personal criticism"; that type of criticism that entails an explicitly autobiographical performance within the act of criticism, or self-narrative woven into critical argument. Because, according to her definition, personal criticism, more often than not, includes self-representation *as political representativity* (the critic gets personal with the intention of "speaking as a" or "speaking for"); it is often located in a specific voice marked by gender, color, and national origin (the personal is the political); and, finally, one could argue with Miller that the efflorescence of personal criticism has to do in part with the gradual waning of enthusiasm for a mode of theory whose authority depended on the evacuation of the very social subjects producing it (the personal is the theoretical). In such cases of personal criticism, the self-figuration, or self-disclosure functions as a kind of internal signature or authorial autograph. In my case here, Montero, Atwood, Rodriguez and Steiner do not do cultural criticism with a personal voice that becomes representative,[10] nor are they intentio-

[9] In his review of Elaine Showalter's book *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents* (2005), Eric Leuschner even categorizes four types of Academic Memoir, roughly corresponding to the academic career: 1) the type of life history as told from the retrospective vantage of post-tenure or retirement, where the academic longs for a past time before the university became corporatized or theorized; 2) those which are essentially childhood memoirs; a *bildungsroman* structured around the making of the academic celebrity; 3) the third type focuses on the day-to-day life of an academic; and 4) the fourth type of memoir recounts the academic career that didn't make it.

[10] In fact, not only here, but in his previous autobiographies, Rodriguez makes constant claims to the uniqueness of his voice; to the fact that he does not speak as a Mexican-American:

nally creating new theoretical postures, even as they are not just leaving a personal imprint in what is first of all a critical essay. Instead, the "subjects" whose names appear on the book cover (Atwood, Montero, Rodriguez and Steiner) create certain "personae" that wander through specific literary, cultural and ideological terrains of the past and the present, always making reference to a "self" that informs the argumentative, narrative, descriptive, philosophical, informative or even emotional routes that they have decided to follow.[11] In other words, they are *using* the essay mode to explore their inner selves —as individual men or women; as writers; as intellectuals; as cultural critics; as prophets; as public commentators; as autobiographers.

Having clarified that these four books are renovated versions of the classical personal essay, we now must turn to what Montaigne, the inventor of the genre, and Virginia Woolf, one of his most fervent followers, have taught men and women essayists since the sixteenth century. In spite of the publication of essayists as influential as Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau or Florence Nightingale, the essay was understood up to practically the twentieth century as an exclusively masculine genre. The double inheritance of the informal, personal essay of Montaigne (1580-88), together with Francis Bacon's more rational essays (1612, 1625) would only be extended years later when William Hazlitt opened up the mythical area of both literary giants, signalling Addison and Steele as their heirs. The essay in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with its pragmatic and empiric approach in the Anglo-Saxon world, would keep pointing at a humanistic universe in which women had no room of their own and probably no room whatsoever.

However, Virginia Woolf came along and took over, and, in spite of the fact that most of her essays were scattered and neglected during her lifetime, feminism has declared her *the* quintessential woman essayist. So that if the essay had been until her lifetime a masculine genre, feminist criticism has considered it, since Woolf, the ideal vehicle for women's personal expression. As Rachel Bowlby puts it, "it is as though the thorough masculinization of the tradition of essay-writing, as opposed to the tradition of novel-writing, would then give all the more force to Woolf's own takeover of the genre for unfemininely feminist concerns" (Woolf xxvi). As a matter of fact, women activists have always called for a written form that would resemble spoken language; a form that would invite communication, connection, dialogue; a form, in sum, that would be a direct, comprehensive and vehement form of discourse that would celebrate the use of personal voice and be flexible to adapt to different forms and styles. And that is, precisely, what the personal essay is. It has

"Mistaken, the gullible reader will take it that I intend to model my life as a typical Hispanic-American life. But I write of one life only. My own" (7).

[11] Barry N. Olshen proposes three terms in theoretical approaches to autobiography: "subject" (a center of awareness; what would have been called 'autobiographer' in a more confident age); "persona" (the autobiographical ego, the textual signifier or literary subject, entirely constituted by discourse); and "self" (a kind of subjective structure maintaining the subject's sense of his/her own identity, and his/her sense of unique, persistent, cohesive being).

been said that the essay fixes its attention on a very small spectrum of subjects, on details; or, according to Adorno, that the essay is constructed as a network of interconnections rather than as a straight line of causes and consequences. Essays emphasize process, rather than results; they are mimetic: they are the expression of the author's experience. It then follows that the essay is the perfect means of expression for women's and feminist projects.

All this, however, remains somewhat moot, because to define the essay has been the ambition of many men and women of letters, from Lukács up to Adorno, through Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley's well-known definition of the essay: "a literary device for saying almost everything about anything." Huxley, however, proceeds to give a very accurate guidance on the subject, because "a collection of essays" (which is what we are discussing in these pages) "can cover almost as much ground, and cover it almost as thoroughly, as can a long novel." Huxley presents the three-poled frame of reference in which most collections of essays fall: the pole of the personal and the autobiographical; the pole of the objective, the factual, the concrete-particular; and the pole of the abstract-universal. Most essayists, Huxley continues, "are at home and at their best in the neighbourhood of only one of the essay's three poles." There are the predominantly personal essayists, who write fragments of reflective autobiography and who look at the world through the keyhole of anecdote and description; there are the predominantly objective essayists who do not speak directly of themselves, but turn their attention outward to some literary or scientific or political theme, and, to Huxley, the most richly satisfying essays are those which "make the best of all the three worlds" in which it is possible for the essay to exist (v-vi). We shall return to these three poles later.

And what did Virginia Woolf have to say about essay-writing and about her master, Montaigne? After declaring that only Montaigne's essays are "*an attempt to communicate a soul*," she proclaims that "this taking of oneself, following one's own vagaries, giving the whole map, light, color, and circumference of the *soul* in its confusion, its variety, its imperfection" —this art belongs to one man only: Montaigne (Woolf, 56). Decades before any theories of autobiography and of self-writing had appeared, Woolf was very clear in her belief that "We can never doubt for an instant" that a book of essays (in Montaigne's case on issues as diverse as books, cruelty, death, glory, desires, honor, affection, fear, philosophy, imagination, teaching, pleasures, crying, solitude, sleeping, vanity, smells, age, praying, intoxication, love, lying, laziness, cowardice, Seneca, Raymund Sabunde, and so on) —that book "was himself" (Woolf 57).

It is not surprising, then, that in "The Decay of Essay Writing" Woolf states that the essay as a form practised by the French genius is in decay, because it has become too egoistical: "The essay, then, owes its popularity to the fact that its proper use is to express one's personal peculiarities, so that under the decent veil of print one can indulge one's egoism to the full. You need know nothing of music, art, or literature to have a certain interest in their productions, and the great burden of modern criticism is simply the expression of such individual likes and dislikes" (Woolf 7). If such essayists, she believes, stopped writing about "the great mysteries of art and literature" and wrote instead about "that single book to which they alone

have the key" (that is: their field of personal expertise), they "would write of themselves —such writing would have its own permanent value" (Woolf 7).

Thus, it seems clear that both my women authors are direct literary daughters (as essayists) of Virginia Woolf, in so far as their books "are themselves" while they write "about that single book to which they alone have the key": Montero and Atwood, as Woolf the essayist at her best, write about themselves while writing about literature and (partly) about women and feminism, the two most celebrated and acknowledged topics of Woolf's essays. Similarly, it is clear that both my men authors are the sons (as essayists) of Montaigne, since their books are also themselves, in so far as, while writing about a broader variety of subjects than their female counterparts (besides literature), their essays are an attempt to "communicate a soul" —understood as an intellectual, emotional, and ideological trajectory.

Going back to Huxley's "poles," I would argue that regardless of the amplitude or the more reduced nature of their topic, and regardless of their gender, my four authors "make the best of all the three worlds." As we shall see, their collections of essays are as private and emotional in chapters focusing on personal "anecdote and description" (first pole), as they are objective in the scrutiny of other authors' literature and thoughts (second pole). We could even argue that both the men and women I consider here become "*abstract-universal*" (third pole) in some sections of their literary, religious, historical or ideological argumentation.

1. MOTIVATIONS

We are now ready to broach the first "gender and genre" issue. Why do men and women write personal essay and not pure, classical autobiography? Or put another way: do men and women choose the essay form for different reasons? The answer to the second question would be a definitive "no": there is no difference in men's and women's motivations for choosing the essay form. I shall outline some of these motivations, but let us first give a brief description of each of the four books, always bearing in mind that, although we can catalogue them as "personal essays," all four celebrate the complete freedom of subject and narrative. They are all "brown" books, to use Rodriguez's metaphor, in that they are "mixed, confused, lumped, impure, unpasteurized, as motives are mixed, and the fluids of generation are mixed and emotions are unclear" (*B* 197); they are books that "extol impurity," that eulogize the constant use of allusion, irony, paradox "—ha!-pleasure" (*B* xi). And pleasure is what a book of essays should give, according to Woolf's view of "The Modern Essay": "The principle which controls [the essay] is simply that it should give *pleasure*... Everything in an essay must be subdued to that end... The essay must lap us about and *draw its curtain across the world*" (Woolf 40).

Atwood's and Montero's volumes belong to the tradition of books written by novelists about the writer's profession, a tradition that has been very fruitful in the Anglo-Saxon letters, from Henry James to David Lodge to name but a few eminent examples. Likewise, Hispanic letters offer examples, from Baroja and Ortega to the essays of Torrente Ballester and Vargas Llosa. So, these two women writer's

books belong to that lucid self-reflexive tradition, to which they add a new freshness and passion in their very personal and subjective revelation of the mysteries of literature even as they are exploring their own personal mysteries.

Atwood's *Negotiating with the Dead* consists of an introductory chapter, followed by six titled chapters that begin with an abstract noun written in italics (*Orientation, Duplicity, Dedication, Temptation, Communion, Descent*). The chapters are followed by notes[12], a bibliography, acknowledgements and an index. The book follows the formal strictures of an academic publishing, since it grew out of the series of Empsom lectures that Atwood gave at the University of Cambridge in 2000. Montero's book, by contrast, was written as a book, and the essays that compose it are nineteen untitled chapters. Moreover, it concludes with a "Post-scriptum" that affirms that everything said in her volume about other people is true; that is, that it corresponds to documented verifiable truth. However, she cannot say the same of the narrative parts that concern her own life, since "all autobiography is fiction and all fiction is autobiographic, as Barthes used to say"[13] (*LLC* 273). This quotation itself makes it clear that Montero is not trying to be rigorously "academic"; that is, she does not feel compelled to provide sources of her references, in a bibliography or in footnotes. Conceptually a more "postmodern" version of the personal essay, or of autobiography, she describes her own book as "mestizo" (*LLC* 180), as a deliberate blurring of genres.

Turning our attention now to the two men's volumes, Rodriguez resembles Atwood's in the sense that it also consists of a short number of titled chapters ("The Triad of Alexis Tocqueville," "In the Brown Study, the Prince and I," "Poor Richard," "Hispanic," "The Third Man," "Dreams of a Temperate People," "Gone West," "Peter's Avocado") which provide an initial idea of the topic dealt with in each chapter; Steiner, on the other hand, opts for untitled numbered chapters, but his book, more academically conceived, also provides a thematic index.

So, why the personal essay form? Two of our writers give us very specific answers that explain their choice, but these answers could be ascribed to all four of them. The reason is no other than that given by Henry Adams, a master of the autobiographical genre, in *The Education of Henry Adams*: distance. All four authors seek the same objectifying distance as Adams, even though their essays are written in the first person singular.

In the last chapter of *La loca de la casa*, Rosa Montero tells us a story —one of her many narrative digressions— that novelist J.M. Fajardo told her, and that he himself had heard from another writer, Cristina Fernández Cubas about a cloistered nun and a woman who lived opposite the nun's convent, in the third floor of an apartment building. Julia, the woman, used to buy homemade cakes from the

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[12] As many as 227 notes —not many doctoral dissertations have such number of notes. Moreover, some of the notes are of the "for more on this subject, see..." type, which gives the essays an even more academic appearance. But just an appearance.

[13] "Toda autobiografía es ficcional y toda ficción autobiográfica, como decía Barthes."

nuns every Sunday, so that she became friendly with the porter nun, although, of course, she never saw her face. Thirty years went by and one afternoon Julia's doorbell rang. It was the porter nun, the visitor announced with a voice that sounded very familiar. "I'd like to ask you a favor," said the nun. "Could I sneak a look from your balcony?" A very astonished Julia walked the aged nun to the balcony, came out with her, and both women stood there, several minutes, staring at the convent. "Beautiful, isn't it?" said the nun; after which she went back to her convent, probably not to abandon it ever again (*LLC* 269-70).

This story may serve to explain the largest voyage a human being can embark on; but, for Rosa Montero, it is the perfect symbol for what happens when one writes novels —and, I would add, when one writes autobiography. Writing a novel or any kind of autobiographical text implies daring to go on that phenomenal path that distances you from yourself and allows you to observe yourself at the end of the trip from a balcony, "in the convent, in the world, in the whole." And, once one has done this supreme effort of self-understanding, once one has touched for an instant the vision that both completes us and strikes us like lightning, "we unwillingly return to our cell, to our enclosed individuality, and we try to accept our own death" (*LLC* 271).[14]

Distance, then, is partly achieved through the use of symbols or representational synecdoche. It is as if, wishing to contradict Lejeune's "autobiographical pact," these twenty-first-century post-postmodern writers deliberately dismantled the command that there must be an identification between author and narrator. As Montero stresses again and again, "to reach the largest distance possible between you and what you tell is the wisest position for a writer to adopt." The writer must assume that what he narrates only "represents" him or her as a human being, in a deeply symbolic manner,[15] "but all of that has nothing to do with the anecdotes of your little life" (*LLC* 267).[16] That is a second key to their motivation in choosing the essay form: following in the tradition of Montaigne, my four writers do not wish to be confessional or testimonial, nor are they interested in seeking the events of their "little li[ves]." They are interested in exploring what *represents* them; be it specific writers and writing in general, or religion, or the "last discovery of America," or music, or hotels, or sex, or love, or an invented twin sister... "The noise of one's own life always tampers with oneself. This is why one must take a distance"[17], says Montero (LLC 268). And, Richard Rodriguez, in the preface to his book, explains why *Brown* completes a trilogy: "I believe it is possible to describe a single life thrice, if from

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[14] "Regresamos renqueantes a nuestra celda, al encierro de nuestra estrecha individualidad, e intentamos resignarnos a morir."

[15] Which is what James Olney also said over thirty years ago, if more theoretically oriented.

[16] "Alcanzar la distancia exacta con lo que cuentas es la mayor sabiduría de un escritor; tienes que conseguir que lo que narras te represente... pero todo eso no debe tener nada que ver con lo anecdótico de tu pequeña vida."

[17] "El ruido de la propia vida siempre entorpece. Por eso hay que alejarse."

three isolations: *Class. Ethnicity. Race* (*B* xiv). Because those are the issues that symbolize or "represent" him as a human being —note that there is not, yet, a volume dedicated to sex or sexual orientation as an identity mark, though he has been invited several times to write a "gay autobiography."

I would finally suggest a third motivation, besides distance and representation. And it has to do with autobiography and ethics. In his book *The Ethics of Life Writing*, and in several of his articles preceding that book, Paul John Eakin explains how life writing, in the information age, has meant the transmission of more and more personal information, often quite intimate, with less and less restraint. At the same time, he identifies three primary "transgressions" for which self-narrators have been called to account: "(1) misrepresentation of biographical and historical truth; (2) infringement of the right to privacy; and (3) failure to display normative models of personhood." Telling the truth, respecting privacy, and "displaying normalcy" (whatever "normalcy" means), all signal and underwrite "the prerequisites in our culture for being a person, for having and telling a life story." If narrative is indeed an identity content, Eakin proceeds to suggest, "then the regulation of narrative carries the possibility of the regulation of identity —a disquieting proposition to contemplate in the context of our culture of individualism" ("Breaking" 113-114).

If that is the present situation, it seems that my women and men essayists have decided to avoid problems vis-à-vis the ethics of life writing, and have chosen different paths where they can feel free from having their identity "regulated." Montero, for example, openly plays and puns with transgression number one, "misrepresentation of biographical and historical truth," and not only in the "Postscriptum" mentioned above, but also in several other instances. Chapter 8 of *La loca de la casa* is devoted to the narration of an (apparently) autobiographical event of her childhood. When she and her twin sister Martina were eight years old, Martina disappeared one day while they were playing in the street, and was missing for three days. When she reappeared, no one gave Rosa any explanations; and the mystery of that disappearance has remained silenced and obscured to this day. Moreover, Montero mentions Martina several other times in different chapters, basically to point out the differences between what Kate Chopin would call the "mother woman" (Martina) and the "artist woman" (Rosa Montero herself).[18] So, when the reader has naively assumed that Martina exists and that Rosa Montero the author ("subject") has a twin sister, we read that Martina *may be* the fictional sister of the fictional "persona" Rosa: "let us suppose for a moment that I have lied and that I have no sister whatsoever" (*LLC* 266). In a a clear breaching of the autobiographical pact with the reader, Montero hints that she *may have invented* the whole incident of the mysterious disappearance. At that point in the book this reader felt tempted to become a truth-searcher and discover if Rosa Montero really has a twin sister called Martina. But I gave up immediately, when I read:

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[18] See Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*.

> Well, even if that were the case, that chapter about my sister's absence and the family silence surrounding it would be the most important for me in this entire book, the most revealing, the one that would have informed me of the existence of other abyss-like silences in my childhood; quieted holes that I know do exist, but that would have been out of reach had I relied only in my real memories; since real memories aren't totally reliable anyway (*LLC* 266).[19]

No theoretician of autobiography could have put it more eloquently: sometimes our imagined fictions are more real than autobiographical "truth."

Second transgression: "infringement of the right to privacy." After Lejeune and Elizabeth Bruss,[20] it must be assumed that if one writes a traditional autobiography, the autobiographical pact grants the reader the right to expect the truth and nothing but the truth, even if that truth may interfere both with the author's and with the others' right to privacy. Richard Rodriguez knows this very well, for after the publication of *Hunger of Memory* he was attacked on at least two sides: Chicano critics disavowed the book because its author did not comply with the agenda of Chicano politics, and gay critics disavowed it because Rodriguez did not use its pages to come out of the closet.[21] But this is not new: many essays have been written on *The Education of Henry Adams*, to give but one example, expressing the critic's surprise if not disappointment at Adam's omission of some twenty years of his life from his narrative.[22] So, the question is: does a writer have the right to choose what he or she wishes to keep private, or do readers and critics have the right to demand that an autobiographer discuss aspects of his or her life that hold special interests for them? The personal essay mode solves the problem: one writes of what one chooses to write and there is no Lejeune pact involved and no "ethical betrayal" (Eakin, *Ethics* 10). There are no autobiographical obligations imposed on the writer and no expectations from the reader. Rosa Montero is very aware of this when she says:

> It's not easy to let the crazed woman in the house run freely... one's *daimon* may feel jammed for fear of what your relatives may think or feel when they read you. Mothers, fathers, wives and husbands, children, often impose, if unwillingly, some sort of anxiety, some censure on one's reveries... The author must come out of himself and examine his own reality from afar, with meticulous detachment. Be-

[19] "Pues bien, aún así, ese capítulo de la ausencia de mi hermana y del silencio familiar sería el más importante para mí de todo este libro, el que más me habría enseñado, informándome de la existencia de otros silencios abismales en mi infancia, callados agujeros que sé que están ahí pero a los que no habría conseguido acceder con mis recuerdos reales, los cuales, por otra parte, tampoco son del todo fiables."

[20] Bruss, Elizabeth, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1976).

[21] In his book *Gay Lives*, Paul Robinson laments not having been able to include Rodriguez's autobiography, and he asserts that, because Rodriguez is gay, he "owes us a gay autobiography" (403).

[22] The period in which his marriage ends with his wife's suicide. In fact, all sorts of psychological, social and narratological theories have been provided to explain that omission.

> cause he does not write so that the others understand his position in the world, but to try and understand himself (*LLC* 268-9).[23]

And, finally, let's comment on Eakin's third infraction: the failure to display normative models of personhood. With this last rule, Eakin argues, it's not so much a question of what one has done but of what one *is*: one is judged by others to be lacking in the very nature of one's being. In his essay, Eakin refers to mentally disabled autobiographers whose selfhood is claimed to be diminished or absent ("Breaking" 119). Of course, this is not our case, but this last transgression could also be applied to other ways of "being." In the academic world —especially in the United States— it seems that political and academic correctness prescribes certain ethical postures on autobiographers, concerning the group identity they "represent"; certain ways of "being" in the world. It would be considered "the norm," then, for certain groups of readers that a brown Chicano write as a representative of "Chicanismo," that an exiled Jew provide personal, if lucid and intellectually sophisticated, testimonial arguments on the exiled condition or the Holocaust; or even that a woman autobiographer write as a feminist. Group-identity politics also imposes its regulations, and punishes its deviations from the norm. But, again, my four essayists have their own rules, and the personal essay form provides them with the freedom to express their very personal point of view, regardless of what "normalcy" would indicate. Considering what could be understood as "writing and ethics" this is what Margaret Atwood has to say:

> If you're an artist, being a good man –or a good woman- is pretty much beside the point when it comes to your actual accomplishments. Moral perfection won't compensate for your badness as an artist (*ND* 113).

In all cases, however, they pay just tribute to the essay form as "essai" —Montaigne coined the word for the genre which he initiated; as "trying out"; as a constant self-interrogation and self-questioning that seldom results in clear-cut answers and are, more often than not, replied just with hypotheses or suggestions. As Woolf said of Montaigne, "'Perhaps' is one of his favourite expressions; 'perhaps' and 'I think' and all those words which qualify the rash assumptions of human ignorance. Such words help one to muffle up opinions which it would be highly impolitic to speak outright" (Woolf 60). As a matter of fact, one of Atwood's most and dominant persuasive devices is the rhetorical question that she uses almost too recurrently. Because Atwood, as her companion essayists, does not seek to provide answers or solutions but to ex-

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[23] "Conseguir que la loca de la casa fluya con total libertad no es cosa fácil... el *daimon* puede verse apresado o agarrotado... por el temor a lo que puedan pensar o entender tus familiares cuando te lean. Las madres, los padres, las esposas, los maridos, los hijos, imponen a menudo, sin querer, una ansiedad, una censura sobre la ensoñación...El autor tiene que salirse de sí mismo y examinar su propia realidad desde fuera, con meticuloso desapego. Porque no escriben para que los demás entiendan su posición en el mundo, sino para intentar entenderse."

plore the parameters of some interesting questions (what she calls "conundrums") that concern writers and readers and that concern her as a human being. The same idea is expressed in Rosa Montero's rejection of what she calls "militant writing," because, as she puts it, "one writes in order to learn, to know; and one cannot initiate a journey of self-discovery carrying along ready-made answers" (*LLC* 172).[24]

There would be many examples of their rejection of "normative models of personhood," but let us restrict the scope to the topic "women and feminism." In her chapter entitled "*Temptation*," on the moral or social responsibility of the writer, Atwood directly touches upon this issue. So, while at one point she seems to adopt a stance of "feminist normalcy," explaining to her readership how

> Women writers weren't included in the Romantic roll-call, and never had a lot of Genius medals stuck onto them; in fact the word "genius" and the word "woman" just don't really fit together in our language, because the kind of eccentricity expected of male "geniuses" would simply result in the label "crazy," should it be practiced by a woman. (*ND* 100)

At another point she uses a detached, ironical tone when talking about what she calls the "F-word." Firstly, she satirically wonders how being an "F-word female" should influence one's wardrobe choices: "if the wardrobe matter is all that frivolous, then why have so many earnest commentators made such ideological heavy work of it?" (*ND* 107), and then she puts forward the characteristically "women writers conundrum":

> If you are a woman and a writer, does the combination of gender and vocation automatically make you a feminist, and what does that mean exactly?: that you shouldn't put a good man into your books, even though you may in real life have managed to dig up a specimen or two?" (ND 107)

No reply is provided, of course. Nor is any reply necessary. Likewise, in her chapter devoted to the moral and social commitment of the writer (*LLC* Chapter 5), Rosa Montero openly states that, from her view point, the famous writer's commitment should not be understood as putting one's work *for* the cause. For her, "pamphletary utilitarianism" is a treason to the profession. And she continues:

> I detest utilitarian and militant narrative; the feminist, ecologist, pacifist novels, or whatever other -ist one may think of. Because writing in order to transmit a message is treason to the principal function of writing; to its real sense, which is to search for meanings (*LLC* 172).[25]

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[24] "Se escribe para aprender, para saber; y una no puede emprender ese viaje de conocimiento llevando previamente las respuestas consigo."

[25] "Detesto la narrativa utilitaria y militante, las novelas feministas, ecologistas, pacifistas o cualquier otro *ista* que pensarse pueda, porque escribir para dar un mensaje traiciona la función primordial de la narrativa, su sentido esencial, que es el de la búsqueda de sentido."

This is exactly the same as Atwood's attitude when she explains, in her satirical mode again, that when she is asked to participate in "The Writer and Society" type of panel discussion, which assumes that the writer ought to have a function in relation to everybody else, she "wants to run a mile." Because such utilitarian vision of literature considers the artist not as "good" or "good at," but as "good *for*" (in the sense of good for other people); as "the slave of somebody else's lamp" (*LLC* 107).

2. THEMATIC CONTENT

After this essayistic rambling (one tends to adopt the mode one is analysing), let us move on to the second "gender and genre" issue. Do men and women essayists write on different issues and topics, such as the private vs. public sphere, domestic vs. worldly concerns, emotional vs. rational approaches, and personal vs. professional focus traditional issues? And the answer, in this case, is "yes"... and "no."

The answer is "no" because both our male and female essayists focus their essays on professional aspects, leaving domestic, personal, and intimate anecdotes almost totally out of the panorama. For example, Steiner's daughter Barbara is mentioned in *Errata* but just as an acclaimed philologist, that is, a colleague. We also know that Steiner has a wife called Zara because she is mentioned in passing once or twice. Nevertheless, these exclusions do not prevent Steiner from subtitling his book "An Examined Life." Rosa Montero, for her part, only mentions a sister who (probably) is not a real sister, and a Hollywood actor lover from her early twenties (he may never have existed either, for this story is told thrice, in three different chapters, with different endings; which, again, celebrates the inevitability of "design" in autobiography writing).[26] Rodriguez's family in totally left out of this volume that is only concerned with such "familiar" issues as "race" and "America" —although he dedicates his book to his lifelong companion, Jimmy, and publicly declares his love for him— and we only get some hints of Margaret Atwood's family life in the first chapter. If we turn to the "Life of author" entry in her book's index pages, we can see the following subentries: childhood, parents, high school, early writing and reading, university, first publications, entering the literary circle. But these entries are all located in the first 30 pages out of 180. And she leaves us there, when she turns twenty-one. And yet, we close all four volumes feeling that we "know" Margaret, Rosa, Richard and George well enough; that we have heard their voices; that we can describe what they think, even how they feel about many of the most important concerns of their lives. And that is something we cannot say of many classic autobiographies.

[26] I am here using the word "design" as it was used by Roy Pascal.

Moreover, if "love" is a typically "female" subject, then our two men essayists have feminized their table of contents, for they assign love a starring role in theirs and everybody's lives. This is Steiner discussing love:

> Love is, in varying intensities, the imperative wonder of the irrational. It is non-negotiable [...] To shake, in one's inmost spirit, nerve, and bone, at the sight, at the voice, at the merest touch of the beloved... to transform one's existence... in the cause and consequence of love... is to partake of the most commonplace and inexplicable sacrament in human life (*E* 188-89).

Exactly the same abstract and universalistic mode of discourse is used by Rosa Montero when raising the theme:

> To talk about literature, then, is... to talk about love, for passion is the greatest invention of our invented existence; the shadow of a shadow; the sleeping one who dreams he's dreaming. (*LLC* 16).[27]

And Richard Rodriguez, after prefacing his book with the thought that "the word race encourages me to remember the influence of eroticism on history. For...within any discussion of race, there lurks the possibility of romance" (*B* xv), he closes his book with the sentential "By brown I mean *love*" (*B* 225).

But, as I said, the answer is also "yes," because the scope of the books' interests is much narrower in the case of the two women. Again, both our women authors are direct literary daughters of Virginia Woolf, in so far as they write about "that single book to which they alone have the key." And they talk, widely, about imagination too ("the crazed one in the house"). But, of course, one can be as abstract and universal in writing about writing, as in writing about Judaism, nationalism, music or race.

Atwood and Montero touch upon a number of fundamental questions related to writing and to the position of the writer; why a writer writes, and for whom; and what is writing, after all. They also coincide in writing about the duplicity inherent in writing; the problems of art vs. money; the problems of art vs. fame and social relevance; the nature of the triangular relationship between the writer, the reader and the book; and about the idea that "all writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and a fascination with mortality by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead" (*ND* 156). In Montero's words this is expressed as: "We novelists, incontinent scriveners, shoot and shoot words, unceasingly, against death" (*LLC* 31).[28] Both women probe their lives and work

[27] "Hablar de literatura, pues, es [...] hablar del amor, porque la pasión es el mayor invento de nuestras existencias inventadas, la sombra de una sombra, el durmiente que sueña que está soñando."

[28] "Los novelistas, escribanos incontinentes, disparamos y disparamos palabras sin cesar contra la muerte."

along with those of many other writers and bring in myths, fairy tales, stories, legends, writers' mini-biographies, quotes from now and then and whatever else may feed their narratives.

In order to compare the thematic scope and concerns of the female writers with that of their male companions, let us consider the book titles, since Rosa Montero, explaining the genesis of book titles, defines the finding of an appropriate title as a sort of epiphany, or "the fiery tongue of the Holy Spirit" (*LLC* 235)[29] that clarifies the writer and illuminates what she is doing.[30] Not unlike Rosa Montero, who has chosen a dead writer's quote to entitle her book, Margaret Atwood also pays homage to dead writers in her title, *Negotiating with the Dead.* It is Atwood's contention that all writers learn from the dead, from the work of writers who have preceded them (probably, the "others" to whom the book is dedicated). Moreover, all writers feel judged and held accountable by them —because the dead control the past, they control the stories and also certain kinds of truth. So, writers will have to deal, sooner or later, with those from previous layers of time: "they will all have to go from now to once upon a time; from here to there; all must descend to where the stories are kept" (*ND* 178).

If we now turn our attention to our two men's titles, we perceive that they are both one-word titles with one single powerful and symbolic word. *Errata* and *Brown* precede subtitles that give us a more concrete perspective of the themes: "An Examined Life," and "The Last Discovery of America," respectively. In his title, Steiner may be paying homage, or he may be "negotiating with" another dead writer, Benjamin Franklin, who, in his *Autobiography* also confesses his "errata" to the world, but rushes to clarify that those "errata" were subsequently purified and expiated. Although he "examines" his life with the precision of a therapist (examining his thoughts, his writings, his teaching and influences, his beliefs and perplexities, his achievements but also his failings), he is probably being guided by Heidegger's *dictum*, "He that thinks greatly must err greatly," the sentence that closes the book (*E* 190). Within this anatomic scrutiny of a mind, Steiner writes thrilling essays, mixing the personal and the analytical voice, on the classics; on his anti-theory academic positioning and all the problems it has brought him; on comparativism and his personal literary canon; on university and teaching; on Judaism and its "strangeness"; on music and language; on translation and languages; on the mass media; on politics past and future (he even prophesizes at one point); on his teachers and literary influences; on his favourite places to get lost in the world; and on religion. Thought, ideas, culture, literature, art, in Steiner's case, are not just an experience: they are life itself.

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[29] "La lengua de fuego del Espíritu Santo."

[30] As a matter of fact, when she was in the initial stages of *La loca de la casa* she had thought of writing an essay about literature, about her profession, about narrative. But when St Teresa of Avila's quote crossed her mind as a possible title, she discovered that, in fact, she was writing about *imagination*, and about madness (as fantasy); the kind of madness that every writer must entertain in order to be creative (*LLC* 235-6).

Steiner, like Rodriguez, is not a favourite with critics. He knows that very well, and, in some ways, this autobiography is also an "apologia pro vita sua," that is, a defence of his traditional humanism and of his many controversial attitudes. Fellow professors have discarded or ignored his work, while plundering shamelessly his bounty, especially from *After Babel*, his work on the theory of translation. Moreover, Steiner knows that theoreticians consider his work "archaic impressionism" (*E* 6), however, he does not hesitate to proclaim that:

> The humanities are susceptible neither to crucial experiments nor to verification. Our response to them are narratives of intuition. In the unbounded dynamics of the semantic, in the flux of the meaningful, in the uncircumscribed interplay of interpretations, the only propositions are those of *personal choice, of taste*, of echoing affinity or deafness [...] In humane letters, "theory" is nothing but *intuition* grown impatient (*E* 6).

The sustained eloquence of Steiner's declamatory style that gained him the reputation of one of the great rhetoricians of our age, is more than evident in this proclamation that puts him on the black list of Eakin's third ethical "transgression," that of not displaying "normalcy." After all, it is "the norm," as a scholar and as an intellectual, to be very theoretical these days. Only the personal essay form allows Steiner to pick what he chooses to discuss, following his "intuition," relying on his "personal choice and taste," without having to be obedient to written or unwritten prescriptions and pacts.

I turn to *Brown* at last to raise yet another thematic gender issue: the mind/body and male/female dichotomies; dichotomies which are totally dismantled by Rodriguez. Rodriguez uses the body as the site of cultural critique, and his skin color becomes the all-encompassing metaphor that gives the title to his book.[31] In the third volume of his autobiographical trilogy, as in some parts of his first memoir, *Hunger of Memory*, Rodriguez explores the very materiality of his skin as a source of his political consciousness. Indeed, his brown skin becomes the leitmotiv, the trope and the analytical point of departure for *Brown*. Rodriguez undertakes the task of finding the answer to the question of whether color colors thought; in other words, does he have brown thoughts? (*B* 33). Being brown and thinking brown is, basically, being tolerant, open, sensual, on the move, in-between. Richard is neither black nor white racially; neither man nor woman sexually; neither Mexican nor American ethnically, so he defines himself as brown, and places at the core of the book his idea that "the future is brown" (*B* 35) since Hispanics are browning America that traditionally has chosen to describe itself as black-and-white (*B* xii).

What Rodriguez discusses in *Brown* is the theme that has occupied him in many other essays, lectures and interviews: the illusion of ethnic purity and authenticity. His challenging de-romanticizing of ethnicity proclaims that what makes

[31] More on Rodriguez's use of corporeal metaphors in Isabel Durán, "The Body as Cultural Critique in American Autobiography," *South Atlantic Review* 70.1 (Winter 2005): 47-70.

him brown is that he is "made of the *conquistador* and the Indian" (*B* xii): a reminder of conflict; but also of reconciliation. Brown is also a gay relationship. Brown is a proclamation against orthodoxy and in favor of contradiction; brown is diversity, impurity; brown is an exciting mixture of thoughts, cultures and races, neither black nor white and always changing. Rodriguez seems to state that it is not any *a priori* cultural difference that makes ethnicity, when he emphasizes his multiethnic Spanish-Indian-African background. One is led to think that his version of Chicano identity may be seen as the vanguard of a future American melting-pot identity, which he calls brown (Sollors xviii).

So, "yes," there is a gender difference if we consider quantitatively the variety of topics that Rodriguez and Steiner approach, and measure them against those discussed by Montero and Atwood. This does not mean, however, that our two women writers do not "draw their curtain across the world." They do; indeed, they do—if around the world of universal literature. And yet my comparison may not be entirely valid, for we have two women who are primarily novelists set up against two men who are primarily scholarly essayists. So, here, instead of using the traditional dichotomy men/women we ought to be using the less "normative" and more "intuitive" type of descriptive classification of writers that is provided by Jewish philosopher Isaiah Berlin, via Rosa Montero's essay in the fourteenth chapter of her book. There are, Montero says paraphrasing Berlin,[32] two types of writers: the "hedgehogs," and the "foxes":

> The former roll themselves up and always ruminate around the same topics; while the foxes are itinerant animals that advance non-stop throughout different topics... I must confess I consider myself a hundred per cent fox; from the truffle of my black snout down to my little playful legs (*LLC* 166).[33]

This rather anti-theoretical and personal classification is not evaluative in any way. A fox-writer need not be better than a hedgehog-writer, since meditating once and again on a specific topic need not be repetitive, but, on the contrary, enriching. It is no wonder, then, that Montero chooses Proust as a prototypical hedgehog; "always crouched in his eternal hypochondriac bed; always traversing the paths of his one and only work, ...the marvellously monumental *À la recherche du temps perdu*" (*LLC* 166).[34] Likewise, Steiner and Rodriguez are "hedgehog-writ-

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[32] Although Montero's book does not provide references, it's easy to infer that she is referring to *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1953).

[33] "Los primeros se hacen una rosca y siempre le dan vueltas al mismo tema, mientras que las raposas son animalejos itinerantes que avanzan sin parar por asuntos distintos... Debo confesar que yo me considero una raposa al cien por cien, desde la trufa de mi negro hocico hasta mis patitas andariegas."

[34] "Siempre hecho un ovillo en su eternal cama de hipocondríaco, siempre deambulando por los alrededores de su única obra... la monumental y maravillosa *En busca del tiempo perdido*."

ers," since in *Errata* and *Brown* they rehearse most of the characteristic ideas and problems explored in earlier books, which explains the masterful handling of the ideological, intellectual and philosophical questions that have always concerned them. On the contrary, our "female fox writers" have always jumped from novel to novel, discovering new and unexpected landscapes in each one of them. And their book of personal essays is another of those landscapes, one devoted to "writing."

3. STRUCTURE

The last "gender and genre" issue will be devoted to a discussion of formal structure. Do men and women write different personal essays? Here again the answer is "no." Jelinek says in this respect, let us recall, that if men shape their life-stories into coherent, chronological and linear narratives, irregularity, fragmentation, disconnectedness and lack of linear chronology informs self-portraits by women. But this does not apply to the essay-as-autobiography form. As I pointed out before, men and women both tend to write in a way that is, precisely, irregular, fragmented, and disconnected. Personal essay writing is consciously exploratory, seeming to move from one point to the next in a tangential fashion rather than develop logically in the scholastic form of the argument. The essays depart from a predictable expository or analytic step, wandering off into sidelines, digressions, small autobiographical stories, myths and legends that may then illuminate the starting point in an unexpected way, "off the beaten track" (Bowlby in Woolf xii). Chronology does not exist in any of the books I consider here, nor is the organization of chapters sequential in any manner. The tone tends to be fresh and colloquial; the voice, direct, conversational and dialogical; the style is ironic, persuasive, free from the imposed rigours and ornamental (or jargon-ridden) eloquence of standard cultural or academic essay writing.

So, we are in all cases talking about hybrid forms of writing that link the personal essay and creative writing (all four authors use metaphor, symbol, allusion, irony, hyperbole, and all sorts of literary tropes, more appropriate of creative writing than of critical discourse); or we can talk about flexible intertextuality between autobiography and other genres such as historiography, autofiction, biography, personal essay and lecture. We could even argue, from an essentialist perspective, that we find, in all four volumes, resonances of what is usually attributed to the social construct of "the woman": the unsystematic nature of the essays, their spontaneous and almost accidental nature, their mixture of anecdote, description and opinion, their opposition to doctrinal and disciplinary thought, their focus on personal experience, their cultivation of diversity, their emphasis on issues connected with the author's life, and so on.

I would venture the proposal of an organizational gender difference, even if it does not neatly apply to absolutely *all* the essays that compose each of the volumes. Still, this difference applies often enough to enable me to reach a provisional conclusion. Because the two women I consider here write essays on their field of expertise ("writing" is their profession), they tend to write following a *deductive*

method. They start off with the expert's general assertion, and then proceed to the exemplification of that assertion in concrete cases: in their own writing, in other writers' or readers' cases, or in particular characters and novels. Thus, when Rosa Montero digresses about how fame and success can destroy a writer, she says: "all of us (writers) do need public recognition; and not only to keep on writing, but to keep on *being*. What I'm saying is that a writer who has failed usually becomes a monster, an insane and ill person" (*LLC* 80).[35] After this generalization has been further elaborated, she proceeds to give examples of particularly "needy" writers that were the victims of either failure or excessive success, such as Melville, Robert Walser or Truman Capote.

The same process of reasoning is followed by Atwood. In *Negotiating*, every general opinion, assertion or comment is rigorously —and playfully— supported with examples and illustrations from writers—legends, poems, quotes, myths, fragments of stories or abstracts of novels or plays). In chapter 4, she discusses the intersection of art and power and their moral and social responsibility, and she starts off with the presentation of her themes, questions or conundrums:

> Are you your brother's keeper, and if so to what extent, and are you willing to mangle your artistic standards and become a Pulpiteer, a preachy manipulator of two-dimensional images, in order to ram home some —usually somebody else's— worthy message or other? And if you aren't your brother's keeper, then, does your inaction lead to societal crime? (*ND* 102)

After she has provided some tentative answers, she proceeds to illustrate her views, in this particular case with three fictional characters: The Wizard of Oz, Prospero, and the actor Henrik Hölfgen in Klaus Mann's novel *Mephisto*. It seems as though both writers are learning about their own topic *as* they write, and once they come up with a new idea or opinion, a hypothesis or a comment about writing and writers, the proofs of what they say tend to proliferate.

On the contrary, when examining some of their concerns and opinions on which they cannot be too assertive —either due to their magnitude, or to their controversial nature—, Steiner (certainly), and Rodriguez (only at times, since he is much more eclectic and random in the presentation of his thoughts), tend to follow the *inductive* type of reasoning, that is, they make their generalizations based on individual instances and observations of recurring phenomenal patterns. Thus, among the many issues Steiner raises there is religious faith. In the last chapter of *Errata*, Steiner tries to "clarify his (religious) perplexities" (*E* 180), which are those of an "adult, rational intellect, at the end of the millennium" (*E* 175). In order to do so, he starts by listing the attractions of atheism, including Darwinism. Then

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[35] "Lo cierto es que necesitamos cierto reconocimiento público; y no sólo para seguir escribiendo, sino incluso para seguir *siendo*. Quiero decir que un escritor fracasado suele convertirse en un monstruo, en un loco, en un enfermo."

follow the attractions of faith, among them, art inspired by faith, and the company of a list of overwhelmingly distinguished intellectuals who were, according to him, believers in a divine presence—Socrates, Plato, Augustine, but also Einstein and Wittgenstein. Finally, based on all of those observations, he ventures his own position: since proving the existence of God rationally can be misguided, and thus, belief is not evidential, the only honest posture is that of the agnostic; the "I don't know" that has become the established church of modernity (*E* 184).

But this difference does not imply in the least a self-image of confidence vs. a self-image of understatement. Our four authors, regardless of their sex, never play the game of political correctness but ride alone, sometimes writing a lonely line of individualism, where they picture themselves as singular or even outlandish; sometimes participating in a communal "we": which is not a "we, women" vs. "them, men," but rather we, writers, we, thinkers, we, teachers, we gays, we, Americans, we, Canadians, we, Jews, we Catholics, we the people of brown America.

4. CONCLUSION

It was my intention from the beginning of this essay to show how "gender and genre" studies can be thrillingly alive if one includes into them female writers in comparison with male writers. So, do women and men write different autobiography-as- essay? In most cases, they "don't." If we believe, with Philip Lopate, that "through sharing thoughts, memories, desires, complaints, and whimsies, the personal essayist sets up a relationship with the reader" based on the "core supposition that there is a certain unity to human experience" (xxiii), then it is of "shared" human experience we should be talking by now. However, as Atwood would put it, "I have no answers. But I've indicated some of the possibilities, some of the dangers that may lurk; some of the conundrums" (*ND* 122).

"Literature professors and the rest of the academia," Rosa Montero believes, "have invented a bunch of classificatory labels that, I'm sorry to say, are awfully boring" (*LLC* 220).[36] So, apart from Isaiah Berlin's hedgehog/fox classification of writers, she invites us readers to follow her along the path of alternative classifications, provided by writers instead. One of them, which was suggested by Italo Calvino, is that of "flame writers" vs. "crystal writers." The former are emotional; the latter are rational. But, of course, this brings resonances from the male/female or the reason/emotion binarisms. So, I feel more inclined to use the next two classifications that Montero suggests: the first, based on another animalistic metaphor, was proposed by Spanish writer Juan José Millás who distinguishes "insect writers" from "mammal writers" (*LLC* 221). Applied to their works, a "mammal novel" (or autobiography) is a monumentally long one, full of detailed description and incident.

[36] "Los profesores de literatura y demás eruditos universitarios han inventado montones de etiquetas, en general, con perdón, aburridísimas."

An "insect" would be a perfect creation, short, sharp, apparently simple, essential, a creation where nothing is redundant. Without any sort of hesitation, *La loca de la casa, Negotiating with the Dead, Errata* and *Brown* are "insect autobiographies."

But Montero provides us with yet another categorization of her own that is more applicable to the kinds of texts I have been discussing in these lines. She divides writers into two categories: the "memorialists" and the "amnesic writers" (*LLC* 222). The former, boasting of their good memory, are probably nostalgic of their past, their childhood, and tend to indulge in a floridly reminiscent and descriptive style—Tolstoy would be an example. The latter, on the contrary, are unable or do not wish to remember; their memory resembles "a poorly erased blackboard," and usually write in a sharper, more concise style. They tend to concentrate "in the atmospheric, in sensations, in action and reaction, in the metaphoric and the emblematic" (*LLC* 223)[37] —the Conrad of *Heart of Darkness* would be an example. Montero declares herself of the amnesic type; and I would say that the other three writers are much more "amnesic" than "memorialists." They are not interested in lengthy narrations of the events of their past lives, nor in florid descriptions of their early years. Instead, they have opted for a testing of their intellectual, emotional, and psychological responses to their chosen topics. They would rather concentrate in the "errata" or the "brown" (the metaphoric and emblematic), in negotiations with "the dead" or in the study of creative imagination (the "atmospheric"). And in so doing, they concentrate, metaphorically, in themselves.

I started this essay with a quotation from Virginia Woolf's "The Decay of Essay Writing" and, after having shown that personal essay writing is not in decay in the twenty-first century, but very alive and full of creative energy, I will quote her again, describing Montaigne's volumes of essays, for Woolf's lines dedicated to the French essayist could also be a description of the four books I presented here:

> In these extraordinary volumes of short and broken, long and learned, logical and contradictory statements, we have heard the very pulse and rhythm of the soul... Whence this overmastering desire to communicate with others? Is the beauty of this world enough, or is there, elsewhere, some explanation of the mystery? To this what answer can there be? There is none. There is only one more question: "*Que sais-je*?" (64)[38]

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[37] "Se concentran más en lo atmosférico, en las sensaciones, en la acción y la reacción, en lo metafórico y emblemático."

[38] As editor Rachel Bowlby footnotes, "What do I know" is the motto that many consider Montaigne's central question, from one of his essays, "Apology for Raymond Sebond."

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PRIVATE PARTS OF PAKISTAN: FOOD AND PRIVACY IN SARA SULERI'S *MEATLESS DAYS*

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ABSTRACT

This essay considers Sara Suleri's autobiography, *Meatless Days* (1989), in which food is the central metaphor for the complications of a childhood spent in Pakistan before partition. Suleri offers interwoven images of actual and metaphorical eating, cooking, and hunger in a compelling triangulation between food, body, and body politics, providing sharp contrasts between her private and public lives in a politically charged post-colonial Pakistan. Sara Suleri deliberately works with the ingredients available to her, while guessing who might be coming to dinner as her readers. She wants to combine autobiography's most salient characteristic —the need to reveal and conceal— by writing a book which can begin to help her reconcile the complications of her most private self and her relationship to her public life. Now an English professor at Yale, Sara Suleri Goodyear seeks to create a recipe that will allow her to blend her life in the United States, her childhood spent in Pakistan and England, her Welsh-born mother, and the political turmoil and violence.

KEY WORDS: Sara Suleri, autobiography, *Meatless Days*, food, eating, cooking, hunger, body, body politics, public life/private life.

RESUMEN

Este ensayo examina la autobiografía de Sara Suleri, *Meatless Days* (1989), en la que los alimentos son la metáfora central de las tribulaciones de una infancia en Pakistán antes de la división. Suleri ofrece imágenes entremezcladas de comida real y metafórica, de cocinar y del hambre en una apremiante triangulación entre comida, cuerpo, y políticas del cuerpo que proporciona nítidos contrastes entre su vida pública y privada en un Pakistán post-colonial politizado. Sara Suleri trabaja deliberadamente con los ingredientes que tiene a mano, mientras adivina quiénes serán los lectores que asistan a la cena. Suleri quiere combinar la característica más sobresaliente de la autobiografía —la necesidad de revelar y de ocultar— a través de la escritura de un libro que puede ayudarla a reconciliar las complicaciones de su yo más privado y sus relaciones con su vida pública. Sara Suleri Goodyear es en la actualidad profesora de inglés en Yale, y busca una receta que le permita combinar su vida en los Estados Unidos, su infancia en Pakistán e Inglaterra, su madre nacida en Gales, y la confusión y violencia políticas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Sara Suleri, autobiografía, *Meatless Days*, alimento, comida, cocinar, hambre, cuerpo, política del cuerpo, vida pública/vida privada.

“A troubled relation to food is
one of the principal ways the problems
of female being come to expression
in women’s lives.”

Kim CHERNIN, *The Hungry Self*

“Who was it said that food
was the only desire that renews
itself three times a day?”

Sara SULERI, *Boys Will Be Boys*

For this essay I would like to consider a pervasive and poetic web of food images in Sara Suleri’s *Meatless Days*. Published in 1989, *Meatless Days* is an especially complicated text, in which —beginning with the title— Suleri offers interwoven images of actual and metaphorical eating, cooking and hunger in a compelling triangulation between food, body, and body politics—all providing sharp contrasts between her private and public lives in a politically charged post-colonial Pakistan.

In her “Assembling Ingredients: Subjectivity in *Meatless Days*,” Linda Warley asserts that one way to begin to understand Suleri’s text is to “think of the process of reading and remembering the text of a life in terms of reading a recipe of the self,” though she adds, “However, as any cook knows, a certain assembly of ingredients will not always produce the expected result” (107). Precisely what dish has been set before us when we began to sit down to *Meatless Days* is directly connected to the author’s desire to balance her personal and public selves. While classified as “Literature/Autobiography” on its back cover, the book’s cook has been somewhat vague about what she has produced. Within the text she suggests that *Meatless Days* began with a series of family tales which might serve as a “surrogate for the letters that I owed to intimates” (172), further describing the chapters as “quirky little tales” (174), while in an interview she remarked that the book “originated in an essay about my Dadi” (Shamsie). In other conversations she suggests that the book is “a new kind of historical writing” and “an alternate history of Pakistan” (Lee). Responding to the suggestion that *Meatless Days’s* having been marketed as autobiography suggests a certain degree of historical accuracy and personal authenticity, Suleri responded by suggesting that fiction has another kind of authenticity to convey, and that she was not exactly writing confessionally or autobiographically (Lee).

It might be most appropriately to read *Meatless Days* as memoir because the text focuses as much outwardly as inwardly, narrating both the life of its author and the times and place in which she lived, especially her immediate family and friends, an approach which corresponds to the classic definition of memoir. Autobiography is usually described as focusing more inwardly, covering a more complete life, and revealing personal details about authors and their various selves. These definitions are less helpful, however, when we consider that in current practice, many personal

narratives are called memoir regardless of their focus, especially when their authors are not famous people writing toward the end of their lives. Furthermore, because so much of the private aspects of *Meatless Days* are also directly connected to the public aspects of Pakistani politics, the private and the public are constantly interconnected and reversed within the text.

Meatless Days individual chapters, which carry such titles as "Excellent Things in Women," "Papa and Pakistan," or "What Mamma Knew," sometimes read like individual examples of the personal essay or separate instances of creative nonfiction, the biographical sketch, or even new journalism. Like a cook who must substitute a packaged ingredient for a more natural one, a store-bought "curry" for an individually selected, roasted, and blended collection of spices, Sara Suleri deliberately works with the ingredients available to her, while guessing who might be coming to dinner as her readers. Now an English professor at Yale, Sara Suleri Goodyear seeks to create a recipe that will allow her to blend her life in the United States, her childhood spent in Pakistan and England, her Welsh-born mother, and the political turmoil and violence which her father, Z.A. Suleri, a prominent pro Pakistani independence journalist, born in India, covered extensively while she was growing up. Further confusing generic distinctions, in 2003 Sara Suleri Goodyear published a biographical book about her father's life, naming it *Boys Will Be Boys*, which was the title of her father's proposed but unwritten memoir as described within *Meatless Days*.

That revelation and hiding —like the public and private— are often intertwined is frequently described in terms of food. For example, one scene in *Boys Will Be Boys* describes a Pakistani knock-off of Tampax called Yumpax, advertised as "another Yum-Yum Product!" (13). "After a huge struggle —private of course— with the cardboard vessel," she adds, "a Yumpax could indeed sail up and moor itself in our groins" (13). Sitting with her sisters in a garden, Suleri recalls her father's boisterous declaration that another newspaper article is complete, "while the Yum-Yum was quietly growing like a cauliflower or anemone" (13).

I've been writing about genre, not because I want to try to argue for some absolute generic distinctions, but because part of the narrative design of the book involves the deliberately interconnection between the most private of body parts and the most public political events of Suleri's childhood. The text is filled with apparent secrets, hints of hidden events, and opaque surfaces, often linked to tropes of eating, hunger and body. For example, when the author notes of her sister's complexion "Ifat's white, and I am brown," her father describes Sara as "my wheaten daughter" (160). Beneath the surface of her lost sister's skin, behind what appear to be at first literal statements about not writing about her body, Suleri embeds figurative descriptions of her ambition to reveal what she seems to be concealing. "Darkness, after all, is too literal a hiding-space, pretending as it does to make a secret of the body," she writes, adding "since secrecy annuls, eats up, what is significant in surface, it cannot be sufficient to our tastes" (175).

While Suleri's narrative hints about important people in her American life, Tom and Dale, she leaves their personal stories out of the text, in part to protect them. And yet she tells the reader of terrible personal events which she will not

describe in detail, including the hit-and-run death of her mother, and a year later the apparently political murder of her sister, Ifat. And though she has chosen, at several points throughout the book, to reveal these terrible losses, her narrative proper concentrates on the lives rather than the deaths of her mother and sister, deliberately omitting details, and relegating a direct description to parentheses: "(For in this story Ifat will not die before our eyes: it could not be countenanced)" (104). Refusing, then, to write too directly about the death of her sister Ifat, Sara Suleri instead reveals many personal details about their relationship, and displays her sister's image prominently on the cover of the book, in part because: "To hide would be a gesture of spare courtesy toward the world, which surely knows that revelation must be a hiding" (175-76).

Returning to Pakistan upon learning of her sister's death, Suleri notes "her name was everywhere, a public domain, blotting out her face and its finesse into the terrible texture of newsprint" (125). While Ifat's name is public, the author notes of her family "we placed Ifat's body in a different discourse, words as private and precise as water when water wishes to perform both in and out of light" (148). And while her sister's face is "blotted out," for a moment, Suleri wishes she was wearing a veil since her own "face felt nude" (148) and later she expresses a fear of an inability of "keeping my face exactly where it was, away from slippage into some third person" (176). The sense of facial exposure as indicator of public and private history culminates in Suleri's description of her mother, "who let history seep, so that , miraculously, she had no language to locate its functioning but held it rather as a distracted manner sheathed about her face, a scarf" (168).

When Inderpal Grewal suggests that "the prevalence of the metaphor of food all through the narrative emphasizes the notion of incorporation and multiplicity, rather than the complete whole" (241), she is describing the food/body relationship as well as the public/private duality because body image is multiple for everyone in the Suleri family. Like the author —daughter of a Welsh mother and father born in what was then India writing from the position of expatriation to the United States— the mother is suspended between cultures. Suleri asks of her, or for her, "What could the world do with a woman who called herself a Pakistani but who looked suspiciously like the past it sought to forget?" (164).

In an essay subtitled "The Gastropoetics of the South Asian Diaspora," Parama Roy declares "There is an extraordinary literalness to the way in which food function in the novel" (473), her term for the genre of *Meatless Days*, citing as an example the "parable" of the kapura. While Roy describes as an "unwelcome revelation of a secret" (472) the moment when Suleri's sister Tillat declares that kapura (which Sara had long thought was a Pakistani version of sweetbreads cooked with kidneys) is actually goat testicles, the author tells us that "I will not write as though I believe in the structure of a secret" (175). Claiming that "our conversations were meals" (21), Suleri wonders whether the "kapura" genre of food is so precise: "couldn't *kapura* on a lazy occasion also accommodate something like sweetbreads, which is just a nice way of saying that pancreas is not a pleasant word to eat?" (22).

Because her mother had told her that kapuras were sweetbreads, Suleri begins to wonder, long after her mother had died, "Maybe my mother knew that

sweetbreads are testicles but had cunningly devised a ruse to make me consume as many parts of the world as she could before she set me loose in it" (23). Suleri casts the confusion into the idea of her mother's equating sweetbreads with testicles, rather than the more logical consideration that her mother simply substituted one euphemism for another. Part of the confusion lies in the fact that sweetbreads in Wales are not the same as in Pakistan, a situation compounded by her mother's lack of translation skills. Writing of her mother, in *Boys Will Be Boys*, subtitled *A Daughter's Elegy*, Suleri notes that she "lived most of her life in translation. She never spoke Welsh, which her parents did; her French was merely academic; Urdu was one of those illusions that cast its shadow over her, but never long enough for her to possess it. As for Punjabi, it always struck us as a singularly male language" (69).

Genre enters into another aspect of the parable of the kapura when Suleri recalls the "story of the kidney" (24), a memory connected to her being forced to "teach myself to take a kidney taste without dwelling too long on the peculiarities of kidney texture" (26). When Ifat explained on that occasion that "kidneys make pee" (26), the link between word, narrative, animal body parts and genre is complete, for Sara is as much concerned about nomenclature as flavor, her inability to separate fable from story, and her lack of "native" knowledge. "Expatriates are adamant," she writes "entirely passionate about such matters as the eating matters of the motherland" (22).

The whole episode of separating kapuras, kidneys, and sweetbreads into distinct categories is itself an elaborate trope. Suleri might actually be more accurate than she reveals, for not only is the term sweetbread used interchangeably for such actual animal parts as thymus glands, as well as glands from the heart, stomach or throat, but a popular Pakistani street food is gurda kapura, described on various menus as "an old Muslim favorite of kidney done Moghul style," and according to an internet poster named Iftar Vikram, on a web site called The EGullet Society For Culinary Arts and Letters, as "a stir fry of organ meats which invariably leads to arguments about whether this includes testicles. I don't think it does, not usually, simply because the organs are on display around the tavaa —compact curly brains, kidneys like swollen red cashews, glossy lobes of liver, the muscly mass of heart, but no testicles" (<http://forums.egullet.org/index.php?showtopic=30213>). Just as Western cooks often omit actual meat or suet from mince-meat pie, so it may be that Suleri's mother may have not realized that some people still prepare kapura with more authentic ingredients. Adding further to the connection between body parts and geographical ones, Kapura and Kot Kapura are cities in the Punjab region of India.

The discussion about kapuras occurs within the chapter of *Meatless Days* called "Meatless Days," an ironic title in each case because in the context of the Suleri family, "Meatless Days" (established by the government shortly after the renaming of Pakistan in 1947, and intended to save "the national supply of goats and cattle" (31), increased the likelihood of eating meat. "A favorite meatless day breakfast... consisted of goat's head and feet, cooked with spices into a rich and ungula sauce..." (32). Just as Sara Suleri wants to maintain an ambiguity about the exact borders in her book's geography of genre, so she expresses concern that "something

that had once sat quite simply inside its own definition was declaring independence from its name and nature, claiming a perplexity that I did not like" (22). Declaring independence suggests, of course, the partition of predominantly Muslim Pakistan from mainly Hindu India, with the Western and Eastern wings of Pakistan eventually further dividing into Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Referring to the complete kapura narrative, Suleri asks: "Am I wrong, then, to say that my parable has to do with nothing less than the imaginative extravagance of food and all the transmogrifications of which it is capable? Food certainly gave us a way, not simply of ordering a week or a day but of living inside history..." (34). "Living inside history" is a complicated phrase which could suggest living privately without allowing history to interfere with daily life, or just the opposite —living so closely with the difficult political and historical movements of Pakistani history that the public partition of India was directly related to the private partition of women in a newly created Muslim state. Just as "meatless days" are the meatiest, so many other phrases that resonate throughout *Meatless Days* sometimes suggest the very opposite of what they might seem to be asserting, as when Suleri remembers Ramzan, the Pakistan Muslim month of fasting as "the season of perfect meals" (29).

Starting with the first sentence of the book, "Leaving Pakistan was, of course, tantamount to giving up the company of women" (1), and continuing throughout, Suleri makes strong assertions about private vs. public life, assertions which are often completely contradicted by other similarly strong statements. For instance, "Now I live in New Haven and feel quite happy with my life. I miss, of course, the absence of women..." (19) and "there are no women in the third world" (20).[1]

Referring to her seemingly perverse rejection of any solid lines of distinction, Shazia Rahman argues that "Suleri's critique of various categories does not simply abolish difference. Instead, she looks at the limits of these categories and redraws the boundaries around them" (348). Suleri makes use of this same partitioning technique when she writes about the confluence of food and public life. She claims to be able to understand "the fear that food will not stay discrete but instead defy our categories of expectation in what can only be described as a manner of extreme belligerence" (29). I like order to a plate," she continues, "and know the great sense of failure that attends a moment when what is potato to the fork is turnip to the mouth" (29). The words "what is potato to the fork" echo the eating habits of Dadi, her paternal grandmother, described in her old age as scuttling "in the posture of a shrimp" (2). With her eyesight diminishing, Dadi is said to "point hazily at a perfectly ordinary potato and murmur with Adamic reverence, 'What *is* it? What *is* it called'" (3)?

[1] For a complete discussion of this apparent contradiction, see Sara Suleri, "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition," *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1998) 116-125; and Inderpal Grewal, "Autobiographic Subjects and Diasporic Locations: *Meatless Days* and *Borderlands*," *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Minneapolis : U of Minnesota P, 1994) 231-54.

For a time during their childhood Sara and her sister Tillat tried to separate the violence outside of their home from the violence within, hoping that "somehow the more history fractured, the more whole we would be" (13). Writing of that period, Suleri notes of her grandmother, "it was hard to distinguish between Dadi with people and Dadi alone: she was merely impossibly unable to remain unnoticed" (6). However, a series of terrible body burnings began to destroy "that sense of the differentiated identities of history and ourselves," and the sisters "became guiltily aware that we had known it all along, our part in the construction of unreality" (14). The first such episode occurred when Dadi crept into the kitchen in the middle of the night in search of tea. Her cotton garments caught on fire, burning her torso until "little recognizable remained from collarbone to groin" (14). Resisting being "lugged like a chunk of meat to the doctor's for her daily change of dressing," Dadi insisted that her wounds be dressed daily by Sara, who peeling the bandages "like an onion," "learned about the specialization of beauty through that body" (14). Revealing intimate details of her grandmother's burnt body, Suleri tells the reader that "she developed great intimacy with the fluid properties of human flesh," describing such private parts as her grandmother's coagulated breast and her "vanished nipples" which "started to congeal and convex their cavities into triumphant little love knots" (14).

Another burning of private parts occurs one afternoon when Irfan, Sara's youngest brother, is required to control his asthma by inhaling from a bowl of boiling water, infused with cumin and camphor. Starting to bolt after only a brief time, and then reacting to Sara's violent screaming of his name, Irfan leapt up, spilling the boiling water directly onto his lap. "He clutched at his groin, and everywhere he touched, the skin slid off, so that between his fingers his penis easily unsheathed, a blanched and fiery grape" (11). Referring metaphorically to her younger brother's penis as a grape does not seem very anatomically accurate, though it does suggest parallels to her declaration about her ignorance, feigned or authentic, about kapuras: "Anyone with discrimination could immediately discern the connection between *kapura* and their namesake: the shape is right, given that we are now talking about goats, the texture involves a bit of a bounce, which works; and the taste is altogether too exactly what it is. So I should have kept in mind that, alas, we know the flavor of each part of the anatomy; that much imagination belongs to everyone's palate" (27-28).

My final example of food and private parts involves not an actual fire, but the sensation of heat, this time directly related to the author herself. As a young girl, Sara and some friends were especially fond of gol guppas, a street food which she describes as follows: "a small hollow oval of the lightest pastry that is dipped into a fiery liquid sauce made of tamarind and cayenne and lemon and cold water. It is evidently a food invented as a joke..." (39). While the adult Suleri has found a way to write about the contradictions of living in the United States while rejecting the position of "otherness machine" (105), noting in an interview that she "is very allergic to being called 'exotic'," (Shamsie), she describes the exotic gol guppas of her youth as lacking a culinary equivalent. "When I left Pakistan," she writes, "I had to learn... how to conceive of a kitchen as a place where I actually could be

private" (36). Unlike the privacy of her American kitchen, she has a very private moment in public Pakistan when a friend knocks a bowl of gol guppa sauce into her lap: "never has desire brought me to quite such an instantaneous effect" (39). Having already written about heat and private accidents in terms of her brother and her grandmother, in this case the heat is sexual and public: "My groin's surprise called attention to passageways that as a rule I am only theoretically aware of owning, all of which folded up like a concertina in protest against such an explosive aeration" (39). Writing of a childhood in which she was urged by her mother to "eat disappointment" (169), describing herself later as "eating grief" (177) over her mother's death, Sara Suleri uses food metaphors to reconcile her hunger for the past with her appetite for the present. "But we were coming to a parting, Pakistan and I. I felt supped full of history, hunger for flavors less stringent on my palate, less demanding of my loyalty" (123).

That food and body are so often coupled with the private and the public reflects the author's need to combine autobiography's most salient characteristic —the equal desire to reveal and conceal— by writing a book which can begin to help her reconcile the complications of her most private self and her relationship to her public life. As a family memoir, primarily a tribute to her mother, *Meatless Days* omits many details about Pakistan's troubled and sometimes violent history; her father's place at the center of the Pakistan Movement, including his imprisonments and his support of General Zia-ul-Haq's militancy and martial law; and the invisibility of the many servants who surround her daily life. And yet many of those public narratives are hidden within the text's body tropes. As Sara Suleri notes, writing about her own sense of confusion when a broken bone seemed a sign of her own body's diminishment: "Was I now to watch my own dismantling body choose to unravel with the cascading motion of a dye in water, which unfurls to declare, 'Only in my obliteration will you see the shape of what I really can be?'" (186). That Sara Suleri, like her mother —born Mair Jones but living in Pakistan as Surraya Suleri— moves fluidly through a variety of ethnic and nationalistic subject positions is a major reason why the author so often uses food metaphors to confuse as well as describe her childhood memories, to reveal as well as conceal. As Anita Mannur notes, "Culinarity emerges as an important counter discourse which destabilizes the mechanisms by which gendered national subjectivity is granted visibility and legitimacy in postcolonial spaces" (18).

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CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITIES: MAPPING THE MALE BODY IN OSCAR ZETA ACOSTA'S *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BROWN BUFFALO*

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ABSTRACT

My study posits how Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel, The *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972), is structured as a cartography which clearly maps the construction of both masculinity and ethnicity through a series of life experiences. It further examines the various strands configuring and constructing a masculine identity in this fictionalized autobiography by focusing on the multiple manifestations of how masculinities are constructed in society: i.e. school, family, friends, institutions, workplace, the military, and so forth. Acosta's text structures a critique of both Mexican and Anglo American stereotypes of Chicano masculinities while simultaneously deconstructing a unitary meaning of what it is to be a Mexican/Chicano male.

KEY WORDS: Oscar Zeta Acosta, autobiography, ethnicity, masculinity, chicano, Mexican, buffalo.

RESUMEN

Mi estudio presenta cómo la novela de Oscar Zeta Acosta, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) está estructurada como una cartografía que claramente traza un mapa de la construcción de masculinidad y etnicidad a través de una serie de experiencias de vida. Además examina las diferentes ramas que configuran y construyen una identidad masculina en esta autobiografía novelada al centrarse en las múltiples manifestaciones de cómo se construyen las masculinidades en la sociedad: i.e. escuela, familia, amigos, instituciones, trabajo, el ejército, y otros. El texto de Acosta estructura una crítica a los estereotipos mexicanos y anglo-americanos de masculinidades chicanas a la vez que deconstruye un significado unitario de lo que significa ser un hombre mexicano/chicano.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Oscar Zeta Acosta, autobiografía, etnicidad, masculinidad, chicano, mexicano, búfalo.

The truth of it was they both conspired
to make men out of two innocent Mexican boys.
It seemed that the sole purpose of childhood
was to train boys how to be men.

(Acosta, *Revolt* 75)

A mapping project entails the drawing of lines from point A to point B and in the process yielding a cohesive, coherent picture of what may have been disparate points in a barren landscape or conversely multiple dots in an urban milieu. A cartographic project selects from the materially specific and abstracts from it while simultaneously making sense of the geometric inscriptions of lines, curves and dots on a flat surface. Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, first published in 1972 and with a second edition appearing in 1989, offers the challenge of deciphering and making sense of the process of engendering a masculine identity while simultaneously constructing and deconstructing Oscar Acosta's (Acosta's protagonist in the fictional autobiography) American identity into its infinite ethnic mutations and permutations.[1]

If humans are socially constructed, Acosta's novel is a cartography which clearly maps the construction of both masculinity and ethnicity through a series of life experiences. In this study I propose to examine the various strands configuring and constructing a masculine identity in Zeta Acosta's fictionalized autobiography focusing on the multiple manifestations of how masculinities are constructed in the text by various sectors of society: i.e. school, family, friends, institutions, workplace, the military, and so forth. In addition, I submit that Oscar Zeta Acosta possessed a parodic consciousness through which and by which he was able to structure a critique of both Mexican and Anglo American stereotypes of Chicano masculinities. Through Acosta's (the author) selection of a specific literary genre, the fictionalized autobiography, and his unique style of writing, what has been described as "gonzo journalism," he is able to deconstruct a unitary meaning of what it is to be a Mexican male and to offer a caustic criticism of Anglo American society and its treatment of this ethnic group.[2] By means of parody, the author both delimits and expands various parameters configuring his protagonist's identity as it relates to his masculinity.

The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo is, as its title indicates, an autobiography. But it is a special type of autobiography —one where fact and fiction are

[1] I will be quoting from the 1989 edition of Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, (New York: Vintage Books) throughout my article.

[2] Gonzo journalism can be defined as a new methodology for writing journalistic reports populaarlized during the 1960 and 1970s. This methodology entails a participant observer type of activity as well as a realistic style of writing. The *American Heritage College Dictionary* (Third Edition) defines it as: 1. exaggerated, highly subjective, and unconventional in style, es. in journalism. 2. bizarre; unconventional.

weaved into a tantalizing maze of both self aggrandizement and caricature. It is not, as some readers accustomed to canonical biographies might surmise, "an untroubled reflection of identity as the surface of a mirror provides" and it certainly does not adhere to the view that "an autobiography is a transparency through which we perceive the life, unmediated and undistorted" (Brodzki and Schenck 1). Acosta's autobiography does not fit the canonical autobiographical format since the subject, a Chicano, belongs to the marginalized sector of American society and is not representative of the hegemonic class. As Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck point out:

> The masculine tradition of autobiography beginning with Augustine had taken as its first premise the mirroring capacity of the autobiographer: *his* universality, *his* representativeness, *his* role as a spokesman for the community. But only a critical ideology that reifies a unified, transcendent self can expect to see in the mirror of autobiography a self whose depths can be plumbed, whose heart can be discovered, and whose essence can be definitively known. No mirror of *her* era, the female autobiographer takes as a given that selfhood is mediated; her invisibility results from her lack of a tradition, her marginality in male-dominated culture, her fragmentation —social and political as well as psychic. At both extremes of subjectivity and publicity, the female autobiographer has lacked the sense of radical individuality, duplicitous but useful, that empowered Augustine and Henry Adams to write their representative lives large.

Acosta is able to use the literary genre of autobiography and to deconstruct the canonical version of the genre for his autobiography will be used to inscribe a damaging critique of Anglo American capitalist society since the autobiography offers a perfect medium for constructing a life history and at the same time comment on this life history as it unfolds. As the first person narrator describes his life and the factors that impinged on the development of that life, the reader is able to perceive how race and gender are affected by the social structures surrounding the individual. As the child begins to mature, issues of race and gender come to the fore and influence the individual either positively or negatively. Autobiography as a literary genre lends itself perfectly to serve as a venue to a critique of those societal forces that lead to the degradation and destruction, both physical and psychological, of an individual. Acosta, therefore, uses his life story —one that is full of pain and degradation— to comment negatively on the effects of a racist, sexist, classist and capitalist society which cares very little for the weak, the different, and the marginal.

There is, nevertheless, a fundamental difference between women's autobiographies and Oscar Zeta Acosta's narrative. Due to sexism, women have a difficult time aspiring to be representatives of their society while Acosta's autobiography certainly seeks to be representative of his specific community and a reflection of his time and space. Even though Acosta does not have the privileges of a white male he does have the privilege of a brown one. As a male in a patriarchal society, Acosta's voice was not silenced in his community as a Chicana wishing to write in the style of gonzo journalism in the 1970s would most likely have been. Furthermore, while white women did not have as rich a tradition of autobiographical

writings as their white male counterparts, the Hispanic male could and did avail himself of autobiographical writings from the *Lazarillo de Tormes* to *Don Quixote* in addition to having at his disposal other Western European and Latin American male canonical writings such those of Montaigne and Rousseau. As a matter of fact, Osvaldo Romero in a review of Acosta's novel links the *Autobiography* with canonical Hispanic texts:

> Posiblemente haya empezado con *El Lazarillo de Tormes* o con los escritos de Cervantes y Quevedo, pero la verdad es que la literatura hispánica está plagada de antihéroes, hombres subhumanos que ridiculizan no tan solo su propia humanidad, sino la de todo el mundo. Tesis y antitesis del ser hispánico, nos debatimos entre la realidad sanchopancesca de nuestras vidas y las ilusiones desequilibradas de Don Quixote. (Romero141)
> [Perhaps it started with the *Lazarillo de Tormes* or with the writings of Cervantes and Quevedo, but the truth is that Hispanic literature is full of antiheroes, subhuman men who ridiculize not only their own humanity but also that of the rest of the world's humanity. Thesis and antithesis of the Hispanic being we debate the Sancho Panza-like reality of our lives and the crazy illusions of Don Quixote].

Acosta writes both within and outside the tradition. His *Autobiography* has the structure of the quest formulated by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1973) where the hero (in this case antihero) goes forth into the world in search of knowledge and after a series of trials returns to his community. His protagonist is more in line with the 1950s antiheroes of the beat generation such as Jack Kerouac who he cites in his novel.

Acosta's autobiographical novel was first published in the Chicano literary magazine *Con Safos* 7 (1971) and was presented in serialized form, although only one section of the work appeared in this issue. The first (and only) installment published consisting of twelve pages (34-46) differs markedly from the eventual publication of the complete novel. Nevertheless, what is interesting in both with respect to the construction of masculinity is the iconic figure of the American buffalo which is prominently displayed in the *Con Safos* issue as well as the two editions. The American plains buffalo certainly elicits an image of strength, power, wildness —in fact it epitomizes masculinity *par excellence*. Acosta deftly connects the buffalo with his character, Oscar, joining both ethnicity —brown, the skin color of most Mexicans/Chicanos— and masculinity as well as Indigeneity. The buffalo is a native of the North American soil and Acosta links them together asserting the Chicano's native roots in the American continent.

The *Con Safos* issue featuring a segment of an early draft of the *Autobiography* displays on its cover a drawing of an image composed of three brown buffalos standing upright with the buffalo at the forefront having the face of a mischievous devil and painted in red. Inside the magazine, where the section of the *Autobiography* appears, there are three full pages of cartoons featuring upright anthropomorphized buffalos. Some of the animals are naked bearing a small penis while others are half clothed; other buffalo-like figures look like lawyers bearing briefcases and wearing suits, while others are featured hugging women alluding to Oscar's wom-

anizing ways. The back of the cover of the *Con Safos* magazine depicts a drawing of a brown buffalo standing upright (the face is painted red with red vomit coming out of his mouth) and the beast holds a *Con Safos* magazine in his left hand.

The first edition of the *Autobiography* published by Straight Arrow Books in San Francisco in 1972, features on its cover a very masculine, but rather sleazy-looking Oscar Zeta Acosta. The cover of the book (soft cover version) is a very dark brown and an imposing photograph-like image of Acosta fills most of the page. He is featured wearing a sleeveless t-shirt with his exposed, strong, muscular arms crossed over his chest. It is a frontal pose from the waist up. His hair appears somewhat disheveled with black curls falling over his forehead and he is looking straight at the viewer in a nonchalant manner. Although he is slightly smiling he looks like he just woke up from a long hangover. The back cover features 35 photographs of Acosta in various poses: some laughing, some serious, some frontal from the waist up, others full length. Near the center of the page is a picture of a buffalo standing up sideways. Inside the book, the first three pages each bear a drawing of a full size buffalo and later each chapter begins with a drawing of a small buffalo at the beginning of the first paragraph.

The second edition printed by Vintage Books in New York in 1989 is very Dali-like in the sense that it is a surrealistic painting. It features a horse with the face of a woman and a chubby Mexican man floating on top of the woman-horse holding on to a strand of her long, blonde hair. The inside of the book, however, repeats the iconic motif of the buffalo by having several drawings of the animal within the first three pages. Each chapter will begin its first paragraph with a small drawing of the buffalo thus visually reiterating Acosta's masculinity and ethnicity via the pictograph of the animal.

It is instructive that the first image we encounter in Acosta's *Autobiography* is that of the protagonist in front of a mirror on the fateful day he is to resign from his position as a legal aid lawyer and initiate his search for his lost self on July 1, 1967. The narrative begins with the protagonist speaking in the first person: "I stand naked before the mirror. Every morning of my life I have seen that brown belly from every angle. It has not changed that I can remember. I was always a fat kid. I suck it in and expand an enormous chest of two large hunks of brown tit. Possibly a loss of a pound here, a pound there?" (11)

Oscar, the protagonist of the fictionalized autobiography, is constructed in ethnic and masculine terms. His body image is that of a fat, brown person and he views himself negatively. He has incorporated the ruling class's conception of masculine beauty —the tall muscular, masculine body: lean and trim. Oscar proceeds to link his train of thought to Anglo mass media advertising and brainwashing regarding the idealized male physique. "I tighten, suck at the air and recall that Charles Atlas was a ninety-nine-pound weakling when the beach bully kicked sand in his girl's pretty face" (11). The reader, familiar with the Charles Atlas 1950s advertisements, fills in the imagery of a skinny kid transformed into a handsome, well-proportioned muscular young man with "abs of steel." Here in fact, we can make a connection with structuralist and poststructuralist theorists who insist on the complicity of the reader in the configuration of the autobiographical self.

The mother, in this instance, also becomes an accomplice in the construction of the beautiful male figure as we hear Oscar reminisce: “Perhaps my old mother was right. I should lay off those Snicker bars, those liverwurst sandwiches with gobs of mayonnaise and those damned caramel sundaes” (11). The foods enumerated are associated with Anglo American junk food and not with Mexican food. Up to this point, in the first paragraph, the exact ethnicity of the protagonist is not made evident, only that he is brown. His masculinity, in terms of a stereotypical “macho” self however, is confirmed at the end of the paragraph: “But look, if I suck it in just a wee bit more, push that belly button up against the back; can you see what will surely come to pass if you but rid yourself of this extra flesh? Just think of all the broads you’ll get if you trim down to a comfortable 200" (11).

Oscar’s masculinity will be constructed throughout the *Autobiography* mostly in terms of language, the body, race, and gender relations. Women, for Oscar, frequently will appear as objects to be desired and used for his sexual gratification, for his male sexuality. They are all minor secondary characters.

We meet the protagonist in the bathroom as he is trying to vomit and defecate. A man with an advance case of ulcers, he is portrayed as a womanizer, mentally unstable with hallucinatory bouts of sexual fantasy and a vocabulary liberally dotted with expletives. The descriptions of his efforts to vomit convey the loathing and disgust he has for himself. “‘Puke, you sonofabitch!’ I command. ‘Aren’t you the world’s champion pukerupper?’... I think of garbage, dirty toilets, whiskey and gravies, but nothing happens...a meaningless belch and noiseless fart are all I get for my troubles, not even my body obeys me anymore” (12).

In terms of a linguistic register, this is stereotypical masculine discourse where the eschatological, the grotesque, the vulgar, the sordid, the unseemly are the order of the day. It is a stereotypical men’s world where the tough talk and tough actions of the protagonist and secondary characters supply the vectors needed to configure a “man’s” world, a macho world. Imaginary antihero models such as Steve McQueen, Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson populate Oscar’s fantasy world. This is fitting since Oscar is a resident of California, the land of the make-believe, hyper-masculine Hollywood heroes.

In Lacanian terms the mirror is the perfect prop for Oscar’s search for identity. If, according to Lacan, the mirror stage provides the human subject with an unauthentic sense of self, with a mis-recognition, Oscar will receive inauthentic images of self as he searches in the mirror for answers. The mirror will be a recurring leit motif throughout the novel and the space where Oscar will vainly seek a reflection of his true identity, his authentic self. At one point in the beginning of the novel Oscar states: “I stare into the mirror for an answer. See the man with the insignificant eyes drawn back, lips thinned down tight? That suave motherfucker is Mister Joe Cool himself. Yes, old Bogey...” (12). This discourse is followed by the ironical, mocking question Oscar has for his three imaginary macho heroes: “Constipation? How in the fuck can I be constipated when I have so much to offer?” (12).

Acosta maps the construction of masculinity throughout the narrative beginning with a description of the type of parenting his mother and father inflicted on him. To both parents, making a man out of their son was a primary objective.

Oscar narrates: "The truth of it was they both conspired to make men out of two innocent Mexican boys. It seemed that the sole purpose of childhood was to train boys how to be men. Not men of the future but *now*. We had to get up early, run home from school, work on weekends, holidays and during vacations, all for the purpose of being a man. We were supposed to talk like *un hombre*, walk like a man, and think like a man" (75).

Thus the beatings, the constant sermons, the memorization of the *Seabees Manual* (obtained from the father's hyper-masculine experience while doing military service in the United States Navy), the trails of manhood such as eating as many spoonfuls of hot pepper as you could stand, were inflicted on Oscar and his brothers.

But while the Mexican home instructed the boys on how to be men, society at large, particularly Anglo society, was more than eager to take away this manhood. As adolescents, the Anglos torture Oscar by beating him up and spitting on his male member semiotically denoting their contempt for his Mexican masculinity. The young Anglo thugs scream upon seeing Acosta's small and hairless dark penis: "Whooee! Look at that. This nigger ain't even a man" (88).

Oscar, as an adult, will suffer from bouts of impotence and frequently will be unable to perform the sexual act. He will suffer from an inferiority complex due to what he perceives to be a deficiency with respect to the size of his penis. The size of his male member and his failure to summon an erection are two recurrent themes throughout the novel. While the mapping of masculinity will reside mostly in psychological events, all transpire in specific geographic locations. The mapping of ethnicity likewise will be associated with definite geographic points located throughout the United States and Mexico and will be associated with supposedly masculine attributes.

At about the middle of the novel, Oscar, the protagonist, provides the reader with a description of his Mexican origins. He narrates that we was born in El Paso, Texas and later he accompanies his parents when the family moves to Riverbanks in central near California near Sacramento where he grew up. He states that, "Although I was born in El Paso, Texas, I am actually a small town kid. A hick from the sticks, a Mexican boy from the other side of the tracks" (71). Furthermore, he characterizes his father as an *Indio* from Durango. The description given of his father as an *Indio* once again confers a hyper-masculinity on his origins.

In Riverbanks, he is not accepted as a Mexican by the California Pochos (Mexican Americans) and is considered an Easterner. While the Pochos do not view him as a Mexican, the Okies and "Americans" do. Anglo society in the town classified Mexicans as "greasers," spics, and as blacks using the pejorative word for them, i.e. as "niggers". Geography and skin pigmentation in Riverbanks was destiny. Oscar recounts: "Riverbanks is divided into three parts and in my corner of the world there were only three kinds of people: Mexican, Okies, and Americans" (178). To the Okies, Oscar was constructed as an African American due to his dark brown complexion and was called racists epithets related to African Americans.

However, by the time Oscar is in high school he is an accomplished clarinet player, Junior class president, and a member of the football team. His accomplish-

ments make him forget he was a Mexican and soon becomes an *agringado* (gringo-like) or assimilated Mexican. He abandons his Mexican American friends and hangs out with Anglos. His dream girl or *Miss It* as he called his fantasy girl, is a typical blonde, Anglo young lady. Oscar narrates: "I never went out with the few Mexican girls in school because they always stuck to themselves and refused to participate in the various activities. Also they were square and homely" (112). It is clear the protagonist by this time has been socialized into accepting Eurocentric concepts of female beauty.

After a stint in the military, Oscar studies law in San Francisco and becomes a lawyer serving the poor in the Oakland district. It is here that he begins to identify as a Samoan to those who inquire about his ethnicity. Once again, in a similar manner to the stereotypical conceptualization of the *Indio* as a hyper-masculine being (feo, fuerte, y formal) the Samoan male likewise conjures up images of strength and masculinity. Although he identifies himself as a Samoan, he chafes under this ethnic label not for what it is but for what it implies: "All my life strangers have been interested in my ancestry. There is something about my bearing that cries out for history. I've been mistaken for American Indian, Spanish, Filipino, Hawaiian, Samoan and Arabian. No one has ever asked me if I'm a spic or a greaser. Am I Samoan?" (68).

Oscar eventually drops out of the mad scene transpiring in San Francisco and embarks on a self exploratory journey by driving across the United States in search of his "true identity." In Ajax, a town in Northern Nevada, he picks up a blonde, young, wealthy woman hitch hiker and identifies himself as Henry Hawk, again a Samoan. The assumed name reiterates the search for a masculine self. A few miles later, in Ketchum, Idaho, where Hemingway (another hyper-masculine male) is buried, he informs the local bartender he is a Blackfoot Indian. As he treks across the Northwest, Acosta continues to change racial identities; all however, are linked to a stereotypical conceptualization of masculinity. In Sun Valley, Idaho he assumes the Samoan identity again but as he resumes his travels in the Western part of the United States he reverts back to an Indian racial identification. In Alpine, Wyoming he constructs himself as an Aztec. It is not until the final chapter, at the end of his journey as he returns to the United States from Juárez, Mexico that Oscar finds the answer to his identity. He is a Chicano and a Brown Buffalo although his answer, in the Bakhtinian sense, will be ambiguous.

As delineated above, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* encompasses a Bakhtinian world of the absurd, the grotesque, and the carnivalesque. The Bakhtinian concept of carnivalization can be employed in the hermeneutics of Acosta's narrative vis-a-vis a social revolutionary project. I am aware of the controversy regarding the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and its connection to political and social revolutionary movements for as L.E. Pinsky cautions: "Bakhtin's work is exciting precisely because of its contradictoriness and ability to spark different and unexpected interpretations, and that one should thus be careful not to assign his writings any single, authoritative interpretation" (Booker 105). Ambivalence is an important if not the most important component of the carnivalesque. "Simple choices between opposing alternatives" are an integral part of this style of writing, M. Keith Booker notes,

and he underscores how "Bakhtin's historical mission crucially relies on a sense of continued becoming which requires that final conclusions and interpretations be perpetually deferred in favor of an ongoing potentiality" (105).

What is useful for this study in understanding the construction of masculinity as it is linked to lower stratum bodily functions and bodily fluids as well as the hallucinatory world in which Acosta frequently found himself is the innate subversiveness of the carnivalesque as Bakhtin has so seminally posited. Carnivalesque imagery is "exuberant, exorbitant, transgressive, [and] emancipatory rhetoric [it is] an imagery that... parallels those that informed the oppositional political movements of the 1960s" (106). The 1960s in the USA, like the 1920s of Bakhtin's generation in Russia, was a period of social upheavals and transformations. It was a historical period where marginalized groups challenged the established hierarchies of the status quo. The Chicano, the black, the feminist, the gay and lesbian liberation movements were radical movements which sought to transform society by collapsing social boundaries of all kinds. Love-ins, sit-ins, rock concerts, demonstrations, protest marches, boycotts, strikes, and so forth were transgressive acts and fall within the purview of the carnivalesque. Booker points out how the carnival is "a time when normal rules and hierarchies are suspended, when boundaries are transgressed, and when the energies of life erupt without regard for conventional decorum" (106).

Three characteristics of the Bahktinian carnivalesque are pertinent to the present study: (1) the linguistic strategies, (2) grotesque bodily functions of vomiting, and voiding, and (3) the use of the fantastic. Acosta's use of expletives throughout the narrative, his obsession with bodily functions of expelling and inhaling, and his imagination gone wild through the use of drugs, i.e. peyote, LSD, metamphatamines, and his mental instability are in accord with Bakhtin's view of the grotesque body. The human excrement, sex, and ulcerating stomach which appear in the novel are all associated with the material body's lower stratum. The use of transgressive linguistic codes both subvert and destabilize the body politics and hegemonic structures by humanizing the body. If early Greek philosophers and early Christian tradition sought to separate the body from the spirit; the carnivalesque encouraged an integration of the two by underscoring bodily functions as part and parcel of the human condition —of the body being-in-the-world. In Bakhtin's highly influential work, *Rabelais and His World*, the author discusses various concepts related to the body, the grotesque and the carnivalesque. In his study he points out how "The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects" (26-27). Bakhtin further amplifies that "the material bodily lower stratum and the entire system of degradation, turnovers, and travesties presented this essential relation to time and to social and historical transformations" (81; see also Booker 106-107)

Acosta's preoccupation with the body and its excretory and imbibing functions serve to situate the human body within the world. The linkage between interior and exterior Booker acknowledges, "provides a graphic reminder that human beings are part of the world and undermine the Kantian duality of subject and

object that underlie conventional Western approaches to the relationship between individuals and their surroundings" (107).

Needless to say, this also underscores our biological nature and situates us within the coordinates of time and space. By stressing the commonalities we have as biological organisms, it reminds us of our human condition; of our humanity. For as we all are acutely aware, death does not respect race, class, or gender. We are all brothers and sisters under the polychromatic hues of skin color.

CONCLUSION

I submit that Acosta's *Autobiography* both constructs and deconstructs masculinity and concepts associated with the masculine. The author both associates his constructed self as masculine/non-masculine. While the protagonist surrounds himself with male oriented icons (the buffalo, the Samoan, the Indian); with a macho discourse (expletives, descriptions of body fluids and male genitalia) and a world suffused with alcohol and permeated with drugs, he deconstructs his protagonist by making him at times impotent and possessing a small male member.

The fictionalized autobiography which is frequently used in Chicano/a literature provides Acosta a narrative structure through which he can interrogate his personal identity and simultaneously challenge and defy hegemonic society —that is the Anglo world that discriminates, oppresses and exploits the Chicano population. Through his narrative Acosta, the author, has his protagonist Oscar embark on a personal quest of self discovery. Oscar's personal quest takes him from California to his place of origin; to the geographic spot where he was born, El Paso, Texas. From there his journey into Juárez, Mexico and into a more metaphysical originary womb leads him to an ultimate self discovery. After being thrown into a dark, infested hole of a jail in Juárez, Oscar will be "reborn" into a new man —a Chicano/Brown Buffalo.

The fictional autobiography in Chicano narrative provides the protagonist a forum through which he can explore both his masculinity and his ethnicity at times perceived to be one and the same. This existential journey via discourse and narration leads to finding a new understanding of the self vis-à-vis Anglo American and Mexican society. Frequently the protagonist finds that he cannot be an Anglo-American nor a Mexican national; that he is a Mexican American —more precisely a Chicano. We see this at the end of the novel where Oscar Acosta empathically asserts: "My single mistake has been to seek an identity with any one person or nation or with any part of history... what I see now, on this rainy day in January, 1968, what is clear to me after this sojourn is that I am neither a Mexican nor an American. I am neither a Catholic nor a Protestant. I am a Chicano by ancestry and a Brown Buffalo by Choice" (199). Oscar Acosta after this self discovery returns to his true home —Los Angeles— and he does this with a stronger sense of self not necessarily based on nationality nor masculinity. And in a similar manner to Joseph Campbell's "hero with a thousand faces," Acosta returns to Los Angeles a wiser man, a more knowledgeable man ready to help his Chicano community.

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"MORE THAN A WOMAN": EARLY MEMOIRS OF BRITISH ACTRESSES*

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ABSTRACT

The early decades of the eighteenth century witnessed the rise of fiction that frequently took women's defence of chastity as its subject. In contrast, the first biographies of Restoration and eighteenth-century actresses were not simply moral warnings that chastised women players for loose behavior, but instead offered entertaining accounts of female adventurers who managed to align some semblance of "virtue" with transgressive sexual mores and lowly family origins. I focus on the lives of three celebrated actresses, Nell Gwyn, Lavinia Fenton, and Anne Oldfield to show how a generation of English actresses was memorialized, and how their virtue —or lack of it— could be kept remarkably distinct from their sexual histories.

KEY WORDS: Biography, actresses, eighteenth century, Restoration, virtue, Nell Gwyn, Lavinia Fenton, Anne Oldfield.

RESUMEN

Las primeras décadas del siglo XVIII fueron testigos del auge de la novela, que frecuentemente tenía como tema la defensa de la castidad de la mujer. En contraste, las primeras biografías de las actrices de la restauración y del siglo XVIII no fueron simplemente advertencias morales que castigaban a las actrices por un comportamiento disoluto, sino que en su lugar ofrecían entretenidas descripciones de aventuras de mujeres que se las arreglaban para alinear alguna semblanza de "virtud" con costumbres sexuales transgresoras y orígenes familiares humildes. Me centraré en la vida de tres célebres actrices: Nell Gwyn, Lavinia Fenton y Anne Oldfield para mostrar cómo una generación de actrices inglesas ha sido conmemorada, y cómo su virtud —o falta de ella— se podía mantener notablemente diferenciada de sus historias sexuales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: biografía, actrices, siglo XVIII, restauración, virtud, Nell Gwyn, Lavinia Fenton, Anne Oldfield.

In Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), the compelling Cinderella-like story of a servant girl's stubborn resistance and eventual marriage to her seductive master, the heroine's *virtue* is synonymous with her *chastity*. In the novel, Pamela protests

that she would willingly prefer to embrace "Rags and Poverty," rather than forfeit her virginity (15). When Mr B. ultimately accepts her terms and succumbs to her irresistible charms, her wedding gift to him is "an experienced truth, a well-tried virtue, and... [an unequalled] natural meekness and sweetness of disposition" (337), which, the reader is encouraged to agree, serves as a legitimate exchange for his riches. Richardson's novel, as Jocelyn Harris has acutely noted, transformed contemporary erotica into more palatable moral fare, with a persistent undertone of sexual sizzle (Harris). But the anti-Pamelists, readers who found Pamela's demurring unconvincing, fastened onto this potential double meaning of the novel in order to mock it. They regarded the heroine of Richardson's novel, not as an innocent maiden defending her chastity, but as a skilled actress, who cunningly enticed Mr. B. into an improbable marriage. In Henry Fielding's parody of *Pamela*, she was transformed into the loose-living Shamela, who mockingly flaunted her "vartue," a cant word that implied her self-interested manipulation of the expectation of chastity, rather than virtue itself. The attempt to define female virtue as something other than a strictly interpreted chastity was consistently and fervently explored throughout the decades leading up to Richardson's novel.

These early years of the eighteenth century, in addition to witnessing the rise of fictions that took women's defence of chastity as their subject, considered what it meant to be a woman whose sexuality was publicly evaluated and judged in text and in life. The standard that regulated the behaviour of men, especially aristocratic men, who participated in public life in which their private life was nobody's business, does not pertain in the same way to public women, who, by their gender and very nature, are operating in a sphere that is not their own. The first biographies of women players on the Restoration and eighteenth-century stage were, not simply moral tales that chastised actresses for unorthodox sexuality, but rather offered entertaining accounts of female adventurers, who managed to align some semblance of "virtue" with an unorthodox sexuality. The biographers of actresses in the several decades just preceding *Pamela*, rather than merely warning young ladies about the dangers of emulating the notorious sexual promiscuity of women players, sometimes attempted to explain and even justify their untoward behaviour.

In this essay, I would like to focus on the lives of three celebrated actresses, Nell Gwyn (1642?-87), Lavinia Fenton (1708-60), and Anne Oldfield (1683-1730), in order to examine the way in which a generation of English actresses was memorialised and the way in which their virtue —or lack of it— was treated. I will argue that these biographical descriptions of the best-known actresses during this early period imply —and not always with a touch of irony— that a woman's "virtue," broadly interpreted, could be kept distinct from her sexual behaviour. This argument elaborates upon but also revises the conventional wisdom that Restora-

[*] An earlier version of this essay was published in *New Windows on a Woman's World*. ed. Colin Gibson and Lisa Marr (Dunedin: U of Otago P, 2005) 225-42.

tion and eighteenth-century actresses were consistently assumed to be whores.[1] Unlike the fictional Pamela, these real women often sought to improve their social class and economic situation, without benefit of marriage, through wages and patronage. For the first time in history, celebrity made possible real social mobility for actresses, who often came from the lower ranks. Lavinia Fenton, for example, became the mistress of the Duke of Bolton and eventually married him after the death of his wife; and Anne Oldfield, though openly a mistress to Arthur Maynwaring and Charles Churchill, became a wealthy and respected woman, who was known to keep company with ladies of quality.[2]

Though the actual life of Nell Gwyn, a Restoration actress and Charles II's mistress, precedes the period in discussion here, the first full-length memoir about her was written in the mid-eighteenth century. A plethora of broadsides, satires, and ballads abound, and information about her is often difficult to extricate from the many apocryphal legends. *Memoirs of the Life of Eleanor Gwinn, A Celebrated Courtezan, in the Reign of King Charles I and Mistress to that Monarch* (London, 1752), an anonymous publication, offered the first full-length life story at more than half a century's distance from her death. The memoir followed the pattern of the popular whore and rogue biographies that were influential on the nascent novel during the early eighteenth century. Illustrated by a frontispiece of a bare-breasted Gwyn, it traced her rise from being the daughter of a tradesman "in mean Circumstances" to becoming the king's most celebrated courtesan (1). According to this version of her life, Gwyn turned to acting as the last refuge of a poverty-stricken girl struggling to find her way in London, an avenue that seemed natural for a strikingly beautiful woman with limited skills: "At least, if she could not wear the Buskin with Success, she could see no Objection to her appearing as a Lady in waiting, or one of the Maids of the Bedchamber to the Queens of the Stage." Her preference, however, according to the anonymous memoirist, was to *become* royalty, rather than merely impersonating it: "if not a Queen, a[t] least the Mistress of a Monarch" (7). The biography, in other words, described Gwyn as steadily improving her status in a calculated way by advancing from being the mistress of Thomas Betterton to that of a player named Deviel, and then on to Lord Rupert, the Earl of Meredith, Lord Wilmot, and finally the king, though in fact her actual list of lovers was even more extensive. The narrative portrayed her as a conniving opportunist, who managed her meteoric rise because of her talent for quick, sprightly conversation deliv-

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[1] Laura Rosenthal has emphasised the importance of the sign of the whore as applied to the actress (8). For a counter-argument to Rosenthal, see Deborah Payne, "Reified Object or Emergent Professional? Retheorizing the Restoration Actress," *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre*, ed. J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah Payne (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1995) 13-38. It would be instructive, I think, for critics of the eighteenth-century theatre to distinguish in a nuanced fashion among actual prostitutes, mistresses, and actresses who simply enjoyed unorthodox sex lives, and I have attempted to begin that calibration here.

[2] See also my "Actresses and the Economics of Celebrity, 1700-1800," *Celebrity and British Theatre, 1660-2000*, ed. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (London: Palgrave, 2005) 148-68.

ered with polite candour: "She inherited a great deal of Wit and good Sense; and had great Promptitude at Repartees" (21). She is praised, too, for having displayed the great good sense to realise that she could not aspire to be the wife of a man of means, but only a mistress.

The memoir, then, is not so much the biography of an actress as a whore's progress that leads to impersonating a lady of quality. Though the narrative praises her beauty, it faults her as a player on stage when it came to elocution, dignity, keen understanding, and gracefulness. In her brief acting career, Gwyn was best known for her *ingénue* roles, in plays written by John Dryden, Robert Howard, and Charles Sedley. As an actress, her greatest power lay not in her parts but at the edges of her role, when she was "speaking an Epilogue... with a striking Air of Coquetishness and Levity" (19), as if to emphasise the linkages between her role in the play and her life at the stage's periphery. Reciting an epilogue, Gwyn would have engaged the audience both as herself and in character, as, for example, when the tragic heroine seemed to rise from the dead to speak, as Nell Gwyn, a comic epilogue at the end of *Tyrannick Love* (1669), while still wearing her costume as Valeria: "Here Nelly lies, who, though she liv'd a Slater'n,/ Yet dy'd a Princess acting in S. Cathar'n" (Dryden). The epilogue required a particular kind of skill sufficiently removed from the play itself, one that established a public persona and allowed the audience to assess her simultaneously as actress and person, as a real individual as well as a character.

In fact, of course, Gwyn's public identity as the king's whore and mother of his bastard children became well known, and King Charles II underscored this identity by treating her as a mistress, rather than as a respected professional actress. Yet, though Gwyn was lacking in chastity according to these *Memoirs*, her virtue was several times bolstered with reference to her *charity*. She was credited with displaying her good nature through acts of generosity and benevolence that would have been regarded as characteristic of a gentlewoman. In particular, her kindness to English Civil War veterans, in providing care to the wounded, was explained in some detail: "Another Act of Generosity, which raised the Character above any Courtezan in those or any other Times, was her Solicitude to effect the Institution of the *Chelsea* Hospital" (46). In sum, "she was a Lady of distinguished Talents: she united Wit, Beauty and Benevolence, and if she deserves Blame for want of Chastity, there are few who challenge such lavish Encomiums for other moral Qualities" (60). Chastity, then, was only one aspect of a woman's morality, though perhaps the dominant one. The centrality of her sexual life relegated her acting to incidental significance in defining her lasting identity, but the memoirist's attention to her benevolence made her "vartue" seem sufficient to attract a prince.

In contrast, the anonymous *Life of Lavinia Beswick, alias Fenton, alias Polly Peachum* (London, 1728) maintained from the outset that acting was central to Fenton's life. Among the first women celebrities, Fenton's singing and acting as the heroine in John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728) skyrocketed her to fame. A raunchy broadsheet, *The Whole Life of Polly Peachum; Containing an Account of Her Birth, Parentage and Education* (London, n.d.), written just after the play opened, recounts how "Polly Peachum... jumpt from an Orange Girl to an Actress on the Stage, and from that to be a Lady of Fortune." As in the Nell Gwyn memoir, sexuality is again

a powerful theme. During Fenton's young life, described with distant, amused irony, she early became "a Sacrifice to *Priapus*" (14). Comparing her to fictional adventurers Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders, the memoirist noted, with sympathy, that she was a fatherless love-child, until her mother, a barmaid and occasional inhabitant of Old Bailey, married her stepfather, Fenton. Having much in common with the popular amatory fictions written by Aphra Behn, Delariviere Manley, and Eliza Haywood during the same period, the memoir focussed on Lavinia Fenton's seductive charms and the sparks who pursued her, though the thread of her enduring love for a feckless Portuguese nobleman is interwoven throughout. Appearing to sympathise with her unfortunate plight, the biographer offered samples of the numerous missives from admirers that Fenton, like other prominent actresses, found herself having to scrutinise, fend off, or accept. Fenton's lively abilities deemed her to be worthy of a stage career in the memoirist's eyes but also aligned her with prostitution: "Polly becoming now the most celebrated Toast in the Town, she gain'd new Admirers every Time she appear'd on the Stage, and Persons of the highest Rank and Quality made Love to her; insomuch, that by the Presents she has received, she lives in Ease and Plenty, keeps her Servants, and appears abroad in as much Magnificence as a Lady" (33). In other words, her achievement as an actress, her accumulation of wealth, and her passing on occasion as a woman of rank occurred because of her sexual attractiveness alone, rather than her talent and skill. At the same time that she was ostensibly absolved from being a common whore, her willingness to accept "a Diamond Ring, a green Purse, a Watch... Snuff-Box or some valuable Trincklet" from admirers is sneeringly noted (34). Her success is thus attributed to male patrons and mentors, as it is in other popular pamphlets or broadsides that remark upon the high fees she allegedly charged, not for acting, but for prostitution: "*A hundred Guineas for a Nights Debauch*" (34). The question raised about Fenton, as for other actresses in these life accounts, concerns the legitimacy of the means by which they rose to wealth and whether their talent as a player justified their apparent class mobility; but the possibility that Fenton possessed a certain kind of virtue in spite of her sexual behaviour is forwarded as a plausible interpretation.

Fenton's memoir liberally criticises her, but it gives way, in the later part, to muted admiration for the high quality of her performance as Cherry in George Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem*, in which she merited an increase in pay from the paltry thirty shillings per week with which she began. Such a fee would still have been modest, but it would have been the equivalent to more than a common labourer's pay (though less than a curate's), not counting the benefits or gifts that she received (Copeland 29). The memoir thus becomes less a story of poverty than a clever actress's ability to earn and accrue funds sufficient to grant charity to neighbours, bail out her Portuguese nobleman lover from a debtor's prison, and offer "*Humanity* to the *Distressed*," as the title-page advertises. In fact, one could certainly argue that a significant theme of the biography was admiration or Fenton's remarkable ease in seeming to be a lady of quality in spite of her lowly origins and her marginal status as a working woman: "I think she may pass for an accomplish'd worthy Lady, *if the Publick will allow an Actress the Title*" (47). This last phrase —"if the Publick will allow an Actress the Title"— is no small caveat, but the gist of the

biography is to assert that Fenton, though contaminated by the company she kept, through grit and ingenuity, earned the right to become accepted as a woman who improved her status through her own merit.

Several of Fenton's talents are mentioned with some cynicism, including her penning a poem in which she defends her freedom to remain a mistress, rather than become wife to a fop. But running counter to the rather sardonic tone of the narrator is substantial praise for Fenton, whose name became permanently identified with her explosively popular role as Polly Peachum. The memoirist expresses considerable admiration —if tongue-in-cheek— not only for her stage career, but also her knack for attracting admirers and gaining sexual attention.[3] Significantly, after promising to provide "Proofs of her *Ingenuity, Wit*, and *Smart Repartees*," he praises her genius as witnessed in social situations. Here, as in later memoirs of Fenton and other actresses, there is great emphasis on the high quality of her conversation to entertain and to soothe. The memoir was somewhat prophetic, for Fenton left the stage shortly after its publication to become the mistress of the Duke of Bolton, whom she finally married several decades later after the death of his wife. In short, Fenton's memoirs explained and excused her being welcomed into the best circles with women of rank, in spite of her sexual profligacy, because of her inherent good taste and accomplished conversation. Her sexual behaviour was made to seem an inevitable consequence of her profession and thus not a matter of will, and Fenton's memoir implies that a celebrated actress's worth might be evaluated separately from it.

The recurring theme of valuing these public women in spite of their unconventional sexual behaviour becomes much more prominent in the several memoirs of Anne Oldfield. The various biographical tracts written about Oldfield justified her being treated as a woman of the upper echelons in spite of her failure to satisfy conventional norms. Oldfield was the subject of two biographies published shortly after her death: *Authentick Memoirs of the Life of That Celebrated Actress Mrs. Ann Oldfield* (London, 1730), which ran to six editions in the first year;[4] and William Egerton [Edmund Curll], *Faithful Memoirs of the Life, Amours, and Performances of That Justly Celebrated, and Most Eminent Actress of Her Time, Mrs. Anne Oldfield* (London, 1731). A later version of the "Egerton" memoir was abridged and added to Thomas Betterton's *The History of the English Stage, from the Restauration* [sic] *to the Present Time* (London, 1741). The first memoir competes for veracity with the later one that had been announced at the time of publication, and it is accused in advance of "pack[ing] together a gross Collection of Absurdities" (12). Edmund Curll's biography of Robert Wilks (1733) and Benjamin Victor's of Barton Booth

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[3] My argument differs somewhat from that of Cheryl Wanko who emphasises that the *Life of Fenton* presents the actress as a "gold digger" and that the memoir "denies her public achievement and condemns her path of upward mobility." *Roles of Authority: Thespian Biography and Celebrity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Lubbock: Texas Tech UP, 2003) 58, 60.

[4] I am citing the 3rd ed. (1730) unless otherwise noted.

(1733) were also written near the same time as these memoirs,[5] and Colley Cibber complains in his *Apology* about the new tendency to follow, in an unseemly hurry, an actor's death with a published life story (6-7).

Oldfield's memoirs are remarkable because they are the first full-length biographies to describe an actress as a credible professional. In part, the task for Oldfield's biographers was to extricate her person from the sexual sins, real and imagined, of her predecessors. *Authentick Memoirs* (1730), the first of Oldfield's memoirs to appear, was an encomium that took pains to rank her, in both comedy and tragedy, as the equal to Wilks, who frequently played opposite her. The popular and talented pair starred together as Plume and Silvia in Farquhar's Recruiting Officer, as Archer and Mrs. Sullen in Farquhar's *Beaux' Stratagem*, Valentine and Angelica in William Congreve's *Love for Love*, and as Careless and Lady Dainty in Cibber's *The Double Gallant; or, The Sick Lady's Cure*. The sole exception to the memoirist's praise for her is the accusation that Oldfield engaged in one "ungenerous action," for having stolen Mr F —e from his wife and children but later persuading him to return to his family as she sincerely repented of her "misspent Life" (6th ed. [1730] 41). As in the case of Fenton, the memoirist explains her misstep as a professional hazard, that ought to be excused by recognising that she was surrounded by flatterers. This is swiftly followed by a reference to the proof of her excellence, in having earned £150 each year, rising to as much as £500, plus substantial profits from benefit nights. Oldfield's worth as a woman was thus complicated by her star power and her ability to earn money. If her life story did not provide a sterling model of behaviour for young girls, it did offer a gripping fantasy of independence and of escape from class strictures.

Even more than in Fenton's life, the emphasis in the 1730 memoir is on Oldfield's deserving to be the universal delight of the "beau monde" in spite of her sexual adventures. Inclined to the theatre from an early age, Oldfield's ascent on the stage is ascribed to her magnetism and acting talent. Exhibiting an appeal across class divisions, Oldfield's acting charmed the boxes and delighted the pit: "Ev'n the Pert Templer, and the City Prig, / Who come to Plays to show their Wit —or Wig" (44). The gentlemen and ladies in the audience, seeming to be part of the theatrical properties and resembling the players on stage, were metonymically signified as wigs or costume accessories, when Oldfield (in a contest with Elizabeth Barry) caused "Effusion among the *Toupees*, and fluttering of *Fans* among the *Ladies*" (20). Levelling out the distance between gentlemanly playgoers and the lowly female player, the narrative assumes that the reader shares the attitude of a captivated male spectator, enchanted by Oldfield's performance, who would himself long to play opposite the convincing actress on the stage: "Who that has seen her *Angelica* in *Love for Love*, but would, like *Valentine*, have made away with all to have obtained her!... so irresistable [sic] was she in every Character she personated" (23).

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[5] Edmund Curll, *The Life of That Eminent Comedian Robert Wilks, Esq.* (London, 1733); and Benjamin Victor, *Memoirs of the Life of Barton Booth, Esq.* (London, 1733).

The first of these several memoirs concerning Anne Oldfield also countered her eccentric if excusable sexual behaviour with high praise for her aesthetic judgement, including her elevated taste in painting, poetry, drama, and even politics: "She is such a Judge of Painting, that the greatest of our Modern Artists in their Profession are glad to have her Opinion of a Piece before it is shewn to the World, knowing, that if it escapes her Censure, it will gain the Approbation of the whole Town; for she is so Nice in the Discovery of an Error, that it's as impossible to deceive her, as it is to express her Strength of Fancy" (6th ed. [1730] 43). Her skill in repartee meant that her wit might even have been construed to be superior to her considerable beauty. Yet there is a double edge to the conclusion of the biographical "A Poem to the Memory of Mrs. Oldfield," which asserts that Oldfield compelled the spectator or reader to ignore her unorthodox actions because of the quality of her thespian achievement: "She spoilt, against her will, the Poet's Aim; / Making those Follies which we should despise, / When seen in her, seem Virtues in our Eyes" (44). Irregular sexual behaviour was transformed into something valuable and even virtuous in her person through the theatrical magic of her dramatic characterisations.

The second narrative of Oldfield's life, *The Faithful Memoirs* (1731), consists of a miscellany of documents related to Oldfield's life, rather than a linear narrative. It includes details of her life, the principal parts she performed, and a defence of the English stage to counter the antitheatrical sentiments in letters that also offer the beginnings of dramatic criticism. *Faithful Memoirs* defines Oldfield in terms of her friendships and affairs, her parts, her politics, and her epilogues. Sections on actress Mary Anne Campion, the Duke of Devonshire, and William Wycherley's marriage fill out the narrative with bits that were only tangentially related to Oldfield's life, but the *Memoir* returns to its subject to discuss her last original role as Sophonisba, as well as her illness, death, funeral oration, will, and effects. It also incorporates poems, some of which commemorated her, but others of which had only the vaguest connections to the theatre.

In *Faithful Memoirs*, the argument switches course to suggest that Oldfield was not of exemplary virtue because she lacked sufficient reflection on her behaviour. At the outset, the title-page offers an apparent critique of Oldfield's life, citing Rochefoucault: "The great Pains, which the Ladies of this Age take to commend Virtue, is sometimes a shrewd Sign that they take but very little to practice it. And, the greatest Part of those complaints against their Neighbours, are owing to the Want of Reflection upon Themselves." If the stage was supposed to inculcate morals, Oldfield was judged, at least in reference to this passage, as personally derelict. But, at the same time, it was her successful impersonation of roles that instructed the audience by moving their emotions, as was noted with admiration in her funeral oration: "What harden'd Heart wept not with *Andromache*? What Mother did she not instruct in Maternal Love when *Astynax*'s Danger wrings her Soul?" (153). Oldfield's principal roles served as examples of reform flowing from a stage that inculcated virtue and punished vice. Just as the 1731 memoir argues that spectators benefitted from watching Oldfield's instructive tragic roles, the susceptible spectators were also purportedly challenged by her comic roles to behave morally: "What Woman so lost in a Crowd of Cards, and good Company which the Repentance of

my Lady *Townley* could not teach to reform? What Coquet so abandoned to her Folly whom the ridiculous Behaviour of Lady *Betty Modish* could not make detest her Vanity? What Character did she appear in private or publick Life which she could not make Amiable? On the Stage so easy did the Poets Language flow from her, it might well be taken for her own Sentiments; and in private all she spoke, all she did, carry'd that agreeable Air, that every thing sat upon her with the same genteel Neglect, her Cloaths did; unaffected gay, but politley Neat" (153). Because the sentiments of the character appeared, to the audience, to reflect Oldfield's own indictment of Lady Betty's coquettish folly as she melded her acting skill together with her person, she could be forgiven her affairs with Maynwaring and Churchill. In fact, as "A Poem to the Memory of Mrs. Oldfield" had claimed, *she* set the standard for actual gentlewomen, rather than the reverse: "Such finish'd Breeding, so polite a Taste, / Her Fancy always for the Fashion past" (42).

By ending with a panegyrical "Funeral Oration for Mrs. Oldfield," the 1731 biography seemed to claim finally that Oldfield was the exception to the ladies of the age, for "she taught Virtue in such persuasive Accents, that the Hearers have been with Immitation fired, and wished they so could Act that so they may Instruct, and so instructing be adored like her" (152). She, like Fenwick, was judged to exceed the expectations of "woman." She is compared to a phoenix, "for as far as Nature exceeds Art, so far did she excell all the Women of her Time" (153-54). In sum, her public fame ultimately took precedence over any quibbles about her private life.

Much more than the biographies of Gwyn or Fenton, Oldfield's memoirs depicted acting as central to her identity. This approach makes them unique in the history of such women's life stories. The final *Memoirs of Mrs. Anne Oldfield* (1741) was published as a separate addendum to *The History of the English Stage, from the Restauration to the Present Time*, attributed to Thomas Betterton but compiled by William Oldys and Edmund Curll from his papers. This abridgement of the 1731 memoirs focussed on the principal narration of the earlier version but omitted the summation of her life, four poems on her death, the list of epilogues and plays in which she appeared, and the inventory of her estate and her effects. Both versions —full-length and abridged— emphasised Oldfield's epilogues, those moments at the ending of the plays when the actress seemed most modern and most herself, as she migrated to the stage's periphery. As much a history of other actresses contemporary to Oldfield as it was her exclusive biography, the memoir demonstrated the actress's courage in blazing the trail for other women in, for example, her epilogue on the parliament of women, her rant against vile husbands, and her argument for a woman's right to divorce and remarry when faced with an unfaithful husband. She acted as intermediary to the audience as the epilogue's speaker, who resembled both the actress and the character, but who was not solely herself or her part.[6] In

[6] Mary E. Knapp provides an excellent study of the performance of prologues and epilogues, *Prologues and Epilogues of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1961).

particular, the comic epilogue to the tragic *Distrest Mother*, spoken by Oldfield as the widowed Andromache, became an opportunity for her to seem to defend her lover Maynwaring and their relationship after his death. The 1741 memoir includes Eustace Budgell's ribald epilogue to *The Distrest Mother* spoken by Anne Oldfield, a gossipy afterpiece to which Richardson's Pamela had taken exception. The memoir calls the epilogue, in which Oldfield mocks her character's scrupulous moral decisions, "very humourous," an opinion quite distinct from Pamela's reaction. Instead, Pamela complains to Lady Davers, "I was extremely mortify'd to see my favourite (and the only perfect) Character, debas'd and despoil'd, and the Widow of *Hector*, Prince of *Troy*, talking Nastiness to an Audience, and setting it out with all the wicked Graces of Action, and affected Archness of Looks, Attitude, and Emphasis." Pamela, of course, misses the irony of Oldfield's stance on her character. Though spectators like Pamela may have been offended, the memoir glosses over any potential moral harm that might result to the audience from the very popular epilogue.[7] Similarly, Oldfield's reciting the comic epilogue to *Phaedra and Hippolitus* bridged the gap between classical history and current events in the eighteenth century, to become a witty injunction to modern women, who were cajoled to remain chaste, unlike the unfaithful Phaedra. Oldfield is represented as attempting to elevate the flagging morality of the theatre for people of quality, "especially the Ladies" ([1731 and 1741] 10), an idea that ran counter to the assumption that her performances pleased primarily male spectators. These prologues and epilogues made the plays seem startlingly personal and current, and they helped to bridge the temporal gap between a historical or classical play and its actual moment of presentation.

Oldfield justly earned a reputation as a consummate actress, and her unconventional sexual behaviour paradoxically became a sign of her brilliant natural talent, as if she had not laboured to learn a demanding craft or to pursue the mundane task of earning a living. In the first memoir, the reader was encouraged generously to grant her the "Grains of Allowance to those whose excentric Genius move about their Orb, that is to say, to those whose petty Failings have superiour Excellencies to all such Cavillers" (26). The memoir also relates the unconventional love story of Oldfield and Maynwaring (and later Charles Churchill) in a manner designed to justify a nation's adulation. Maynwaring, though excused by his nobility, is acknowledged to be the alcoholic spendthrift that he was, and much of the memoir turns out to be a defence of him, rather than her. The two actors' fates and public reputations were, of course, intertwined, to such an extent that his death was testified as not resulting from venereal disease, "to clear up the unjust Aspersion cast on

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[7] *The Spectator* No. 341 (April 1, 1712) entered the controversy, in a paper ascribed to Budgell, by asserting that Mrs. Oldfield was no longer Andromache when she spoke the "facetious Epilogue" after the end of the play: "every one knows that on the British Stage they are distinct Performances by themselves, Pieces entirely detached from the play, and no way essential to it." *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965] III:266-67. See Knapp 296-97.

Mrs. Oldfield" ([1731] 40; [1741] 29), and, perhaps, to dissociate her from any association with Nell Gwyn, whose death was suspect. Neither is Oldfield's giving birth to illegitimate progeny, one son each with Maynwaring and Churchill, condemned. In addition to being a legitimate object of desire, the actress is portrayed as a kind of ideal mother, whose generosity appropriately merited deep affection from the men of means who fathered her children. For example, her willingness to bequeath money to her sons, including sufficient funds for one son to buy a coveted place in the Horseguards, is turned into an indication that her high character was worthy of Maynwaring, "a Gentleman of one of the best Families in *Great-Britain*, as well as a Man of the most exquisite and refin'd Taste, and most unquestion'd Judgment" ([1730] 24). In short, the memoirs were testaments to Oldfield's munificence and to her ability to amass a fortune equal to twice the estate that Maynwaring left; and the 1731 biography lists the details of rich tapestries, jewels, books, paintings, linens, japanned screens and chests among her possessions.

Actresses in particular were credited with making social comedies and she-tragedies relevant to people's lives, thus erasing the distinction between theatre and life. When Oldfield acted as Calista in Nicholas Rowe's *Fair Penitent* (1725), "she appear'd with such a noble Grandeur in her Person, that it were to be wish'd some of our modern Ladies of Quality could learn in their Turn to personate Mrs. *Oldfield*; So infinitely did the Copy transcend the Original, and so much more amiable did they appear when represented by Mrs. *Oldfield*, when at home with their Lords" (6th ed. [1730] 38). This sympathetic portrayal as the seduced maiden of "she-tragedy" speaks to the complexity of combining virtue with lost chastity. William Chetwood wrote, "Her excellent clear Voice of Passion, her piercing flaming Eye, with Manner and Action suiting, us'd to make me shrink with Awe... and though Mr. *Booth* played *Lothario* I could hardly leg him up to the Importance of triumphing over such a finish'd Piece of Perfection, that seemed to be too much dignified to lose her Virtue" (Chetwood 201-02; Lafler146-48). The heroine ultimately succumbed to the cunning Lothario instead of turning to Altamont, to whom she was betrothed by her father. Calista afforded a splendid role that would have enticed audiences to draw parallels with Oldfield's real life, and she played the part at least twice each year, until she chose it for her benefit night in 1730, her last year of performing. In yet another theatrical example of virginity lost, Oldfield was credited with *becoming* Jane Shore, at once a queen and a woman who needed to be forgiven, as in the epilogue to the play: "Then judge the *fair Offender* with good Nature, / And let your Fellow-feeling curb your Satire. / What if our Neighbours have some little Failing / Must we needs fall to damning and to railing; / For her Excuse too, be it understood, / That if the Woman was not quite so good, / Her Lover was a King, she Flesh and Blood" ([1731] 75). In pitying Oldfield, who made this plea as Jane Shore, the audience was cajoled into forgiving the actress's own moral lapses.

But, perhaps, the most noteworthy and memorable character that Oldfield played was that of the charmingly duplicitous Lady Betty Modish, in Colley Cibber's sentimental comedy, *The Careless Husband*, produced for the first time at Drury Lane, 7 December 1704. The play also featured her popular co-star Robert Wilks

as Sir Charles Easy, the careless husband of the title. Cibber almost certainly modelled the role after Anne Oldfield, who owned the part during her lifetime; and the play, like *Fair Penitent* and *Jane Shore*, teases the audience with its close blending of life and myth. The *Faithful Memoirs* includes *verbatim* an entire scene between Lady Easy and Lady Betty Modish (II.i); and, though the 1741 version omits the scene, it dates Oldfield's birth as an actress from her performance of this part. Her "*real Character*" is revealed through the "*imaginary one* of Lady *Betty Modish*" in regard to her dress, charm, "Wit, Raillery, and Conversation" (11). The part exemplifies Oldfield's straddling her public and private roles. Though Cibber apparently created the part with her in mind, Thomas Davies notes in his *Dramatic Miscellanies* that Oldfield seemed to have invented the words of her character as if she had spoken them in her own life: "By being a welcome and constant visitor to families of distinction, Mrs. Oldfield acquired an elegant and graceful deportment in representing women of high rank. She expressed the sentiments of Lady Betty Modish and Lady Townly in a manner so easy, natural, and flowing, and so like to her common conversation, that they appeared to be her own genuine conception" (Davies, vol. III 433-34). *The Careless Husband* also animates the ongoing debate over an actress's virtue versus her chastity, seeming to allow the character Lady Modish's rank to compensate for the actress Oldfield's sexual behaviour.

Demonstrating that Oldfield's natural character was equal to the peer's daughter she played, Cibber set the play's scenes of spirited exchange in Windsor Castle, where he imagined that the actress had engaged with ladies of quality in similar conversations. Lady Modish relishes the power of her beauty to torment Lord Morelove, whose solid morality contrasts at once with Sir Charles Easy's libertine tendencies and the studied extravagance of Lord Foppington (played by Colley Cibber), with whom she shares delight in being à la mode as a means of accruing power. Because Lady Modish's authority resides in her beauty and costume, she boldly asserts that "A new fashion upon a fine woman is often a greater proof of her value than you are aware of" (Cibber, *Careless* vol II.i). Manipulating this power, she displays apparent indifference to Morelove (who adores her) for the bulk of the play, as a feminine counterpoint to Sir Charles Easy's casual infidelity. Though Lady Modish publicly displays contempt for reputation, the play reins her in at the end to exemplify virtue. If the play draws upon racy Restoration themes in a toned-down eighteenth-century context, Lady Modish stands between Restoration heroines, such as Congreve's Millamant, and eighteenth-century comic sentimental heroines in what has been called the first sentimental comedy because of the reformation scene at its conclusion.[8]

Lady Modish's power derives, in part, from studied attention to high fashion, a trait for which Oldfield was also known. Wearing beautiful clothing brought feminine sway, while public reputation —for which Lady Modish claimed to care not a fig— resembled exotic deformity: "One shall not see an homely creature in

[8] See William W. Appleton's introduction to Cibber, *The Careless Husband* ix-xvi.

town but wears it in her mouth as monstrously as the Indians do bobs at their lips, and it really becomes 'em just alike" (II.i). The resolution of the plot relies on a fashionable stage property, the famous steinkirk scarf that Lady Easy dangled from her philandering husband's neck as material proof of his adultery. The lady's scarf —not the fop's periwig, cravat, hat, or even his snuffbox— unfolds the moral of the drama. Yet the play's other fashion-plate, Lord Foppington, comes to possess a masculine piece of stage business that threatens Modish's relationship with Morelove, and she demands its return. For Lady Betty Modish, the snuff box that Morelove gave her as a talisman of his love is transformed into "a lady's utensil" to suggest that even male properties could become female possessions in the theatre (III). The male characters challenge Lady Modish's reckless courage, and the women are jealous of it, making her character a paradigm of the actress who plays her.

When it becomes clear that no amount of new-fashioning of the scarf will change the circumstances of Sir Charles's exposure, the women show themselves to be the reformers of men, though not before the chastened Sir Charles Easy lectures Lady Betty Modish, as if speaking directly to Oldfield: "But the noble conquest you have gained at last, over defeated sense of reputation, too, has made your fame immortal. Ay, madam, your reputation... I say, your reputation; 't has been your life's whole pride of late to be the common toast of every public table, vain even in the infamous addresses of a married man, my Lord Foppington; let that be reconciled with reputation" (V.vii). Particularly regretting the *public* nature of the slights she had shown Morelove, Lady Betty wins her lover and regains her reputation.

Empowered by her quick tongue and sheer attractiveness, the illustrious Oldfield embodied the contradictions of an actress who played on and competed with her own personal reputation. Her memoirs drew the parallel very tightly when Cibber was quoted as saying "that almost every Sentence, in the Part, may with Justice be said to have been heard from her own Mouth before she pronounced it on the Stage. In short, it was not the Part of Lady Betty Modish, represented by Mrs. *Oldfield*; but it was the real Mrs. *Oldfield* who appeared in the Character of Lady *Betty Modish*" ([1731] 3). In other words, as the subject of early theatre biography, Oldfield was credited with a nearly seamless assumption of a role and a social class that was attested to be already inherent within her character while acknowledging her less-than-perfect sexual reputation.[9] She was "the *Greatest Lady* in *England*" (38), and "the Brightest Actress *Britain* e'er did yield" (146). At the same time, the theatre was "aptly calculated for the forming [of] a free-born People," according to *The History of the English Stage* (124), and Oldfield was portrayed as its national treasure. Oldfield was thus represented as a woman exemplary of the English nation, and one who richly deserved the honour of being buried in the national monument, Westminster Abbey, an honour previously limited to Thomas and Mary Betterton.

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[9] For example, Joanne Lafler reports that the Earl and Countess of Bristol, as well as John, Lord Hervey, were among Oldfield's aristocratic friends (123).

In sum, the taint of the whore follows Nell Gwyn, Lavinia Fenton, and Anne Oldfield into their mingling with those of higher rank, but it would be too simple to say that, in these memoirs, they were absolved of their sins simply because they travelled in circles of quality. The memoirs —and some of the plays in which they acted, and the epilogues that they recited— often offered excuses for the actress's missteps, rather than condemnation, and they seemed to suggest, in a not entirely uncomplimentary fashion, that actresses were in a category not contained by "woman." As Fenton's biographer puts it, "For sure she was more than Woman" (42). This sentiment is both derisive and admiring, but identifying these women primarily by their sexual activities or lack of them —as prostitutes, mistresses, or even as chaste women— is, if we attend carefully to the subtleties of their biographies, often an inadequate and skewed understanding of how they were perceived. Oldfield's 1730 memoirist argues this most forcefully: the celebrated actress "endeavour'd by a sincere Repentance to make all the Atonement that lay in her Power for a misspent Life; and indeed how could it be expected otherwise, from a Person who had been from her Youth immersed in Vanity, surrounded with Flattery, and inur'd to a profuse Way of living? most Women, I believe, in her condition would have done as much, few would have done better, and many would have done much worse" (6th ed. [1730] 41). The separation between public and private virtue was being negotiated in these memoirs in a way that would be resolved quite differently in James Boaden's memoir of Sarah Siddons in the early nineteenth century: "Her PRIVATE life! What is there, then, in the private life of the *most excellent* wife, mother, sister, friend, the *detail* of which could be interesting to the public? The duties of such a character are unobtrusive, unostentatious, and avoid the pen of history. They confer the BEST OF BLESSINGS; but they shun all record and reward, save the internal consciousness, which renders every other, in this life, of little moment" (Boaden I:15). In contrast, these eighteenth-century memoirs attest that each actress, though sexually unorthodox in her private life, was charitable and generous; and, in the cases of Fenwick and Oldfield, each was possessed of immense natural talent that merited them a social mobility in spite of their private behaviour. As popular and visible public women, they acted as surrogates for the new bourgeoisie aspiring to assume a new kind of celebrated, impersonated nobility that could be achieved, rather than inherited.

The memoirs of Anne Oldfield were the first substantial accounts of an actress's life, but the first autobiographical account, in which an actress narrates her own life, did not appear until Charlotte Charke's A *Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke, Written by Herself,* in 1755. Until that time, the narratives that most resemble autobiographical writing are, perhaps, Jane Rogers' short memorial (1712) and Kitty Clive's protests (1744), mere fragments of self-representation but courageous defences of their rights as working women. No wonder, then, that the theatre audience, hungry for juicy titbits and private information about these strong-minded women, interpreted their roles, as well as their spoken prologues and epilogues, as affording authentic glimpses into actresses' private lives. Unlike the later more scandalous memoirs, such as those of Peg Woffington (1760), George Anne Bellamy (1785), and Elizabeth Gooch (1792), these early memoirs display ambivalent attitudes toward women in the public sphere, who were carving out their right

to earn a substantial living while redefining "virtue." The actress's body on stage, that instrument for combining the labour of acting with sex work, held virtue together with public display in unstable proportion. These early memoirs convey both the impulse to explain and to forgive; the impulse to condemn and yet to entertain the possibility that celebrated women of the theatre, in the first half of the eighteenth century, might prosper while living their ostensibly "private" lives by an inconsistent moral standard that reigning definitions of "woman" could not contain.

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"HOME IS WHERE THE (HE)ART IS": MARGARET ANDERSON AND ISADORA DUNCAN, TWO UNDOMESTICATED ART LOVERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to bring together the autobiographies of two remarkable women who developed their artistic talents in the first decades of the 20th century: Margaret C. Anderson, the editor of *The Little Review*, and Isadora Duncan, the innovative dancer. The analysis of their life narratives shows how, beyond temporal coincidence, and an independent attitude towards social conventions, both women shared a rejection of established canons of family life which led them to portray a model of domesticity quite different to that expected by Victorian standards. This is especially reflected in their particular attitude towards the places and houses they inhabited, in their manifold travels —both of them embarked on a life-changing journey to Europe, and in their economic mismanagement. Theirs was a constant longing for art and beauty, which may explain why they present a different model of womanhood from that of the women of their time.

KEY WORDS: Margaret C. Anderson, Isadora Duncan, autobiography, domesticity, spaces, family life, art.

RESUMEN

El objeto de este artículo es aunar las autobiografías de dos mujeres excepcionales que desarrollaron su talento artístico en las primeras décadas del siglo XX: Margaret C. Anderson, la editora de *The Little Review*, e Isadora Duncan, la innovadora bailarina. El análisis de sus textos autobiográficos demuestra que además de ser coetáneas y de mostrar una actitud independiente ante las convenciones sociales, ambas compartían el rechazo a los cánones de vida familiar que predominaban en su sociedad, lo cual les llevó a reflejar un modelo de domesticidad diferente al que cabía esperar en la época victoriana. Esto se aprecia de manera especial en una actitud peculiar hacia los lugares y casas que habitaron, en sus múltiples viajes —ambas se embarcaron en un viaje a Europa que les cambió la vida, y en su mala administración económica. Su anhelo constante por alcanzar el arte y la belleza pudiera explicar el porqué ambas presentaron un modelo de mujer diferente al de sus contemporáneas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Margaret C. Anderson, Isadora Duncan, autobiografía, vida doméstica, espacios, familia, arte.

I have no place in the world —no fixed position.
Margaret C. ANDERSON

I certainly was not suited to domestic life.
Isadora DUNCAN

Writing itself is space. It is a populated house.
Nancy MAIRS

Do Margaret Anderson and Isadora Duncan have anything in common beyond temporal coincidence? Their artistic endeavours and their personal stance in life suggest more similarities than differences. Certainly, a close reading of their life narratives shows that these early 20th-entury art lovers have more in common than at first appears.

At the turn of the 19th century, when America was being reshaped and transformed into a more cosmopolitan society and the "old Victorian certainties (of class, marriage, of the role of woman) were being dissolved by a rapidly changing order" (Reynolds 39), these two women embarked on a journey in the opposite direction going from the New World to the Old Continent. Those changing times were the socio-cultural scenario in which both women were to carry out diverse forms of artistic expression: editing,[1] writing, music, and dancing. Anderson, who founded the literary magazine *The Little Review* in Chicago, was one of the first women editors, and Duncan was an innovator in the art of dancing from her early times in San Francisco and later in Chicago. They not only devoted themselves to their artistic endeavours but also made an incursion into the field of autobiography, using differing approaches to write their lives. In the present essay we will analyse the first of the three autobiographical books written by Anderson, *My Thirty Years' War*[2] (1930), and Duncan's posthumously published autobiography, *My Life* (1927). Although their life stories, as well as their life narratives were very different, both women share, among other things, an independent attitude towards social conventions, evidenced in the way their lives unfolded; a compulsion to travel in order to

[1] In *The Little Review*, Anderson defended the idea that editing and criticism should be regarded as art: "...the tides of art would cease to ebb and flow were it not for the sun and moon of appreciation. This function of the sun and moon is known as criticism. But criticism as an art has not flourished in this country" (qtd. Marek 67). In her book, *Women Editing Modernism: "Little" Magazines & Literary History*, Jayne E. Marek infers that "critical writing [for Anderson] could be as original and useful as art" (67).

[2] Anderson would publish *The Fiery Fountains* in 1951, giving an account of her life in Europe and her relationship with Georgette Leblanc, and *The Strange Necessity* in 1962, for the most part a text containing personal reflections on art, love, and life.

see new horizons and to expand their ideas —as Anderson affirms, "movement implies change" (233); a special attitude towards the spaces and the houses they inhabited; a rejection of the established canons of family life, moving beyond domesticity; and economic mismanagement. Above all, they shared an ever present longing for art and beauty which became a "lighthouse" in their lives.[3]

In talking about the woman autobiographer, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain how she negotiates the cultures of subjectivity available to her, the discourses of identity circulating around her, as well as the narrative frames commonly used to tell stories: "she reads her life through her readings of other life stories" (5). Duncan's text, for instance, presents numerous allusions to the usual reflections made by the autobiographers of her time about aiming at truth, plus a specific acknowledgment of her incapacity —as a woman— to write the truth of her soul, as she believes Rousseau did, for which she affirms: "no woman has ever told the whole truth of her life" (8). Yet, Anderson goes further than that, reading her life not only through, but also *against* her readings of other life stories. That is to say, because she was aware of the discourses of identity circulating around her she wrote a type of discourse where she would not allow herself to be defined in the same terms in which her contemporaries were writing themselves.

Anderson's narrative could stand as an example of how a modernist autobiography should read. She presents herself as an impersonal narrator, one who is not concerned about her past memories, or telling the truth, but who is merely creating a literary artefact in which she happens to be the protagonist. Acknowledging in the first paragraph that the book is a record of her refusals to be cornered or suppressed by those who cannot accept exceptional or inspired people (3), she goes on to tell of her various fights and struggles—it is no wonder that the title of her narrative makes reference to her belligerent attitude. At the beginning of her text, as an epigraph to the first chapter, she reveals one of her most important battles, which she seems to be winning: "My greatest enemy is reality. I have fought it successfully for thirty years" (3). This statement appears as a warning to her readers about the kind of autobiographer they are about to meet: one who lives in a different dimension. Yet, Michelle E. Green points out in an article about Anderson and *The Little Review* that Patricia Meyer Spacks uses precisely this quote from Anderson to argue about some women's tendency "to glorify themselves in their own minds at the expense of tangible accomplishments," linking both Anderson and Duncan in their narcissism: "Anderson is a prime example of a woman caught up in her own myth, like Isadora Duncan" (12-13). In the first chapter, Anderson also states that she has no place in the world, "no fixed position" (4), which stands out as an early awareness of a female identity which will not consent to being easily grasped. What

[3] In the final paragraph of the last chapter of *My Thirty Years' War* Anderson makes an interesting comment when she says: "I no longer look out upon a lighthouse. I live in one" (274), which is an allusion to the period of time when she lived with Georgette Leblanc in an actual lighthouse in France, whilst it can also be read as a projection of her continuous quest for art.

follows is a description of herself in terms of what she is not, which seems to be a means of preventing her readers from expecting to find the usual kind of story a woman of her time would tell:

> I don't know just what kind of thing I am. Nobody else seems to know either. I appear to be a fairly attractive woman in her thirties. But such a human being falls inevitably into one or more human categories —is someone's daughter, sister, niece, aunt, wife, mistress or mother. I am not a daughter: my father is dead and my mother rejected me long ago. I am not a sister: my two sisters find me more than a little mad, and that is no basis for a sisterly relationship. I am certainly not a niece; (...). I could almost be called an aunt (no one would dare), but my two nephews don't find me convincing; so I'm not an aunt. I am no man's wife, no man's delightful mistress, and I will never, never, never be a mother. (4)

All those human categories she rejects have to do with family relations, making clear from the start that she is not going to define herself in those terms. Furthermore, in choosing to define herself through negation, which actually means going against the pre-established patterns of thought of a conventional society which assigned pre-defined roles to women, she is presenting the roles she was not willing to embody.

Anderson does describe some scattered episodes of her childhood and youth in what appears to be a suffocating family atmosphere, and talks about the many people she met in the early years of *The Little Review*, the artistic/life project around which the whole book revolves,[4] yet she does not reach the point of showing any emotions which would render her text something other than a modernist artefact. One of the most outstanding examples is that of her relationship with Jane Heap, which is presented as one of profound intellectual admiration, with no specific mention of the love they shared, even though the readers gradually become aware of their emotional involvement and subsequent partnership.[5] In fact, that refusal to be too personal makes Anderson present herself in various parts of her text through Heap's perception of her personality and attitudes, and through the ceaseless dialogues in which they were always engaged, as this illuminating assertion shows: "Being really solicitous about human development, Jane sometimes found this im-

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[4] To appreciate what this project meant to Anderson, it is worth mentioning one of her famous dictums, actually taken from an article by Jane Heap in *The Little Review*: "To express the emotions of life is to live; to express the life of emotions is to make art" (148).

[5] In the Introduction to her edition of Margaret C. Anderson's novel, *Forbidden Fires*, Mathilda M. Hills gives an interesting account of the relationship between Anderson and Heap. She explains how Jane's jealousy became a troubling aspect for both of them (4), and how Margaret's falling in love with the French actress-singer Georgette Leblanc was the beginning of the end of their relationship (6-8). Anderson does not mention her love for Leblanc in *My Thirty Years' War* either, although she does introduce and briefly describe her, talking of their activities together, and, most important, dedicating the book to her as "the only human being I have known who has none of the human *bêtises*."

personality of mine discouraging. But I am eternally interested in performance" (187). This fragment not only shows Jane's appreciation of her, but also seems to be another warning to her readers about the kind of text they should expect to find —a text as impersonal as this performer-writer aimed at creating. Furthermore, such a text would not be concerned with providing its readers with a strictly chronological account of events; Anderson's narrative is very well organized, structured through six chapters ("My Thirty Years' War," "The Little Review," "Jane Heap," "California," "New York," and "Paris") and yet, it is not particularly concerned about temporal references.

Such is also the case of Isadora Duncan's narrative, full of memories and anecdotes which take readers from one part of the globe to another in the endless journey that Isadora's life became, but hardly ever giving dates to contextualize any of those events. Ironically enough, she seemed to fail in trying to emulate Rousseau, the truthfully honest autobiographer she mentions several times in her text, not only because of the "omissions and inaccuracies" (Blair xiv) many biographers find in it, but also because of her emphasis on spatial rather than temporal references, which Nancy Mairs, when talking about her own work, perceives as a characteristic of women's life narratives: "...in emphasizing the spatial rather than the temporal elements in my experience, I attempt to avoid what Georges Gusdorf calls [...] the 'original sin of autobiography' (and, one might add, the outstanding feature of phallocentric discourse in general) —that is, 'logical coherence and rationalization' " (472). Subverting phallocentric discourse, Duncan hardly ever offers temporal references; yet, she puzzles her readers with an overwhelming account of the multiple spaces she occupied such as: cattle boats, yachts, benches, hotels, tents, studios, museums, manor houses, or palaces, to mention but a few. Accordingly, her friend and biographer Sewell Stokes, "contaminated" by Duncan's apparent carelessness in making reference to place and time, realizes that he fails to keep a temporal sequence in his own book when he affirms:

> As I write, I realize that even in the first few paragraphs I have failed to keep to any sequence in this story. Perhaps that is because a sequence of any kind was the last thing one considered in any experience that had to do with Isadora. Her mind was big enough (...) to be unconscious of space and time as they are reckoned with, in countries and in minutes. (18)

In contrast to Anderson, Duncan does show her emotions in *My Life*, telling her readers of her numerous love affairs —after a longer than usual virginal state— or sharing her grief at the dramatic loss of her children. She was also explicit when asked by Stokes why she was writing her memoirs, answering in a straightforward manner: "because I need the money so badly" (35). It is not our purpose to "police the truth" of our autobiographers, as Leigh Gilmore wisely warned feminist critics of autobiography some years ago, but we think that we must draw attention to two important omissions in Duncan's text, since they are relevant to our analysis. One is that despite the fact that she had once fallen into "the trap" of marriage, she never mentions it, and yet maintains a belligerent attitude towards that institution

throughout her narrative[6]: "I would live to fight against marriage and for the emancipation of women" (19), or, "Any intelligent woman who reads the marriage contract and then goes into it deserves all the consequences" (138), are only two of the numerous assertions that reveal her oppressive notion of marriage. The other omission is the irony that while she was writing her autobiography she was secluded at the hotel Negresco in Nice, which came to be her last "home", victim of her total incapacity to deal with economic matters. After a nomadic life of absolute freedom and unrestrained movements, she found herself a prisoner of her own chaotic disorganization.[7] To these important omissions, we must add the use of a pseudonym, Lohengrin, to refer to her lover, and father of her second child, the sewing-machine millionaire Paris Singer. In fact, Stokes makes reference to a conversation he held with Duncan on her relationship with Singer where he was told, "You don't know my Millionaire. He was a great influence in my life. I lived with him for a long time. The stories I could tell you about our life together. Such a strange life. None of it is going into the memoirs" (121). In spite of her alleged intention to be a truthful autobiographer, these examples show that Duncan seems to be more in command of what she reveals or conceals from the readers than might be expected from her initial discourse.

Having introduced Anderson's and Duncan's life narratives, we will focus on their specific relationships to the spaces they inhabited conditioned, somehow, by their compulsion to move from place to place, and which reflect their personal ideas on home and domesticity. Both women seemed to have lived in "no man's land", free of the patriarchal impositions that usually paralyzed women in those times; women who were not acted upon but were themselves acting. As Anderson asserts, "I have found out that the quality of every life is determined exclusively by its position in relation to acting or being acted upon" (270). Travelling gave them freedom from domestic constraint, giving them the opportunity not only to drink from the sources of the Old Continent but also to shed in Europe the fresh sap of the New World. Anderson makes clear her reasons for crossing the ocean: "During these years I stayed in Europe —chiefly in France and Italy. I wanted to find out what the old civilizations, races, countries, climates, landscapes would do for me. In some ways these old things made me a new person" (265). For her part, Duncan's journey started early in her life travelling across the States; it continued in Europe

[6] It must be acknowledged that Duncan's autobiographical enterprise was interrupted by her unexpected death. The final chapter leaves her as she arrives in Soviet Russia, where she would meet, marry —for bureaucratic reasons— and shortly after divorce the Russian poet Sergei A. Esenin (Wood 331-362). A reader trusting her autobiography as the only source of information about her life would never suspect that this "preacher" against marriage would ever have surrendered to the institution she so much despised.

[7] Sewell Stokes recalls in his biography of Duncan her confession that she felt in prison at the Negresco. Recklessly, she had made the decision to stay at the most expensive hotel on the Riviera, pretending that she would be able to pay the bill when she left —which was precisely the reason why she could not leave, for she had no money to meet her expenses (61).

where she was nourished by the classical tradition of Greece and Italy, while she impressed innumerable audiences with a new type of dance, the result of her research on movements that, according to her, did not exist before. She resumed her intentions on travelling to Europe as follows: "I had come to Europe to bring about the great renaissance of religion through the Dance, to bring the knowledge and the Beauty and Holiness of the human body through its expression of movements" (65).

Marilyn R. Chandler, in her book, *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* in which she analyzes space and settlement, points to a characteristic tension present in American culture "between the project of building a settlement and the romantic image of the homeless, rootless, nomadic hero whose roof is the sky (...), or the boundless sea," which she considers a "conflict over the tremendous psychic costs of 'civilization' and domestication" (4). This tension does seem to be present in the two texts under analysis: both Anderson and Duncan had gone beyond the boundaries marked by the Puritan codes of settlement, alternating the Thoreauvian lack of attachment to a particular place with a special interest in houses. Interestingly enough, in her narrative Anderson recalls how at one point in her life she had "an intuition [that she] no longer needed a house" (88), embarking herself, her lover, her sister and two nephews on a camping experience which lasted six months. On this adventure, described as "the most lyrical" months in her life (89) she would comment: "The only lack was the residence. But was this an essential obstacle? Wasn't camping a passion with all sensible people? What was to prevent our putting up tents and living the pristine life of nomads?" (86). Significantly, Duncan found herself immersed in a similar situation when her brother, in order to console her in her sorrow after the tragic death of her children, asked her to join him in Albania, where he was working among refugees. Duncan describes how they lived in a tent by the sea (201), although "the misery represented by the Albanian refugees" led her to long "for the feeling of Persian carpets beneath my feet" (202). These experiences show the capacity of these two women to enjoy or adapt to austere environments; notwithstanding, their love for houses, villas or palaces –as Anderson once exclaimed: "We now had an enchanting palace to live in and nothing to live on" (157), seems to have always been in the background of their personal landscapes.

Bestriding different types of settlement, Anderson ponders on her capacity to live in manifold places when she discovered, on her arrival in France, that her lover Georgette Leblanc's sister lived in "the most fabulous fairy castle" of her experience: "I thought of my excessive interest in diminutive ranch-houses, tents, gold rooms, Brookhaven, and felt that here at least it would appear less excessive" (242). Indeed, at many points in her autobiography Anderson insists on her attraction towards houses, on her impulse to settle immediately in abandoned houses which inspired her intellectual hunger. This is her description of the moment she found "the most sympathetic house anyone has ever seen", in Highland Park: "I came upon an empty house (...) of such a perfect romanticism that it occurred to me we should live in it (...). There is always a delicate way of breaking into abandoned houses, so I examined this one thoroughly and found it was the ideal home" (99-

100). This "hunting" for abandoned houses continued when, after having met Jane Heap, they decided to go to California. This time, they were also looking for a proper house where they could have "good conversation" (117): "You must never consider any environment that looks new. There must be an atmosphere of other lives upon it. If you can find an abandoned house with a straggling garden you've found perfection" (117). The ranch-house they finally encountered and reconstructed was "old, simple, homely, deserted, isolated, sympathetic" (117), the perfect place for the editorial tandem to thrive. If this was their experience on the West Coast, later on, in New York they came across, again, a small, abandoned house, "It wasn't a house; it was hardly a structure" (184-185). This shows her fascination for ruined places, which she loved to reconstruct: "it's the rebuilding that attracts us!", she would exclaim (185). Anderson and Heap tailored their rooms according to their intellectual needs: "It was to be a room where all *Little Review* conversation would take place. It was to be a special, haunting, poignant, dedicated room. It was. In this room the *Little Review* entered into its creative period" (152). Anderson's obsession with abandoned, ruined houses might be symbolic of the "ruins" of her own family life, that she so much resented, and her urge to rebuild houses and rooms could be read as a desire to craft a different way of life, away from bourgeois mediocrity.

Anderson's excessive interest in houses finds its parallel in Duncan's "*idée fixe*" (137) —the founding of the school of dance which had been engrained in her mind since her early childhood (16), a dream she took along with her wherever she went, be it Berlin, France, England, the United States, Russia, or Greece. This nomadic school needed a physical space to shelter the troupe of children she intended to instruct in her innovative ideas on dancing. In her search for the right places, she was confronted with innumerable obstacles, economic and otherwise, which she usually, miraculously, managed to overcome. Of all the locations where her school was settled, Bellevue, in France, was among the most outstanding. This incredible place was damaged during the war, and coming back to it she found with distress that it was "falling into ruins" (249). Duncan, like Anderson, thought of rebuilding the ruin, but the lack of funds made it an "impossible task" (249). The whole situation could be interpreted as a symbol of her destroyed life, of the impossibility to recover happier times. Nevertheless, Duncan never gave up in the face of adversity; once again, she tried to found her school of dance, this time in Greece, in Kopanos, a much cherished old place which she also found in ruins (250). That seemed to have been her fate.

Postmodernist and feminist criticism has commented widely upon the importance of space, and the close intertwining of space and power. Chandler states that space is "an ideologically weighted 'product'," and that the idea of space is "a highly charged issue for theorists and artists" (3). Space, be it physical, emotional, psychological, or metaphorical, has been such a rich source of interest for women writers, and feminist critics alike, because of its complex and contradictory meanings for women. Traditionally, there has been the notion or expectation that "home" is a sanctuary, a place of safety that can always be returned to, a place of love and warmth, an image evoked in manifold literary works. Looking more closely at the

evolution of the concept of space, it is evident that private space could not only be seen as a place of "safety, warmth, and love" but also as one of empowerment. Spaces such as the domestic sphere may signal frustration and confinement for women at particular historical moments, and in certain cultural locations. Indeed, private spaces can provide a backdrop to relationships of power and dependence or, on the contrary, they can be transformed into spaces of freedom —liberating spaces or constraining spaces which might convey a sense of imprisonment; "[t]hey are, after all, embodiments— incarnations that threaten to become incarcerations" (Chandler 6). Nonetheless, women would want to escape, in their lives and writings, breaking down the association between themselves and the home through the reconfiguration of their familial domestic spaces and the opening up of new environments. Anderson felt that sense of imprisonment in her early family life, but she soon released herself from this constraint; the spaces she created after that period in her life show how private spaces can be liberating and artistically productive. Duncan, who did not feel the oppression of family relations in the early stage of her life, never accepted the attempts of her lovers to incarcerate her in domestic spaces.

Undoubtedly, personal spaces and family life are deeply intertwined in the two narratives under analysis, revealing the perception both autobiographers had of the concept of home —one which diverges from conventional patterns. Anderson gives different accounts of her early, almost precocious eagerness to confront her family. One revealing example of this attitude can be seen in her letter to the advisor of young girls in the "obnoxious" magazine the *Ladies' Home Journal*, where she asked "how a perfectly nice but revolting girl could leave home", adding a list of "everything I found immoral in the family situation" (12); this is evidence of her rebellious attitude, which reached its breaking point when her mother gave her an ultimatum which forced the decision about "which policy was to rule our house —hers of suppression or mine of freedom" (65). Mother and daughter were at war sorting out who had the power. Hence, family relationships were not easy for Anderson, who arrived at the disappointing conclusion that "the Blue Bird of discontent is not to be searched afar but to be found right in the home" (10), proving that home may not only be a space of empowerment but also a place of discomfort. In short, Anderson rejects the bourgeois family model she inherited from her parents, and this is clearly expressed in her autobiography when she confesses bluntly: "I liked houses and disliked my family" (7). For her part, Duncan does not seem to reject her family upbringing: she proudly speaks of the "Clan Duncan" —formed by her mother, sister, and two brothers— which she insistently defined as "self-sufficient" (93, 95). Small wonder Duncan's perception of family life is more positive than Anderson's: the Duncans were raised in a household with an absent father, and with a cultivated and supportive mother who loved and played music, and encouraged her children to lead a free, nomadic life the evidence of which can be seen in their numerous transcontinental journeys. This togetherness was projected in their preposterous dream to build a Greek temple —"that should be characteristic of us" (91)— in Kopanos, an enterprise which proved to be impossible and which highlighted the Clan Duncan's impractical view of life. This peculiar vision

of family life, which seemed to have been engrained in her personality, led Isadora Duncan to construct a *sui generis* type of family: she conceived three children by three different fathers, and refused to marry any of them; she never had a permanent home to bring up her children, as she was constantly travelling, either taking her offspring along or leaving them behind for long periods of time. This stance in life did not obviously comply with the traditional family model of her time.

Houses are usually "inhabited" by furniture and objects which become mirrors of their owners. As David Harvey affirms, "the appropriation of space examines the way in which space is occupied by objects" (222). Chandler, for her part, states that "the notion that 'things' bind and that emptiness liberates [has] deep roots not only in American romanticism but in ancient Eastern cultures"; she adds that "...the relative absence of material objects had made way for something intangible that nevertheless required space to become apparent" (137) Undoubtedly, that "something intangible" stands, in Anderson's and Duncan's case, for their awareness of the space required by art in order to be made manifest. Significantly, the ideas Anderson and Duncan had about furnishing were rather peculiar; at different points in their texts they actually say that they could do without furniture: in Anderson's own words, "furniture was undesirable. I decided" (68), or "[w]e weren't exactly bourgeois perhaps (...) being without furniture" (70). Similarly, Duncan refers to her family's decision to live in a studio with no furniture so "as to have space to dance in" (34). Neither one seemed to have felt special attachment to "things," in general, with two important exceptions. The first one was Anderson's insistence on the impossibility of living in a house without the presence of a Mason and Hamlin piano. This obsession was such that there were moments when the piano was among the few objects present in the houses she inhabited (66-67, 71-72). Duncan, on the other hand, tells the readers of her autobiography that the only thing she needed to give expression to her art was "a blue curtain", which she would hang wherever she was to dance. These objects become leitmotifs throughout their narratives: Anderson writes repeatedly about the "necessary grand piano" (120), and Duncan about the need for the "never-failing inspiration" of her blue curtain (228).

These two objects seem to be symbolic of the way in which the lives of these two women were inevitably linked to their passion for art: in the case of Anderson, for almost all artistic expression —especially music and literature; in the case of Duncan for dancing. Their life narratives are good examples of how these two women were throwing off the roles usually attached to them, showing aspirations other than the care of the home and family. Indeed, the lack of attachment they both had for the different spaces they inhabited, —Anderson would claim: "Why anyone wanted to own a property [sic]?" (54), and the way they both related to those spaces point to changing attitudes about how a woman's life would unfold at the dawn of the 20th century. Domesticity, therefore, would not be their lot. Anderson relied on others to perform those household chores that would distract her from her dedication to *The Little Review*; as she acknowledges in her narrative when she explains how in their "organized domesticity" her sister Jean "decided to be housekeeper [...], leaving my time free for editorial (anarchistic) writing. I played

the Mason and Hamlin until three in the morning and slept on an uncovered balcony, usually waking under a blanket of snow" (82), which made her arrive at the conclusion that somehow she "could never lead the kind of life that appeared normal" (155). Likewise, Duncan took advantage of a tightly knit family who supported her emotionally or, in prosperous times, of an army of servants who organized the chaotic, uncontrollable life of a creative woman. Their lifestyle was rather alien to what has been considered a "stable domestic life". As Duncan clearly affirms in her memoirs: "I certainly was not suited to domestic life" (180), and whatever "experiment in domesticity" (Wood 223) she undertook, mostly forced upon her by her various partners, was a complete failure. If, according to Chandler, for women "'housekeeping' has been recognized as a kind of autobiographical enterprise, a visible and concrete means of defining and articulating the self" (3), in Duncan and Anderson that "feminine task" seems to have been replaced by their dedication to Art. In other words, their devotion to art was a way of life: editing was for Anderson what the long-cherished school of dance was for Duncan: two life/art projects in continuous process. This dedication is clearly expressed by Anderson when she declares that: "Art to me was a state; it didn't need to be an accomplishment. By any of the standards of production, achievement, performance, I was not an artist. But I always thought of myself as one" (<http://www.littlereview.com/mca/mcaquote.htm>).

These "undomesticated" women, in the literal and metaphorical sense, had a great personal appeal which attracted numerous artists from many different fields[8] —avant-garde poets, sculptors, musicians, performers, interpreters, singers, choreographers, painters, composers, anarchists, politicians, aristocracy, royalty, and a whole troupe of sophisticated members of the upper classes who were interested not only in the new trends in literature, and in innovations in the art of dancing, but also in the lifestyle of these incredible characters who could certainly be the embodiment of the "New Woman." Duncan, conscious of the personal attraction and magnetism she exerted on her audience, claimed with an air of self-importance: "My dancing is for the élite, for the artists, sculptors, painters, musicians, but not for the general public" (74). When Singer was asked by Duncan, late in her life, why he kept returning to her, his reply was: "[because] you are the one woman in my life who never bored me. Ever" (qtd. in Wood 286). Such was the life Isadora Duncan led: unpredictable, unconventional, flamboyant, extravagant, daring, con-

[8] Among Anderson's acquaintances were: Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, William B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, Emma Goldman, Harriet Monroe, Amy Lowell, Hilda Doolittle, Carl Sandburg, Harold Bauer, Mary Garden, Hart Crane, Mabel Dodge, James Joyce, Tara Osrik ("The Baroness"), Djuna Barnes, Pablo Picasso, Allan Tanner, Constantin Brancusi, George Antheil, Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Jean Cocteau, Ernest Hemingway, Richard Aldington, André Guide, George Braque, among many others. Regarding Duncan's : the Princess of Polignac, Henry Bataille, Auguste Rodin, Eugène Carrière, the Grand Duke Ferdinand of Vienna, Siegfried Wagner, Ellen Terry, Cosima Wagner, King Ferdinand of Bulgaria, Eleonora Duse, Gabriel D'Annunzio, Cécile Sorel, Comte Robert de Montesquieu, the King of Greece, Percy McKaye, and a great many others.

stantly moving, on the verge of insanity, prey to grief and alcohol, but always rejecting domesticity and always complying to the demands of art. Likewise, Anderson was the brilliant woman who was easily the centre of attention for intellectuals and artists who appreciated the unique personality and talent for conversation of the exceptional editor of *The Little Review.*[9] This is emphasized by Edna M. Levey, who also links our art lovers when she refers to Anderson's appeal: "she reminds you of Mary Garden, Isadora Duncan, Lysistrata, Sappho, all packed into one dynamic personality" (qtd. in Green 3). Making allusion to how conversation became the axis in her life with Jane Heap and other intellectuals, Anderson says: "Our talk began with luncheon, reached climax at tea, by dinner we were staggering with it. By five o'clock in the morning we were unconscious but still talking. Chiefly we talked ART —not 'aesthetically', but humanely. We talked of the human being behind the art manifestation" (122) or "The younger poets came for talk. We had long discussions on the making of poetry" (153).

All these projects, journeys and enterprises carried out by Margaret Anderson and Isadora Duncan were plagued by a constant scarcity of money. It seemed that they both had a congenital difficulty in dealing with money matters; as Anderson points out in her narrative, "We used to develop headaches trying to understand why we found it so hard to relate our talents to money-making. It is not strange that talented people without practical abilities or common sense live and die without money" (187). In a similar way Duncan, not being able to control her extravagances —which knew no boundaries— continuously experienced the uncertainty of being short of funds; she always seemed to have put the cart before the horse, going from opulence to poverty, and often returning to Singer for economic help. Being a victim of her own incapacity to manage her personal fortune, in a moment of lucidity she makes the following reflection in her memoirs: "All money brings a curse with it, and the people who possess it cannot be happy for twenty-four hours" (167), which might be read as a premonition of her end: she died penniless, confirming Anderson's intuition about talented people being unable to deal with money in a sensible way.

If Duncan re-invented the art of dancing, engaging herself in an almost wild, non-stop journey across the Old and New Continents, Anderson turned the task of editing into an art-form in a more subdued manner. They both had itinerant lives, confirming the American tendency to be somewhat uprooted, always ready to make the next move. The different spaces these two women inhabited came to be a sort of metonymy for their personal conceptions and beliefs about art,

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[9] Jayne E. Marek makes reference to Anderson's fascination with conversation, and how this was reflected in her motivations to found *The Little Review*: "This insistence on response and interaction demonstrates Anderson's expressed reason for developing the magazine in the first place: her boredom with the life that did not include 'inspired conversation' every minute, and her belief that publishing a review would place her in contact with persons with whom she could always have an interesting exchange of ideas. The 'conversation' embodied in *The Little Review* became one of the forces that moved modernism" (60-61).

and therefore they reflect and become a visible manifestation of the ideas of those who dwell in these spaces. Likewise, Anderson and Duncan show how they did not conform to the established concept of "home," where daily life unfolds and personal relationships thrive. Undoubtedly, their idea of family did not meet traditional standards, inasmuch as domesticity was not a concept with which either woman could identify, and so they became two undomesticated women who happened to be art lovers. Both women had to struggle with economic difficulties to carry out their projects, so disturbing their Arcadian lives.

In conclusion, we see in the analysis of Anderson's and Duncan's autobiographies two women who were not willing to have their lives ruled by Victorian principles. If, according to the adage, "home is where the (he)art is," Anderson and Duncan placed art at the centre of their lives, devoting themselves to the construction of an always provisional home the heart of which was Art. In so doing, they made one the extension of the other: Europe, the source of Western art, became their home, and their reverse journey turned them both into significant women. Indeed, Europe, where they could deliver the untamed energy of the New World, was the target for their intense creativity. They not only left us the innovations in their art fields, but also the legacy of their autobiographies. To confirm the transnational character of Anderson and Duncan, since neither one was attached to a particular place, we might paraphrase Virginia Woolf in her novel *Three Guineas* by saying that Margaret and Isadora had no country as women. They did not want any country. Their country was the whole world.

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MISCELLANY

A JOURNEY TO THE POSTMODERN CAPITAL OF THE AMERICAN WEST: HUNTER S. THOMPSON'S *FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS*

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ABSTRACT

The following article examines Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (1971) both in terms of its revelatory value to the peculiar nature of Las Vegas and also as major literary testimony to the symbolic role of this city as a microcosm of the New West and of contemporary America. It is also argued that most Las Vegas writing, as exemplified by Thompson's book, has often overlooked the multiple ingredients and complexity of Las Vegas life to focus on the archetypal image of this city as the incarnation of vice, artificiality, chaos, and excess in postmodern America.

KEY WORDS: Western American literature, New West, city writing, Las Vegas, postmodernism, Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, "gonzo" journalism, American Dream.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo analiza la obra de Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (1971), centrándose en su poder para retratar las características peculiares de Las Vegas y su condición de símbolo del Nuevo Oeste y de la América contemporánea. Se destaca además que el relato de Thompson, al igual que otras populares obras sobre Las Vegas publicadas en las últimas décadas, ha contribuido a la extensión de una imagen arquetípica de esta ciudad, convertida en la encarnación del pecado, la artificialidad, el caos y el exceso en la América postmoderna.

PALABRAS CLAVE: literatura del oeste norteamericano, Nuevo Oeste, literatura urbana, Las Vegas, postmodernismo, Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, periodismo "gonzo," sueño americano.

The road of excess leads to the palace
of wisdom.

William Blake —*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793)

Since the end of the 1960s the extraordinary development of quality western writing, led by such well-known authors as Wallace Stegner, Cormac McCarthy, Barbara Kingsolver, Leslie Marmon Silko, Edward Abbey, Larry McMurtry, Maxine Hong Kingston, Rudolfo Anaya, Marilynn Robinson, and many others, has brought increasing recognition to the American literary West. This new significance of western writing has put an end to traditional misleading and stereotyped views that used to identify the literature of the American West almost exclusively with "formula westerns" and Hollywood horse operas. One of the signs that the western literary field has been reinvigorated is the increasing attention to the role of the cities in the New West. In fact, new western writing offers unique portraits of the complexity of contemporary western cities that testify to the gradual maturation of the urban perspective of the West. The new visibility of western city writing, represented by the remarkable success of such authors as Joan Didion, Raymond Carver, James Ellroy, Ishmael Reed, Lucha Corpi, T.C. Boyle, and Sherman Alexie, to name just a few, has brought growing attention to the city landscape as a fundamental feature of the New West. Actually, recent western literature includes illuminating approaches to the interconnection between the city, its residents, and its visitors, or to use Ihab Hassan's words, to the city as "concept, project, field, magic lantern through which the human condition may be viewed" (94).

One of the most interesting traits of postfrontier writing is the consolidation of the urban novel as a major subgenre, with distinctive settings such as Los Angeles, Seattle, and Las Vegas. In particular, the singularity of Las Vegas, "the most mythic, if not mystic, of all American cities" (Hausladen 15), has attracted the attention of many contemporary authors, who have often regarded this city as the capital of the postmodern West and as an icon of the growth of the New West. Certainly, the term "new" may be problematic when applied to the West that emerges in the postwar period, a complex and heterogeneous territory where traditional cowboy culture and economy coexist with industrialization and the expansion of metropolitan areas in major Southwestern cities. In fact, as Neil Campbell has observed, "the New West fuses old and new creating something different, ... within an increasingly hybridized cultural space" (132). Anyway, it may be argued that the extension of urban uniformity and the increasing influence of technology in the New West have emphasized the growing loss of the traditional sense of place and proximity to the land, contributing to the development of postmodern placelessness in this region, as exemplified by Las Vegas. This city also symbolizes the recreational function of the New West and one of the main ingredients in tourism: the search for unique, distinguished places, often associated with a supposed golden era in remote countries. As Leonard Lutwack has written, "when notable places cannot be made available, they may be faked in the construction of primitive, antique, and futuristic sites: wildlife compounds, Disney World amusement parks, and business

establishments that masquerade as exotic wonderlands" (229). In Las Vegas' case, "the greatest bargain destination on the planet" (Konik 35), its millions of visitors are offered an artificial reproduction of the most significant locations of such distinguished cities as Cairo, Rome, Paris, Venice, and New York. In the following I argue that most Las Vegas writing not only overlooks the ordinary lives of its inhabitants, but also the multiple recreational dimensions of the city, to center on gambling-stimulated tourism, with an emphasis on the archetypal image of this city as the incarnation of vice, artificiality, chaos, and excess in postmodern America. Particular attention is paid to Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (1971) both in terms of its revelatory value to the uniqueness of Las Vegas and also as a major literary testimony to the symbolic role of this city as a microcosm of the New West and of contemporary America.

In the second half of the twentieth century Las Vegas replaced Reno as the nation's main gambling center and wedding and divorce capital. In fact, a few years after the end of World War II the reputation of Las Vegas as the "new sin city" was widely extended throughout the country. By the end of the 1960s publicly traded corporations entered the gambling scene and the distorted "Mob" image of Las Vegas began to be tempered. In the last decades of the century federal funding and the impressive development of gambling-related tourism helped Las Vegas's astonishing growth. Thus, its population jumped from 124,000 in 1970 to 478,000 in 2000 (actually, the whole metropolitan area had more than 1,563,000 residents by the end of the century). Las Vegas has not only become the fastest-growing metropolitan area in the United States, but also an international major tourist attraction. As Sally Denton and Roger Morris have contended, "the city's luminance draws a world. More than 50 million people journey to it every year. Only Mecca inspires as many pilgrims... Nearly half of America has been there, more than any other locale in the nation" (7). The increasing popularity of Las Vegas as a tourist resort has also been favored by a series of remarkable innovations introduced in the city's entertainment industry. In fact, since the late 1980s Las Vegas has undergone an important metamorphosis, becoming a city loaded with family-oriented theme park hotel-casinos, a sort of Disneyland in the desert. Although the city still offers a wide array of adult pleasures and its position as the major American adult playground remains safe, this reorientation in its entertainment focus, together with the extension of legalized gambling to other states of the nation, has tempered the commonly held view of Las Vegas as aberrant (Land and Land 15). Last but not least, Las Vegas has been increasingly celebrated as the greatest business success story of the twentieth century, as "a prime Wall Street investment, a shrine to which the most famous politicians of both governing parties make their obligatory pilgrimage for anointing and finance, a realization of the American dream" (Denton and Morris 8).

According to Hal Rothman and Mike Davis, "no city in American history has ever changed its clothes as frequently and rapidly as Las Vegas... Reinvention has been the essence of the place" (1). Certainly, Las Vegas has often shifted its identity since its foundation in 1905 and the multiple faces of Las Vegas have been particularly evident in the last quarter of the twentieth century. In fact, Las Vegas has come

to epitomize the New West, due to its complex and shifting features, becoming a postmodern city "that refutes any single design principle or metanarrative, like Disneyland, but rather echoes the New West in its pluralist evolution, its constant reinvention, and its attachment to the road itself from which it grew" (Campbell 157-8). Despite these continuous shifts of identity and the alleged purification of the last two decades, much of contemporary Las Vegas writing still retains a great deal of the sensational and sordid elements that have shaped the public's image of Las Vegas since the end of World War II. Actually, several of the works published in the last four decades, and in some cases their film adaptations too, have contributed to reinforce the negative stereotype of Las Vegas. Thus, books such as Nicholas Pileggi's *Casino* (1995), Joan Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethelem* (1968) and *Play It as It Lays* (1970), Larry McMurtry's *The Desert Rose* (1983), John O'Brien's *Leaving Las Vegas* (1990), John Gregory Dunne's *Vegas: A Memoir of a Dark Season* (1974), James Ellroy's *The Cold Six Thousand* (2001), and Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (1969), *Inside Las Vegas* (1977), and *The Last Don* (1996), have obtained widespread attention, consolidating in the popular imagination the image of Las Vegas as a cultural aberration and as a metaphor for everything that is superficial and artificial in the New West and in contemporary America. In most cases there is an overemphasis on the sin and vice features traditionally associated with Las Vegas and its libertarian laws, focusing on the themes of gambling, crime, drugs, and prostitution.

One of the most influential books for the consolidation of the Las Vegas negativist image during the last decades of the twentieth century has been Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*.[1] Although this book defies placement within a specific genre and its connection with the so-called "New Journalism" still remains controversial,[2] we cannot deny the similarities between Thompson's book and some of the best-known pieces traditionally associated with this genre such as Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Text* (1968), Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968), or Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977), to name just a few works. Thompson shares with the authors of these books the subordination of the journalistic contents of the text to a common aim, to "create an aesthetic experience embodying the author's personal experience and interpretation of the subject" (Hellman 25). However, Thompson's approach to his topic is unique because in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* he resorts to his famous "gonzo" style, an extreme version of new journalistic techniques, where self-conscious parody and excessive, flamboyant accounts become major ingredients. This type of journalism has been defined as "the fusion of reality and stark fantasy in a way that amuses the author and outrages the audience. It is Point

[1] *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* originally appeared in *Rolling Stone* magazine in two installments in 1971 and a year later it was published in book form (New York: Random House). In 1998 Thompson's book was adapted into the film of the same name directed by Terry Gilliam and starring Johnny Depp and Benicio del Toro.

[2] Even some critics completely disagree with the use of the label "journalistic" to refer to Thompson's writing (Kennedy xix).

of View Run Wild" (Filiatreau 7). Although Thompson himself claimed that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* was just a failed attempt to write gonzo journalism because he violated one of its rules (the avoidance of any revision at all), the book certainly fulfils other basic characteristics of gonzo journalism, especially the participation of the author as the focus of the story (McKeen 49-50). It is a text that breaks traditional genre barriers, a combination of journalism and narrative nonfiction that is difficult to categorize. The book has been classified as nonfiction, as a novel, or even as a travelogue. Thompson himself often insisted on the artificial nature of the distinction between fiction and journalism. He rejected both standard journalism and realistic fiction to emphasize the power of imagination. In the book Thompson employs a fictional framework on a piece of journalism to break the conventional barriers between fiction and non-fiction, shocking the reader who "is never sure whether he is experiencing extraordinary fact or extraordinary fantasy" (Hellman 73). Whether fiction or fact, the truth is that, as William McKeen has stated, "the book certainly *reads* like fiction" (50).

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas is basically the author's confession of his failure to fulfill two magazine assignments dealing with two completely different events in Las Vegas in 1971: the Fourth Annual "Mint 400" motorcycle desert race and the National Conference of District Attorneys Seminar on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. In the book the drug-soaked journey to Las Vegas of Raoul Duke (Thompson's fictional counterpart) and his friend Dr. Gonzo (attorney Oscar Zeta Acosta) becomes a grotesque search for the American Dream at the end of the counterculture era. Admittedly, the book may be seen as an epitaph for the idyllic 1960s, for "all those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit. But their loss and failure is ours, too" (Thompson, *Fear* 178). However, the book contains a wider meaning because it signals the decline of American culture and values and, above all, the corruption of one of is most widespread myths, the elusive American Dream: "Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas" (12). Actually, Thompson's book may be defined as a literary parody of the archetypal quest for the American Dream. In fact, this quest soon becomes a mere survival trip, where his protagonist resorts to black humor to mock long-standing American values and archetypes, exposing them as self-deceptions. Thompson even inverts the traditional direction of such a quest (the historical movement toward the west), sending Duke and Dr. Gonzo east, from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, in what we may be seen as a symbol of the confusion of contemporary America and the artificiality of its main myths. It is also worth noting the peculiar name chosen by Thompson for the main protagonist of his book, Duke, a name many Americans in the 1970s associated with John Wayne, the cowboy emblem of the mythic West. However, in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* Duke is not an epic hero, loyal to the code of the mythic cowboy taming the West, but sort of a picaresque anti-hero, who abuses different kinds of drugs, while challenging both traditional American values and the countercultural dream of the 1960s.

The failure of the idealism of the 1960s and the illusory faith in the American Dream appear intertwined throughout most of Thompson's book, as it is particularly evident in the following passage: "We had all the momentum; we were

riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave... So now, less than five years later, you can go on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost *see* the high-water mark- that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back" (68). This passage resembles closely the end of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and, in fact, the book has been defined as "a countercultural Gatsby" (Sickles 61). Thomson himself in a later work, *Generation of Swine* (1988), referred to the last lines of *The Great Gatsby* as "some of the highest and purest and cleanest words ever written about the real beauty of what they were just beginning to call back then, the *American Dream*" (259). In *Generation of Swine* Thompson also mentioned Fitzgerald's novel to emphasize his disillusionment with the myth of the American Dream from a contemporary perspective: "Between AIDS and acid rain, there is not much left of what Scott Fitzgerald called 'a fresh green breast of the new world'" (258).

If *The Great Gatsby* has been often regarded as an epitaph for the 1920s, *Fear and Loathing* may be viewed as a proper epitaph for the 1960s. Actually, the book became an icon of the pop-culture, of an era past, in a time in which the innocence and optimism of the 1960s had been replaced by skepticism and cynicism. Although in *Fear and Loathing* Thompson shows his affection for the 1960s (even the book is dedicated to Bob Dylan for *Mister Tambourine Man*), it may be argued that this work is mainly a mocking portrait of those who tried to recreate the spirit of that decade and the hippy drop-out culture just through the music and drugs, principally LSD. It is grotesque to lay a 1960s journey in the seventies because the spirit of the sixties no longer existed in Nixon's era. Thus, Duke and Dr. Gonzo appear to be outsiders who represent the counterculture movement and the drug culture. Although they seem to be located outside the dominant paradigm of their time, there is no nostalgia for the 1960s, a decade whose values, attitudes, and ideologies are often debunked by Duke. However, his criticism towards the 1970s, towards its materialism and conservatism is even harsher: "But what is sane? Especially here in 'our own country' —in this doomstruck era of Nixon. We are all wired into a *survival* trip. No more of the speed that fueled the Sixties" (178). The anachronistic condition of Duke and Dr. Gonzo's journey is also enhanced by the main features of their final destination, Las Vegas. In fact, this city, in Duke's view, seems to reproduce the spirit of the 1950s:

> A week in Las Vegas is like stumbling into a Time Warp, a regression to the late fifties. Which is wholly understandable when you see the people who come here, the Big Spenders from places like Denver and Dallas. Along with National Elks Club conventions (no niggers allowed) and the All-West Volunteer Sheepherders' Rally. (156)

In Thompson's book Las Vegas is mostly depicted as a modern-day Babylon, as the ultimate corruption of the American Dream. *Fear and Loathing* mocks Las Vegas and its promise of instant gratification in exchange for nothing: "Las Vegas is a society of armed masturbators/gambling is the kicker here/sex is extra/weird trip for high rollers... house-whores for winners, hand jobs for the bad luck crowd" (41). The book also exposes the meaning of the term "sin" associated to Las Vegas:

"In a closed society where everybody's guilty, the only crime is getting caught. In a world of thieves, the only final sin is stupidity" (72). In any case, Thompson does not intend only to put into question Las Vegas promises, but also the idea of the existence of the American Dream. In fact, the working title of *Fear and Loathing* was *The Death of the American Dream* (Clark 2). Certainly, Thompson does not include in his novel an explicit reference to the reason why his protagonists believe they will find the American Dream during their trip to Las Vegas. However, Las Vegas and its lure of all-expenses-paid become for Thompson the perfect embodiment of the false myth of the American Dream. Particularly remarkable is his mocking portrait of the average middle-class Americans, coming to Las Vegas in search of a dream that is no longer based on hard work:

> They look like caricatures of used-car dealers from Dallas. But they're *real*, and, sweet Jesus, there are a hell of a *lot* of them- still screaming around these desert-city crap tables at four-thirty on a Sunday morning. Still humping the American Dream, that vision of the Big Winner somehow emerging from the last-minute pre-dawn chaos of a stale Vegas casino. (57)

Thompson's parody of the American Dream and his exposure of the sorry condition of this myth reach their climax almost at the end of the book when a waitress and a cook give Duke and Gonzo directions to a club on the Northeast outskirts of Las Vegas called "The American Dream." When they arrive at the place, they find only "a huge slab of crocked, scorched concrete in a vacant lot full of tall weeds, [a place that] had burned down about three years ago" (168).

In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* Thompson also focuses on the interaction between the illusory and artificial landscape of Las Vegas and the hallucinatory world where Duke and Gonzo are immersed due to their abusing different kinds of drugs: marijuana, mescaline, LSD, cocaine, ether... It is even possible to draw an analogy between the hallucinatory image of the American Dream offered by Las Vegas with its gambling tables and the promise of instant gratification that drugs are supposed to bring to the two main characters. Besides, the hallucinatory power of these drugs increases in the context of excess and artificiality provided to them by Las Vegas, a place where "reality itself is too distorted" (47). As John Hellman has noted, through these hallucinatory visions, "Thompson is able to present Las Vegas's psychic dangers as physical ones" (76). In Thompson's book the liminal space between reality and illusion often becomes a blurred line. The chemical hallucinations of the two main characters parallel the constant distortion of reality in the neon artifice and their freakish behavior seems to fit right in an insane city containing an excessive and often incongruous mix of forms and lifestyles:

> Vegas is so full of natural freaks —people who are genuinely twisted— that drugs aren't really a problem, except for cops and the scag syndicate. Psychedelics are almost irrelevant in a town where you can wander into a casino any time of the day or night and witness the crucifixion of a gorilla —on a flaming neon cross that suddenly turns into a pinwheel, spinning the beast around in wild circles above the crowded gambling action. (190)

The hallucinations of Gonzo and Duke and the artificiality of the Las Vegas landscape are portrayed against a background of real life news stories, often disturbing experiences concerning drive-by-shootings, car-jackings, thrill killers or the Vietnam War. Thompson resorts to these all-too-actual experiences to denounce the depravity and decadence of America in the Nixon era and to ridicule the "controlled excess" and the hallucinations of drugs offered under the neon of Las Vegas in comparison with the nightmares brought in from the outside world. Actually, in the book Thompson identifies Las Vegas with the establishment and with the counterrevolution of the 1970s, mocking the city as a paradise of freedom and opportunities: "This was Bob Hope's turf. Frank Sinatra's. Spiro Agnew's" (44), "The Circus Circus is what the whole hep world would be doing on Saturday night if the Nazis had won the war" (46), "After five days in Vegas you feel like you've been here for five years. Some people say they like it- but then some people like Nixon, too. He would have made a perfect Mayor for this town; with John Mitchell as Sheriff and Agnew as Master of Sewers" (193)... Thus, Thomson unmasks the Las Vegas mythos, emphasizing its illusory condition and the power of the House (a symbolic reference to the establishment control) in a place where, above all, the visitor should "calm down [and] learn to *enjoy* losing" (57).

Thompson's mocking portrait of the countercultural dreams of the sixties and his undermining of the rising conservatism of the seventies may make *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* appear as a modernist morality tale on the end of the American Dream. Certainly, modernity and postmodernity coexist in this text, at least to a certain extent, as it also happens in other books of the era that represent the transition from declining modernist structures to emergent postmodern paradigms (DeKoven 14-18). Nevertheless, in this book postmodernism becomes the dominant literary modality, as illustrated, for example, by Thompson's choice of formal strategies and their interaction with the setting of the story. Thus, in his depiction of Duke's journey to Las Vegas, Thompson often moves away from realism, utilizing a series of postmodernist techniques that enhance Duke's lack of orientation and his fragmented way of perceiving things. In fact, we may notice that Duke is often unable to tell the difference between what he is thinking and what he is saying. Thompson's book is basically a disjunctive narrative, filled with short sentences, ellipses, and brief, disconnected, bizarre episodes. These episodes often contain images of alienation and desolation that illustrate postmodern placelessness. Overall, the disordered and broken pattern of Thompson's narrative may be viewed as a very effective way to convey not only Duke's disorientation, but also the chaotic quality of postmodern American society and the complexity and contradictions of the New West, whose ultimate artificial nature is represented in particular by such a peculiar urban space as Las Vegas, a "harbinger of postmodern American inauthenticity" (DeKoven 107). Actually, Thompson's multiple and ruptured narration and its frantic pace suggest the dislocation of the Las Vegas scene and its surreal condition, emphasizing the power of this city to undermine our sense of reality. Related to this, it is worth remembering that another postmodernist western writer, Joan Didion, once defined Las Vegas in the following way:

> Las Vegas is the most extreme and allegorical of American settlements, bizarre and beautiful in its venality and in its devotion to immediate gratification... Almost everyone notes that there is no "time" in Las Vegas, no night and no day and no past and no future...; neither is there any logical sense of where one is, ...what happens there has no connection with "real" life. Nevada cities, like Reno and Carson, are ranch towns, Western towns, places behind which there is some historical imperative. But Las Vegas seems to exist only in the eye of the beholder. All of which makes it a very stimulating and interesting place, but an odd one. (*Slouching* 90-91)

Another remarkable postmodernist aspect of Thomson's style in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is his use of technology, particularly the tape recorder, a device that he employs to transfer his transcriptions. In a postmodern world technology seems to replace paper as a reliable instrument to keep a record of experience. Thus, at the beginning of the book Duke's attorney insists on the importance of getting money for two basic purposes, "for drugs and a super-sensitive tape recorder, for the sake of a permanent record" (9). However, later in the book it is hinted that technology does not guarantee a faithful record of experience because it may turn faulty. In fact, the transcription of Duke and his attorney's visit to an all-night diner in North Vegas ends because of garbled tape: "Tape cassettes for the next sequence were impossible to transcribe due to some viscous liquid encrusted behind the heads" (168).

Although it is a book about fear and loathing, it is worth mentioning Thompson's ability to portray these two feelings from a humorous perspective, resorting to parody and satirical devices to distance somewhat Duke, his narrating persona, from horror. This anti-hero works in the book as Thompson's self-caricature and becomes a useful instrument to convey his surrealistic view of contemporary experience. Thus, actual events and paranoid illusions intertwine in the book, contributing to a black humorist view of postmodern American society. In fact, due to his impressive command of parody Thompson has been called by Tom Wolfe "the 20th century's greatest comic writer in English" ("Gonzo" 1). Besides, in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* humor is enhanced through the expressionist pen-and-ink drawings by the Welsh cartoonist Ralph Steadman. His images do represent gonzo as much as Thompson's words do. There is an emphasis on a particular aesthetics based on ugliness, with surreal and crude images suggesting the two main motifs of the books: fear and loathing.

In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* postmodernist formal strategies reinforce the surreal moments and scenes offered by Las Vegas, the paradigm of postmodernity. It is a setting that seems to offer an alternative to contemporary uniformity through its mixture of styles, forms, and histories. Even the architecture of the city symbolizes postmodernity due to its embracing of such features as spectacle, hyperrealism, thematization, simulacra, commodification, and fragmentation (Smith and Bugni 1-2). It is a place where chaos, unrestraint, vice, and sin seem to be overwhelmingly present and celebrated by its visitors. This archetypal image of Las Vegas as the incarnation of vice and almost unlimited freedom plays certainly a major role in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, though it is also hinted that this atmosphere of sin and permissiveness often coexists with a series of underlying powers that enforce

control and enclosed borders in this city. These simultaneous and contradictory elements of freedom and regulation, moral liberalism and repression, properly connect with the postmodernist celebration of ambiguity and hybridity in a city where real and virtual forms mix in odd and multiple ways.

Overall, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* testifies to the gradual maturation of the urban perspective of the West and the increasing attention to the postmodern symbolic contents of city landscapes in new western writing. The book also illustrates proper awareness of the uniqueness of Las Vegas and of its symbolic role as a microcosm of the general atmosphere of chaos and excess often associated with the New West and with contemporary urban America. After all, as H. Peter Steeves has noted, "Vegas is different. If this is the all-American city, then it has all of America's best and worst traits. And surely because of this, it looks like no other city in America" (132).

Certainly it may be argued that the Las Vegas portrayed by Thompson no longer exists. Even some critics, for example, Francisco Menendez, have defined it as "a romantic notion that no longer draws a crowd" (54). Besides, the widespread acceptance of gambling in contemporary America has also contributed to legitimate Las Vegas. However, the truth is that Thompson's book played an important role in the expansion of the popular perception of this city as a place of greed, artificiality, vice, and easy money. The book set the pace for a widespread fictional genre during the last decades of the twentieth century, the male adventure search for instant gratification in Las Vegas, a city often portrayed from a bleak perspective. In fact, most contemporary authors, including Thompson himself, have tended to stress the negative features of Las Vegas, reproducing archetypal fatalistic views about this myth of neon. They have often presented Las Vegas in an apocalyptic way, as a doomed place, whose corruption symbolizes America's way to self-destruction. In Ken Cooper's words,

> ...due in part to its close physical proximity to the Nevada Test Site, Las Vegas has become the nuclear-age Hollywood in fiction, with a diverse group of writers appropriating the vernacular of the city's culture: the neon artifice, Howard Hughes and his fear of radioactive fallout, the rigged roulette wheels and an invisible but omnipresent "House." In Las Vegas, these writers have found (and created) the place where all of us go to die, a microcosm of atomic roulette. (542-543)

Admittedly, the recurrent portrait of Las Vegas as a bastion of vice, greed, and organized crime may be somehow justified by the peculiar history of this city, in particular, by its libertarian reputation and its ties to the underworld. Similarly, the image of Las Vegas as an artificial, absurd, and chaotic realm reflects the singular atmosphere of this city, a place that, after all, is filled with volcanoes, castles, canals and pyramids. However, it is always risky to oversimplify the nature of such a complex city as Las Vegas. As Ken Cooper has stated, "because Las Vegas has such distinctive connotations for millions of Americans who have never been there, it may be inferred that our apprehension of the city frequently (or even predominantly) occurs in the realm of cultural discourse. Not only does the city mean something, but we have made that meaning" (529-530). Actually, a lot of contem-

porary authors writing about Las Vegas have paid more attention to the Las Vegas mythos than to the reality of the city itself. They have focused on Las Vegas as a symbol of the corrupted nature of the American Dream, employing this city to offer a bleak portrayal of the dislocation of American values and culture. This overemphasis on the "sin" image of Las Vegas as a sleazy place populated by criminals, gamblers, and prostitutes has often overshadowed in contemporary writing fundamental characteristics of modern Las Vegas, such as its role as a family vacation spot, the ordinary lives of its residents, or its rich multicultural aspects (Río 461). Actually, the multiple ingredients and complexity of Las Vegas present-day city life still lack a proper fictional representation. Only a few contemporary and not very well-known authors, such as Phyllis Barber (*Parting the Veil: Stories from the Mormon Imagination*, 1999), Hart Wegner (*Off Paradise: Stories from Las Vegas*, 2001), David Kranes (*Keno Runner*, 1989), H. Lee Barnes (*The Lucky*, 2003), and Charles Bock (*Beautiful Children*, 2008), have shown their ability to transcend the Las Vegas myth to focus on the multiple and hybrid features of this city, to deal with Las Vegas as a real place, instead of writing about a mythologized world outside reality.

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THE DIMINUTIVE SUFFIX "-ET/-ETTE": THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN ITS STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The English language is usually said to be poor in diminutive resources and its apparently few diminutive expressions are considered unproductive. However, these are assumptions not normally supported with real data. Indeed, Schneider's seems to be the only systematic work on the diminutive in English, although it does not make use of modern electronic corpora. This paper analyses the behaviour of the English diminutive suffix "-et/-ette" by using different sources: grammars, dictionaries, monographs, the British National Corpus and the Internet. Searches on the net have been responsible for the most interesting discoveries, some of which contradict previous studies about this suffix.

KEY WORDS: Linguistics, English, diminutive, internet, British National Corpus, suffix, "-et/-ette."

RESUMEN

Se suele decir que la lengua inglesa es pobre en recursos diminutivos y sus aparentemente pocas expresiones diminutivas se consideran improductivas. Sin embargo, estas suposiciones no suelen ir acompañadas de datos reales. De hecho, el estudio de Schneider parece ser el único trabajo sistemático sobre el diminutivo en inglés, aunque no hace uso de corpus electrónicos modernos. Este artículo analiza el comportamiento del sufijo diminutivo "-et/-ette" en inglés, partiendo de distintas fuentes: gramáticas, diccionarios, monografías, el British National Corpus e Internet. Las búsquedas en la red han sido responsables de los descubrimientos más interesantes; algunos de ellos contradicen estudios previos sobre este sufijo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: lingüística, inglés, diminutivo, internet, British National Corpus, sufijo, "-et/-ette."

1. INTRODUCTION

The English language is often said to have a limited group of diminutive expressions and some of them are regarded as unproductive: "It is a feature of many other European languages as well, including English, where relatively few diminutive suffixes are available, and where even these are being used with decreasing

frequency" (Sifianou 157). Likewise, it is assumed that the variety of values which the diminutive is able to express in the romance languages does not seem to be found in those of Germanic origin, such as English (Soler 28).

Statements like these are normally based on a narrow or biased understanding of the concept of the diminutive and are not usually supported by a systematic analysis of the English diminutive behaviour. Indeed, there are few studies about the diminutive in the English language and none, for the time being, that draws its data from large electronic corpora.

There is a tendency among dictionaries, grammars and pragmatic or typological studies about English to understand the diminutive as a suffix or suffixed word which indicates mainly smallness and often attitude as well. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter abbreviated *OED*) defines it as follows:

> 1. Gram. Expressing diminution; denoting something little: usually applied to derivatives or affixes expressing something small of the kind denoted by the primitive word. 2. Gram. A diminutive word or term (see A.1); a derivative denoting something small of the kind.

As in the *OED* definition, Hornby (s.v.) does not mention the diminutive capacity to express attitude but he focuses only on diminution: "(gram, of a suff.) indicating smallness; n. word formed by the use of a suff. of this kind, e.g. *streamlet*, a small stream, *lambkin*, a small lamb". A similar definition is given by the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*: "a word formed by adding a diminutive suffix: the word *duckling* is a diminutive, formed from *duck*"; below it explains that a diminutive suffix is "an ending which is added to a word to express smallness". A more recent dictionary, the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, shares the same idea: "a word or an ending of a word that shows that sb/sth is small, for example *piglet* (=a young pig), *kitchenette* (=a small kitchen)."

Some other dictionaries include the attitudinal meaning of the diminutive in their definitions. That is the case of Fowler and Fowler (s.v.): "Gram. (of a word or suffix) implying smallness, either actual or imputed in token of affection, scorn, etc. (e.g. -let, -kins) —n. Gram. a diminutive word or suffix". Trask (s.v.), for his part, mentions the attitudinal meaning more clearly in the entry of the word diminutive:

> 1 A derivational affix which may be added to a word to express a notion of small size, often additionally (or even instead) a notion of warmth or affection. 2 a word formed by the use of such an affix.

Among the definitions given in pragmatic studies, it is worth mentioning Sifianou's (157) and Dressler and Merlini's (144) since they both agree that the diminutive is a derivative word that expresses mainly smallness but they explain that it also has a connotative meaning. As an example of a typological work, Jurafsky defines the diminutive as "a morphological device which means at least 'small'" ("Universals" 534).

However, it is important to realise that suffixation is not the only means to express the diminutive linguistically. Recent research points out that the diminu-

tive is a universal concept (Schneider 5), therefore, those languages with no or few suffixes must also be able to express diminution. Thus, an appropriate definition should not be based on the linguistic form but the semantics of the diminutive. After examining the already mentioned and other definitions[1], I consider Schneider's (1)[2] the most suitable to base any study about the diminutive on, particularly the English one.

His definition allows different kinds of linguistic structures to be considered diminutives. This is of paramount importance for languages, such as English, in which the diminutive concept tends to be expressed through analytic constructions. This does not mean that the English language lacks diminutive suffixes. In fact, the most recently published study about the English diminutive offers a list of fifteen different diminutive suffixes, in which their spelling variants are not included (Schneider 79).

The study which is presented in this paper attempts to cover some of the gaps that exist in relation to the diminutive in English, such as the assumed unproductiveness of the English diminutive suffixes, the apparently reduced scope of diminutive meanings in English, the lack of studies about the diminutive based on electronic corpora and the inexistence of a deep analysis of concrete English diminutive suffixes. In order to select the corpus, I have taken Schneider's definition (1), "a term which refers to all expressions of diminution", as the point of reference. Due to space reasons, this paper only deals with the behaviour of the English diminutive suffix "-et/-ette." The corpus selected in my research has been taken from different sources, the most important being the *British National Corpus* (herafter abbreviated *BNC*) and the Internet.

2. THE DIMINUTIVE SUFFIX "-ET/-ETTE"

Of French origin, the suffix "-et/-ette" was introduced into the English language during the Middle English period as a diminutive and feminine suffix. The variant *-et* was originally masculine, while "-ette" indicated feminine. However, confusion between these two variants started in the 15th century and has remained in some words even today. Although it seems to be true that "-Et is of little use as an English formative" (*OED*), a new derivative with such an ending

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[1] The extension of this article does not allow the inclusion of all the definitions that have been consulted. Those already mentioned may serve as examples of the tendency to understand the diminutive as a suffix or derivative word meaning smallness and attitude. However, there are some dictionaries and grammars which regard the diminutive differently. For instance, the *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* (s.v.) understands it as an adjective indicating smallness, while Peters (s.v.) defines it as an affix implying small size.

[2] Schneider (1, 4) defines the diminutive as "a term which refers to all expressions of diminution," which he understands as a bridge between the concepts of quantification and qualification because it combines both size and attitude.

may still be admissible in English. The evidence I have found points out that the English preference for "-ette" is not only due to linguistic reasons but to the social phenomenon of "frenchification"[3] (Peters s.v.). That is why I consider "-et/-ette" spelling variants of the same diminutive suffix.

The suffix "-et/ette" has developed three meanings in English: "small," "female" and "imitation" (Marchand 290; Peters s.v.; Zandvoort 303). While the first two were derived from French, Marchand (290) claims that "imitation" is an exclusive development of the English language. Apparently unrelated, these three meanings are intimately connected through cognitive mechanisms. Thus, Jurafsky points out that "small" is the central meaning within the diminutive concept and that "female" derives from it through the metaphor "women are children/small things" ("Universal" 546). He maintains that this can be explained because women are generally considered marginal members of the society and the weakest people both physically and socially in many cultures ("Universals" 427).

"Female" has been well accepted since the first French loans expressing that meaning appeared in English in the 17th century. Indeed, the words "suffragette" and "majorette," from the French loans "suffrage" and "major," were coined in the English language in 1906 and 1941 respectively and, since then, new words have been created, such as the most recent "gothette." The English "suffragette" and "majorette" were taken in 1907 and 1955 as loans by the French language (Dubois s.v.), contributing then to the use of this meaning in French as Hasselrot (71) assures: "a servi de modèle à plusieurs néologismes". However, several authors regard the meaning 'female' as chauvinistic and affirm that it has become obsolete (Quirk et al. 1549; Schneider 96; Peters s.v.). On the other hand, Jurafsky states that 'imitation' was created through generalization from "small type-of," another meaning that he considers part of the concept of the diminutive. It refers to words in which the diminutive suffix indicates a small but different object from its base ("Universal" 553).

As part of a larger research I am carrying out on the English and Spanish diminutives, I have studied the behaviour of the English diminutive suffix "-et/-ette" by consulting, first of all, several prestigious English grammars and dictionaries where this topic is mentioned (*OED*; Hornby; *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*; *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*; Peters; Quirk et al.), as well as monographs on the word formation in English (Marchand; Zandvoort). Muthmann's *Reverse English Dictionary* has been especially useful to my purpose because words are arranged alphabetically from their endings. I drew up a list of English words ending in "-et/-ette" from all these sources. Likewise, the *BNC* provided part of the data for analysis in order to achieve reliable results.

Despite being one of the best corpora for linguistic research in English, the *BNC* presents important difficulties to look for affixes in general. The scientists responsible for the searching programme associated to the corpus (SARA) recog-

[3] This concept refers to the positive value and attractiveness that are added to expressions of French origin for the only reason of being French.

nise that it has some gaps regarding affixes: "This was not entirely successful, since several participants wanted to be able either to search by suffix [...] These are the very things that SARA finds difficult" (*BNC* "BNC Workshop in Paris"). Eventually, I discovered a laborious but effective means to find words ending in "-et/-ette": the "pattern query." It allows matching words of as many letters as dots have been written before the ending "-et/-ette." So I added dots before the suffix until no words appeared in the corpus, checked that their meaning coincided with Schneider's definition (1) and incorporated the new diminutive words to my primary list.

Every word of the final list was looked for in the *BNC* in order to contextualise it in specific examples belonging to different texts, and thus know if it had fallen into misuse. By doing so, I realised that the corpus was not enough to assure a word had been dropped from use in a language. Many of the words of my original list did not appear despite being in use, what can be partly explained because spoken language only represents a 10% of the *BNC* data (*BNC* "What"). Therefore, I decided to complement my study with searches on the Internet.

The use of the Internet could be questioned as presenting varieties of English different from those included in the *BNC* and, therefore, produce a heterogeneous result. Nevertheless, influences from non-British varieties appear in the mentioned corpus. In fact, the *BNC* authors recognise that "non-British English and foreign language words do occur in the corpus" (*BNC* "What"). Besides, the use of the Internet may enrich the research since it is a very powerful communication means where new words are constantly appearing. In my opinion, the spontaneity and creativity of the language on the Internet may be compared with those found in the spoken language.

Interesting changes in the behaviour of "-et/-ette" were detected through these searches[4] on the net. While some of my discoveries confirm some features that have been always attributed to the suffix, others on the contrary contradict what some authors have long affirmed; for instance, the facts that "-et/-ette" is not an especially productive diminutive suffix in English, that the meaning 'female' has become obsolete, that the suffix can only convey three meanings or that the meaning "small" is added only to words referring to objects.

3. WORDS IN "-ET/-ETTE"

After checking them both in the corpus and on the Internet, the words of the resulting list were classified into three groups: English creations, loans from French, and words that the *BNC* does not include in its database, in which creations and loans were also considered separately. The second group is also divided

[4] Searches on the Internet were carried out through Google by typing each diminutive word of my list. In order to contextualise the examples, I visited the web pages where the derivative appeared and thus verified the site content.

into loans whose bases exist in English and loans whose bases do not form part of the language at the moment.

These last loans (those for which there is not a separate base without "-et/-ette," such as "cygnet" or "brunette") may be on the way to becoming lexicalised, if we follow Huddleston and Pullum's (1629) definition: "words that are or were earlier morphologically analysable but which could not be formed with their present meaning by the current rules of word-formation". Nevertheless, I decided to include them as diminutives in my corpus because the suffix still determines both their belittling and affective values. These loans are no longer morphologically analysable in English but "-et/-ette" is still partly responsible for their diminutive meaning.

In the following five tables, all the diminutive words of my corpus are recorded following a chronological order (from the earliest to the most recent words). The first one corresponds to those words ending in "-et/-ette" which have been created in English. The loans from French whose bases exist in the English language are grouped in the second table, while the third one presents the loans with no bases. The fourth table contains English creations that are not registered in the *BNC*. Finally, French loans which are not part of the *BNC* database are included in the fifth table.

Each table lists the following information: the derivative word, its diminutive meaning (i.e. 'small', 'female' or 'imitation', besides others that will be explained below), its register date, its base together with its date of register and origin. The information related to the base does not appear in the case of those French loans whose bases do not exist in the English language. These data have been drawn from the *OED* and several etymological dictionaries, such as Ayto's and Hoad's. The date of register for those words which do not appear in any dictionary has been taken from the earliest examples in either the *BNC* or the Internet.

Such a classification has been very useful to know that "-et/-ette" is a completely productive suffix in English. Indeed, forty of the sixty-one words selected in my study have been created in the English language, seventeen of them in the 20th and 21st centuries. It seems that this suffix got incorporated into the inventory of the English derivative suffixes quite easily, since there are English creations as early as the 14th and 15th centuries, such as "hogget" and "floweret" respectively.

The words selected in my analysis have corroborated the theory that, after the confusion between the two spelling variants in the 15th century, those first loans from French eventually ended up being written in "-et." The only exception seems to be "bannerette," which is in turn the oldest loan (1300). Such an ending predominates among the first derivatives coined in English, as for instance "hogget," "floweret," "owlet," etc. On the other hand, the spelling variant "–ette" became very frequent in loans that entered the language within and after the 18th century, when the suffix began to be totally assimilated into English. This ending finally got established as the preferred variant by English speakers, since all the creations from the 19th century on (excluding "midget") finish in "-ette."

Although most of the included words have French bases, this suffix has also been used to form derivatives from words of different origins. Some examples are "owlet," "winceyette," "demonette," "cashmerette" and "balconette," whose bases

TABLE I. WORDS CREATED IN ENGLISH (CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)					
Derivative	Meaning	Register date	Base	Base date	Base origin
Hogget	“child”	1370	Hog	1350	English
Packet	“small”	1530	Pack	1225	Germanic
Owlet	“child”	1542	Owl	725	Germanic
Nymphet	“female”	1612	Nymph	1390	French
Snippet	“small”	1664	Snip	1558	Germanic
Sermonette	“small” “contempt”	1814	Sermon	1200	French
Novelette	“contempt”	1814	Novel	1639	French
Midget	“small”	1865	Midge	1796	English
Leatherette	“imitation”	1880	Leather	1225	Germanic
Flannelette	“imitation”	1882	Flannel	1503	Unknown
Suffragette	“female”	1906	Suffrage	1534	French
Kitchenette	“small”	1910	Kitchen	1000	Latin
Winceyette	“imitation”	1922	Wincey	1808	Scandinavian
Luncheonette	“small”	1924	Luncheon	1652	English
Usherette	“female”	1925	Usher	1386	French
Dinette	“small”	1930	Dining-room	1601	Germanic
Roomette	“small”	1938	Room	1000	Germanic
Superette	“small”	1938	Supermarket	1933	English
Majorette	“female”	1941	Major	1579	French
Leopardette	“imitation”	1975	Leopard	1490	French
Bottle-ette	“small”	1990	Bottle	1375	French
Flingette	“unimportant” “female”	1991	Fling	1827	Germanic
Hangarette	“small”	1992	Hangar	1852	French
Fibette	“unimportant”	1992	Fib	1611	Unknown

TABLE II. FRENCH LOANS WITH EXISTING BASES IN ENGLISH (CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)					
Derivative	Meaning	Register date	Base	Base date	Base origin
Circlet	“small”	1528	Circle	1305	French
Islet	“small”	1538	Isle	1290	French
Cabinet	“small”	1565	Cabin	1400	French
Eaglet	“child”	1572	Eagle	1380	French
Maisonette	“small”	1818	Maison	1570	French
Cigarette	“small”	1842	Cigar	1725	French
Statuette	“small”	1843	Statue	1300	French

TABLE III. FRENCH LOANS WITH NO EXISTING BASES IN ENGLISH (CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)		
DERIVATIVE	MEANING	REGISTER DATE
Pullet	"child"	1362
Hatchet	"small"	1375
Poppet	"small"	1386
Leveret	"child"	1400
Cygnet	"child"	1430
Coronet	"small"	1494
Coquette	"female"	1611
Brunette	"female"	1713
Grisette	"female"	1723
Sachet	"small"	1838

TABLE IV. ENGLISH CREATIONS NOT REGISTERED IN THE BNC (CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)					
DERIVATIVE	MEANING	REGISTER DATE	BASE	BASE DATE	BASE ORIGIN
Floweret	"small"	1400	Flower	1225	French
Freshet	"small"	1598	Fresh	1538	French
Muslinette	"imitation"	1787	Muslin	1609	French
Dandizette	"female"	1821	Dandy	1780	Unknown
Demonette	"small" "female"	1854	Demon	1569	Latin
Balconette	"small"	1876	Balcony	1618	Italian
Essayette	"contempt"	1877	Essay	1597	French
Leaderette	"small" "female"	1880	Leader	1837	English
Cashmerette	"imitation"	1886	Cashmere	1822	Indian
Plushette	"imitation"	1887	Plush	1594	French
Storyette	"contempt"	1889	Story	1520	French
Stationette	"small"	1893	Station	1797	French
Vanette	"small"	1921	Van	1829	English
Brickette	"small"	1934	Brick	1440	French
Liette	"unimportant"	1993	Lie	900	Germanic
Gothette	"female"	2003	Goth	1989	English

TABLE V. FRENCH LOANS NOT REGISTERED IN THE BNC (CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)					
DERIVATIVE	MEANING	REGISTER DATE	BASE	BASE DATE	BASE ORIGIN
Bannerette	"small"	1300	Banner	1230	French
Mountainette	"small"	1586	Mountain	1205	French
Collarette	"small"	1690	Collar	1325	French
Baronette	"female"	1861	Baron	1200	French

were taken from Germanic, Scandinavian, Latin, Indian and Italian respectively. This fact seems to be another proof that the English language did not only adopt some French loans ending in "-et/-ette" but it very soon turned this suffix into part of its inventory of diminutive suffixes.

My analysis of the English words ending in "-et/-ette" has shown that the semantics of this diminutive suffix is more complex than what has been traditionally believed. I have approached the study of the semantics of the diminutive concept following Jurafsky's cognitive model ("Universal" 542). He proposes a radial category in which the different meanings are connected through cognitive mechanisms. The central meanings are both "small" and "child," which seems to be the original meaning of the synthetic diminutive in many languages, although there is no evidence that this also happened in Indo-European languages ("Universals" 425).

Taking into account Jurafsky's model, I realised that many words which have been traditionally considered as meaning "small" can better convey a different meaning. For instance, words such as "owlet" or "hogget" make reference to a younger animal than its base, so they better express the meaning "child" instead of "small." Using the same suffix to convey both "child" and "small" seems to be very frequent among the languages in the world, as Jurafsky himself affirms: "many languages lexically mark the young of animals with the diminutive" ("Universals" 427). This meaning is cognitively related to "affection" through inference because people usually feel tenderness towards children and young animals.

On the other hand, the meaning "contempt" seems to be more predominant than "small" in words such as "essayette," "novelette," "storyette," etc. Not only do these words refer to shorter texts, but they are also considered of lesser quality. See the following example: "*The Sun* made less use of the *News of the World* style of long reports which unfolded the plot of a sex crime in a 'racy' style, like a novelette" (*BNC*). People usually show disrespect for the texts that these words refer to, which is even more noticeable in the following instance of "sermonette": "In 1980, when I told my doctor I was leaving my day job to work wire full time, he gave me a sermonette about the evils of carpal tunnel inflammation" (<http://www.wirelady.com/berrienwiresafetypage.html>).

There are many cases in which the meaning "small" does not indicate a reduction in size but in importance, which can also be explained cognitively. The clearest instances of "unimportant" are "flingette" and "fibette." Despite appearing both in the *BNC*, the searches on the Internet have revealed a very curious use of premodification which serves as an emphasis for the lack of importance: "Just a tiny, teeny, miniscule little fibette, just so that we filled up a tiny amount more space" (<http://www.mandiapple.com/mavisdream/livedr4.htm>).[5]

[5] The analytic diminutive is also part of my research on this topic, but for space reasons not part of the present paper.

Creations like "liette" in the example "It was a little white fib, or 'fibette', as he sometimes called them (or 'fi', or 'liette', or 'sidetruth'... a friend once joked 'you have more words for a lie than the eskimos have for snow'" (<http://www.idler.co.uk/archives/?page_id=132>) are the result of spontaneity, which makes clear that English speakers have internalised the meanings of this suffix. Therefore, there is enough evidence to affirm that "-et/-ette" is completely alive in the English language.

The productivity of this suffix becomes stronger in relation to its behaviour with the meaning 'female'. Contrary to some authors' opinions (Quirk et al. 1549; Schneider 96; Peters s.v.) English speakers do use the suffix "-et/-ette" with the meaning "female" quite frequently. Several new words I have discovered in my research turn their bases into feminine referents. Such a meaning has always played a very important role in English, even contributing to its strengthening in the French language through the use of "suffragette" or "majorette," as I have said in previous pages. These words originated in English and were taken as loans into French at the beginning and half of the 20th century respectively with exactly the same meaning they have in the English language (Dubois s.v.).

On the one hand, I have found out some derivatives in "-et/-ette" of very recent creation which only convey the meaning "female." Such is the case of "gothette," which appears neither in the *BNC*, the *OED* nor in jargon dictionaries, such as Tulloch's *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words*. Its "female" meaning is more than evident in an example as "Meeting Place For Those Goth Boyz And Goth Lordz Who Adore These Unique Gothette Girrls And Mistresses & The Darkish Abyss World They Inhabit!" (<http://gothettevampyria.tribe.net/>), taken from a webpage created in the year 2003.

On the other hand, there are some other words that can convey both "unimportant" and "female" or "small" and "female," such as "flingette" and "leaderette" respectively. However, both of them seem to be specialising their meaning to the second one. "Flingette" can indicate both "an unimportant fling" and "the woman with whom somebody commits infidelity" (my own definitions). Take the following example:

> It started with 30somethings's ex-flingette posting a video on the net. No, not that type of video. it was shot by her g/f and it was about her search for a decent gym in her home town [...] Anyway, I then went upstairs in our house to find ex-flingette in our spare room, still snivelling whilst telling me that she has now developed a large crush on me (<http://whatwoulddanado.blogspot.com/2005/12/these-dreams-go-on-when-i-close-my-ey.html>).

While "flingette" still seems to express both meanings, other words may have already got specialised into "female." For instance, "demonette" is defined by the *OED* as "a little demon" but I have not found any example either in the *BNC* or on the Internet with such a meaning. On the contrary, there are quite many instances in which "female" becomes apparent:

> While Jim and Rick continued their discussion, a mousy (literally) female demon carrying a clipboard approached them. 'Okay, right. You two are Jim and Rick,

> correct?' 'That's right,' said Jim. 'Are you our punishment?' The demonette gave him a cold stare (<http://www.bearchive.com/~addventure/game1/docs/118/118987.html>).

The most remarkable change has taken place in the derivative "leaderette" because, not only has it turned into indicating two different meanings, but it has also taken the base "leader" with different senses. On the one hand, the *OED* defines it as "A short editorial paragraph, printed in the same type as the 'leaders' in a newspaper," so its base "leader" refers to a type of paragraph. On the other hand, examples found on the net have revealed its use as a feminine word:

> *Centerville Church of Christ* has been involved with the Lads to Leaders program since 1987. Lads to Leaders & Leaderettes has a proven methodology for developing young people into leaders" (<http://www.centervillechurchofchrist.org/leader_leaderette.htm>).

The derivative in this case has taken the base "leader" with the meaning "one who leads" (*OED*), turning it into a feminine referent. Although there are some examples in which certain contempt seems to accompany the feminine derivative, cases such as this one seem to respond women's need to become visible.

4. CONCLUSIONS

My research has shown that the diminutive suffix "-et/-ette" is productive in the English language since it has been used to form new derivatives from the 14th century to the current 21st century. Contrary to the traditional belief that English diminutives cannot express as many values as other languages, such as the romance ones, my analysis has proved that only this suffix is able to express at least six meanings: "child," "contempt," "unimportant," "small," "female" and "imitation," all of them connected through cognitive mechanisms. The meaning "female" has recently become very important and has given place to singular changes in some words, such as "flingette," "demonette" and "leaderette." Far from being obsolete, "female" seems to be more alive than ever. The appearance of words like the previously mentioned and "gothette" may be explained as women's wish to be acknowledged both in the world and in the language.

Although its diminutive nature has never been denied, there are no systematic works about the suffix "-et/-ette," so a first serious research on specific English diminutive constructions was needed. Besides, none of the few studies on the English diminutive has made use of electronic corpora to draw its data, not even the latest research, as Schneider himself admits: "So far, large electronic corpora have not been used in diminutive research to any significant extent" (70). Therefore, the use of the *BNC* as my tool for analysis both to draw up the list of words ending in "-et/-ette" and to check their existence in the English language is a further step on the linguistic research on the diminutive.

Apart from the *BNC*, it has been essential to use other resources such as dictionaries, grammars and, especially, the Internet in order to cover the deficiencies that the corpus presents. Dictionaries such as Muthmann's have been very useful to draw up the list of words, while the Internet has played a relevant role in the verification of their use in English.

Unquestionably, the Internet has been a very important source in which the existence of certain words in the English language has been stated. Searches on the net have enriched my study in a very remarkable way and my findings on words such as "gothette," "leaderette," "flingette" and "demonette" would not have been possible if I had restricted my corpus to the *BNC*. The Internet opens a wide world of possibilities for research in any scientific field and even wider in linguistics. Blogs, chat rooms and personal websites mean an unlimited source of data for linguistic research. Examples taken from the Internet present typical features of spoken language, a factor that has been very helpful for my analysis since diminutives seem to be more frequent in daily speech. People are increasingly communicating through this means and linguists should consider its value as an intermediate field between the written and the oral language.

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A BRIGHT JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS. Santiago J. Henríquez, ed. *El viaje literario... y la cueva: imágenes de la memoria*. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Cabildo de Gran Canaria, 2007.

Numerous monographies on travel literature have seen the light in the last few years. This is very probably due to the unstoppable process of globalization that today's world is going through, where travel has become a key tool for flooding ever-moving knowledge. It is not less certain, however, that one can also perceive a slight decrease in Spain's magnetic attraction to foreign travellers with literary intentions, which does not necessarily mean that there is not an abundance of books on English travel accounts in different regions of our country, including the Canary Islands. On the contrary: these accounts are still being written and studied with a constancy that makes one think of a fashion. The many literary analyses published nowadays on any aspect of travel literature of olden times do not stop reminding us that a travel account is by definition a portrait abounding in subjective accounts of a reality as narrated and described by the traveller-writer. Travellers and their travels fuse in loving embraces, engendering fruits embodied by their travel books, all personal and untransferable works, which, together with other examples of a given period, constitute the output that experts on the genre dedicate themselves to dissecting.

El viaje literario... y la cueva: imágenes de la memoria is indeed a most original book, albeit somewhat slippery when it comes to its analysis with our critical scalpel. This is due, among other reasons, to the fact that, as far as we know, nothing similar has been published before by specialists on travel literature. Its singularity is attributable to its being a work that collects diverse travel experiences lived by foreigners —especially Britons, Germans, Irishmen, Americans and Canadians— that have moved at different times within two apparently completely incompatible worlds: the world of shadows, here represented by the literary figure of the cave, and that of the sunlight, with light and nature at their utmost splendour which we easily associate with the Canary Islands. Those like us who have already traversed and experienced and read more than a few travel accounts, are certainly accoustomed to recreating and rejoicing in literary views of outshining brightness, landscapes of suns and moons of all possible shades, mountain ridges that deserve generous descriptions of blinding clarity; and, indeed, we are prepared to confirm that the Canary Islands have been priviledged witnesses of the many travellers (and a similar number of female travellers) who have set foot on them and described them passionately; and a generous amount who have even decided to stay. But the cave as a literary issue has not been a frequent visitor to the literary criticism of travel literature. Many a book has indeed been written in Spanish on English-speaking travellers in the Canary Islands and their relations with the local inhabitants. The following come to our minds: *Viajeros ingleses en las Islas Canarias durante el siglo XIX* (1988, 2007), by José Luis García Pérez; *Canarias e Inglaterra en las Islas Canarias durante el siglo XIX* (1995), by F. Fernández-Amesto et al.; *La convivencia anglocanaria: estudio sociocultural y lingüístico (1880-1914)* (1995) and *Notas para una*

bibliografía inglesa sobre Canarias: primer repertorio bibliográfico y análisis de su estructura y contenido (2002), by María Isabel González Cruz; and *Viajeros victorianos en Canarias*, by Nicolás González Lemus (1998). As can be easily perceived, the 19th century is the glorious period of English travel and expatriate residence on the archipelago. And this very book could be one more in the long list of travel accounts on the Canary Islands —which in fact it is— if it were not for its original approach.

The book that we now have in our hands is, indeed, the polyhydric recreation of several journeys towards a world of darkness in a land where this fact is heightened all the more due to its well known luminosity. The journey to a cave is the literary embodiment of a lack of landscape, of a virtual total annulment of connivance with human beings from other galaxies and exoticisms. Even the sober blackness of its cover anticipates the protagonism of all things dark in the book. The title also reveals up to what degree its coordinator, Dr Santiago J. Henríquez, is perfectly aware of the readers' surprise when they delve into the pages of this work. The use of suspension points in the title gives him away.

Let us start from the beginning. *El viaje literario y... la cueva* was born from a seminar of lectures read by travel literature and speleology experts, coordinated by the aforementioned Professor Henríquez, from the English Department of the Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: "El viaje literario y la cueva: imágenes de la memoria" was its name. The seminar took place during the second half of the year 2006 under the patronage of the Museum and Archaelogical Park of the Cueva Pintada in Gáldar, an organism that belongs to the Regional Department of Culture and Historical Heritage of the "Cabildo" or Government of the Canary Islands. The cave/cavern/grotto/depth/catacomb/mine/abyss... which took the starring role in these lectures was in reality the literary sublimation of the famous and recently restored Cueva Pintada of Gáldar. The common element of the different chapters/lectures of the book/seminar is/was threefold: the cave as a topic in travel literature, the Canary Islands as a meeting place of past and present-day civilizations and cultures (both for passing foreign travellers and residents), and images of memory. Each of the contributors writes about one or more of these issues.

Some of the book's contributors analyse the presence of a cave or equivalent in travel literature without considering the case of the Canaries. These are Patricia Almárcegi Elduayen, from the Universidad Internacional de Catalunya, who penned "Lo que la historia debe a la litera-tura de viajes: las catacumbas de Alejandría vistas por los viajeros europeos"; Irene Furlong (National University of Ireland, Maynooth), who is the authoress of "The Giant's Causeway: Mythical Cliffs and Caves of Finn MacCool"; Florence Gérard Lojacono (Université de Haute-Alsace, Mulhouse), who has written "La caverne: figure de l'architecture heureuse. Une lecture des robinsonnades de Jules Verne et de Michel Tournier"; María Antonia López-Burgos del Barrio (Universidad de Granada), with her chapter on "Las cuevas de Granada en la literatura de viajeros británicos e irlandeses de otros tiempos"; Maureen Mulligan (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria) and her "Troglodytes in Myth and Literature: the Image of the Cave"; and Rosa Elena Penna (Universidad Católica de Argentina), who has contributed with "Las cuevas de Barabar Marabar: realidad, ficción y simbolismos a través de *A Passage to India*". Curiously enough, all of them are women experts, which may point to a growing interest in the genre amongst women researchers. A special case is the chapter written by the speleologists Octavio Fernández Lorenzo and Antonio Javier González Díaz (from the Spanish Federation of Speleology), who have authored the chapter entitled "Miran-do al abismo", which approaches the issue of a cave from a literary perspective blended with the point of view of two professional travellers-explorers of the underworld, a fact that grants their work a welcome touch of originality.

On the other hand, the journey to the Canary Islands (without a specific mention of the archipelago's caves or with only a mild presence of them) is the theme of two researchers who are deeply rooted on the land: Dr. Manuel Brito (Universidad de La Laguna) through his "Historia y logos en la memoria de los hombres:

Gloucester y las Islas Canarias", and Dr. Bernd Dietz Guerrero (Universidad de Córdoba), former Professor at the Universidad de La Laguna until 1996 and the author of "La mirada del norte: escritores canadienses en Canarias".

Finally, the third main block of chapters is made up by those written by Canarian authors, who combine the issue of the cave with its relevant presence on the islands. This is the case of Dr. Santiago J. Henríquez, who contributes with the Introduction and with "El viaje literario y… la cueva: actualidad de los textos y la crítica inglesa de viajes más recientes sobre el patrimonio histórico español y Canarias"; Dr. Isabel González Cruz (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), who is the authoress of "Cuevas y guanches en la bibliografía inglesa sobre Canarias", and Dr. Marcos Sarmiento (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), who puts an end to the book with his chapter "Cuevas canarias en los textos de viajeros alemanes del siglo XIX". The book also has a section dedicated to including the researchers' brief cvs.

This is a book whose main merit is that it endeavours to cater for a wide variety of interests. The geographer will be able to traverse different landscapes, from the Canary Islands to Egypt, India, Northern Ireland, Britain or Spain. Readers with historical interests and mythologists will travel within diverse periods, covering Antiquity and the 20th century; and literary critics will follow suit through different types of texts written by travellers, novelists, poets and explorers-speleologists, as well as through different cosmological visions (those of the British, Irish, French, Canadians, Germans, etc). This is a book which brings together what the author of the Introduction termed as "the instrumentalization of the cave/journey binomial" (13). This is a compulsory book in any travel expert's library, especially for those interested in the darkest aspects of the travel genre. This is a book that transports us to a new and unique dimension: the literary journey to darkness versus luminosity, the Canary Islands versus the rest of the world, memory versus modernity.

Eroulla Demetriou
José Ruiz Mas

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A NEW ARENA OF DIALOGUES AND DEBATES. Bárbara Arizti and Silvia Martínez Falquina, eds. *On the Turn: The Ethics of Fiction in Contemporary Narrative in English*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007.

The last two decades of the 20th century witnessed a particular concern about ethics in literary studies, the so-called "turn to ethics." This is how editors Bárbara Arizti and Silvia Martínez Falquina begin to explain the genesis of *On the Turn* in its introduction. Interestingly, they introduce us from the start to a set of essays which come to prove that this ethical (re)turn entails dialogues and debates between two main trends. On the one hand, a more conservative group, continuers of Leavis's moral criticism, in which names such as Wayne Booth, David Parker, Martha Nussbaum, Alasdair MacIntyre and Richard Rorty are included. On the other hand, there are some seconders of Emmanuel Levinas and his primary interest in the Other, for whom an approach to ethics and literature bearing in mind certain principles of deconstruction and poststructuralism is more appropriate. Amongst the latter group, Geoffrey Harpham, Drucilla Cornell, Chirstopher Falzon, J. Hillis Miller and Andrew Gibson are mentioned, the last two being very often alluded to in *On the Turn.*

Actually, its first part, "Framing Ethics," presents us initially with an essay by the very Andrew Gibson in which he develops his concept of intermittency by emphasizing four particular characteristics of it. He explains each of those features by referring to key theoretical works and also to certain literary ones, before examining them in particular in J.M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron, Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*. Secondly, Patricia Waugh approaches the turn to ethics by paying particular attention to the impact of recent biological disciplines on the Humanities. In this context, she analyses closely and clearly the works of theorists such as Iris Murdoch, and novelists as widely-known as Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro. Waugh concludes that the main implication of the turn to ethics under the light of recent scientific viewpoints is the recognition of the primary importance of emotions and the body. Curiously, the following essay also proposes one of Ian McEwan's fictions as a case study. Thus, Heinz Antor explores the former's *Black Dogs* to illustrate how the turn to ethics is possible despite the current worldwide decentredness and fragmentation.

"Studies in Mode," Part II of *On the Turn*, starts with Susana Onega's exhaustively documented analysis of A.S. Byatt's *Babel Tower,* exposing how, in several ways, it participates in the current ethical turn, by examining thoroughly the novel's possibilities in this context, producing an appropriately argued and thought-provoking essay. Next, we encounter Jean-Michel Ganteau's views on the implications of ethics on the study of romance, studying the perspectives that the latter offers in the turn, alluding to Peter Ackroyd as the contemporary author who best exemplifies his opinions. Then, María Jesús Martínez Alfaro evidences and justifies how Charles Palliser's short story "The Medicine Man" participates in the ethical turn, exploring the connections of satire with this field. Finally, Gabrielle Moyer reflects on the important role of recovering the practice of hermeneutic, "attentive reading" at the prospect of the ethical turn. She carries out in her paper several such readings, theoretical and literary, of the process of falling in love, in order to prove the validity of her particular focus.

On the Turn offers a third section, "Visions of Multiplicity," which opens with Gordon Henry's close analysis of the relationships between ethics and both theoretical and literary treatments of American Indians, not only revising how this has taken place so far, but also proposing several angles for the future development of such a topic. Then, M. Dolores Herrero chooses David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life* in order to show how it illustrates the connections between ethics and narrative territorial representations, as she also exposes tenets of both Levinas and Heidegger which she believes most appropriate for this ethical dimension. In the paper that follows by Isabel Fraile Murlanch, some of Levinas's principles, namely that of Facing and its implications in responsibility and identity, are also chosen as a theoretical framework to study both *The Last Magician* and *Oyster* by Janette Turner

Hospital. Next, Chris Weedon describes different contemporary images of Islam by accounting their representation in the visual arts, particularly in the film version of Hanif Hureishi's *My Son the Fanatic*, and pointing out some ethical implications of Islamophobia. In the final essay of this part, Rüdiger Ahrens centres the ethical turn on an interdisciplinary debate between equity, law and literature, which he studies both in colonial and postcolonial writers such as Joseph Conrad, E.M. Forster, Salman Rushdie and Caryl Phillips.

Stephen Ingle's comparative study between Orwellian ethics, particularly his treatment of truth and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and their role in certain current affairs such as the Iraq war, opens "Political Positionings," *On the Turn*'s Part IV. In the next paper, Chantal Cornut-Gentille D'arcy scrutinizes the British TV series *The Vicar of Dibley* from a feminist viewpoint, aiming at revealing alternative ethical readings of this seemingly unoffending sitcom. This essay is followed by Monica Calvo Pascual's interesting approach to the so far somehow neglected Stephen Marlowe's *Colossus*, in order to evidence the novel's possibilities to offer an appealing ethical reading. Next, Francisco Collado Rodríguez examines E.L. Doctorow's *The March*, focusing on the treatment of the sense of sight, the visual and perspective in the narrative as a means to arrive at several ethical considerations.

The final part of *On the Turn*, "The Ethics of Writing/Reading," includes six papers. Firstly, Marita Nadal deals with ethical criticism paying special attention, following Hillis Miller, to the relationships between author, reader, narrator and characters, particularly in some works by Flannery O'Connor, both as an essayist reading her own work and as a writer. Secondly, Vera Nünning also considers the role of narrators in the ethical turn. However, she deals with unreliable ones, distrusted or disapproved of by readers, however demonstrating that they might turn out to be fruitful in the current ethical debate, such as the ones appearing in Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love* and Nick Hornby's *A Long Way Down*. From this proposal to credit (un)reliable narrators, we move to C. Namwali Sepell's emphasis on uncertainty as a means to accomplish a new ethical reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Next, Adia Mendelson-Maoz proposes to explore literature's particular essence by examining certain units and linking them to morality and aesthetics, illustrating her viewpoints with William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*. The following essayist, Sonia Baelo Allué, revises various critical responses to the controversial *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis in order to prove that the ethical turn entails both assets and liabilities. The author argues that, in order to avoid the latter, ethics and aesthetics must converge by paying attention, as it should have been the case in *American Psycho*, to aspects such as the implied author. Finally, Eamonn Dunne examines J. Hillis Miller's views on reading and how they are linked to ethics, showing how they are exemplified in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*.

The pertinence of all the papers included is undeniable, although the finest insights are mostly present in those by members of the Universidad de Zaragoza's research team currently studying the ethics of fiction, as acknowledged by the editors. On the contrary, some of the less extensive papers of the book should be continued elsewhere as unfortunately their interest is diminished by their brevity. All in all, the plurality, depth and comprehensive research of all the aforementioned essayists accomplishes an enriching work which is a must for any scholar interested in the ethical turn.

María del Pino Montesdeoca Cubas

TRANSLATION AND CENSORSHIP IN THE FRANCO YEARS AND THE TRANSITION PERIOD. Raquel Merino Álvarez, ed. *Traducción y censura en España (1939-1985): estudios sobre corpus TRACE. Cine, narrativa, teatro*. León y Bilbao: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de León y de la Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, 2008.

This book is the result of a consolidated research project (TRACE) involving researchers from the Universidad de León and the Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea. The overall aim of the project is to study the reception, translation and censorship of translated texts in the Franco era, from 1939 to 1985 in Spain. In 2000 the first collective volume, *TRACE, Traducción y censura inglés-español: 1939-1985* was published, as a preliminary analysis of the censored translation catalogues, compiled using the censorship records of the AGA (General Administration Archives) as a main source of information. In this second volume, the TRACE researchers offer us the results of their ongoing descriptive and methodological investigations.

The book is composed of six articles grouped in three sections: narrative, film and drama. The narrative section begins with Marisa Fernández López's paper on children and juvenile literature. She offers a detailed description of the different stages involved in building a corpus of texts of translated children's and juvenile literature that were subject to censorship processes during the different legislative periods of the Franco regime, from 1940 to 1984. According to Fernández, censorship during the regime was particularly strict in the revision of children's and juvenile literature because of the educative role these texts play, so these literary texts were expected to conform to the existing pedagogical, moral and ethical principles and ideas. The first step involved in building this corpus is the elaboration of a list of authors and works on which to base the search of censorship records. A group of censored texts can then be defined, text pairs established and finally a selection made of those parts of the text that are supposed either to have been manipulated by censorship or to have been subject to prior/ self censorship because they had already had problems in the source system.

The second paper in the narrative section deals with the Spanish system's reception and translation of Emily Brönte's novel *Wuthering Heights.* After contextualising the novel and its author within the British source system, Eterio Pajares focuses on the process of censorship and carries out a comparative descriptive analysis of the different Spanish translations of Bronte's novel. The information obtained from the AGA censorship records from 1940 to 1983 with regard to *Wuthering Heights,* the main features of the novel and the obstacles to the import and/ or edition of this work indicate a trouble-free and uncomplicated reception process. Pajares concludes that the resulting target text was a faithfully translated work with no impediments from the censors and that the modifications and changes found were mainly due to the cautious and prudent attitude of translators and editors. In an excellent annex to the article, all the editions of this novel published between 1936 and 1980 are listed, together with the library location of at least one copy of each edition.

José Miguel Santamaría López's research deals with fictitious translations, a very interesting phenomenon related to publishing policy from the 1940s to the 1970s, and the possible reasons for this. This phenomenon was particularly related to the appearance of popular genres in Spain during the 20th century, such as Western novels, and its main objective was to obtain the credibility and indulgence of the public. Santamaría offers an interesting compilation of translated and fictitiously translated Western literature in Spain. He focuses his attention particularly on one of the most famous American Western writers: Zane Gray. The translation and reception processes of Gray's work are traced from the first texts imported from Latin America to those carried out in Spain. This process is finally illustrated by a textual analysis of three of his works: *The Drift Fence*, *Twin Sombreros* and *30.000 on the Hoof* and the main changes and modifications that were carried out on these.

The last paper of this section opens up a new line of research within the TRACE research project, as it incorporates a new genre, the philo-

sophical essay, and a new source language, German. Ibon Uribarri Zenekorta's study deals with the contextualization and cataloguing of the Spanish translations of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in the AGA censorship records. The situation of philosophy in Spain from the nineteenth century until the civil war is revised in an extensive section. The strength of the Church in Spain limited the representation of modern German philosophy during the Franco period from the pre-civil war years until the late 1960s, when the publishing silence was broken and the first philosophy translation projects appeared. Uribarri contextualizes the figure of the German philosopher in the source system and in order to elaborate a catalogue of translations describes the reception and translation process in Spain from the first partial translation that appeared in 1856. Finally, the author begins the textual research with a textual comparison of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. A detailed annex of the Spanish translations of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is also included.

In the section devoted to film studies, Camino Gutiérrez Lanza focuses on the methodology used to define, construct and analyse a very wide censorship catalogue such as the one on film. The construction of the so-called corpus 0 is based on textual, language and time limits. All the registers included in this corpus are cinema film texts with English as the source language and Spanish the target language and which were translated, censured and screened between 1951 and 1985. The second part of the paper deals with the process of constructing the corpus and the various sources of information used and information included in the TRACE index cards are described. Finally, Gutiérrez looks at the way the study of the different (con)textual fields of information such as the type of censorship, production, distribution and exhibition data, genre, etc. can be used to identify specific textual groups and to select representative samples and textual groups.

The volume closes with Raquel Merino's contribution on the translation of drama texts. She focuses on a specific case study: the translation and integration process of Mart Crowley's play *The Boys in the Band*. The 1975 production of this play was a milestone in the representation of homosexuality in Spain and had an enormous media impact. As Merino points out, it is important to bear in mind that homosexuality was the most taboo topic for the censors of the Franco regime, given their concern about any issue related to sexual morality. The reception of Crowley's play illustrates the process by which the topic of homosexuality was introduced into the Spanish drama scene by means of the translation of foreign texts. Merino carries out a textual study of the play starting from the analysis of contextual data obtained in the AGA censorship records and followed by a macro-textual and micro-textual analysis of pairs of fragments. This case study illustrates the tension that existed between the censorship apparatus and the different agents trying to publish or produce a text in a period of political involution.

The papers included in this volume represent an important step forward in our understanding and knowledge of translation policy and norms during the Franco period, revealing the close interaction between extra-textual factors and the practice of translation. In general, the research activities of the TRACE group have made an essential contribution to the configuration of a history of translation in Spain.

Carmen Toledano Buendía

FEELING OTHERS' PAIN: POSTCOLONIAL ESSAYS ON LITERARY EMPATHY. Nieves Pascual and Antonio Ballesteros, eds. *Feeling in Others: Essays on Empathy and Suffering in Modern American Culture*. Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2008.

Feeling in Others is an immensely interesting book, one that is worth having on the shelf regardless of one's particular field of study. Through eight critical essays of the highest standard, this book gives the reader both an overview and a profound analysis of the manifold faces of pain in the arts. Additionally, the book includes a selection of paintings by the Spanish artist Marina Núñez that beautifully (but also disturbingly) illustrate the insights contained in this volume.

This collection is divided into different parts according to the different subject matters that revolve around the idea of pain. The first part, dealing with race, comprises two essays, the first of which analyses pain in relation to the female body in Louise Erdrich's *The Master Butchers Singing Club*. Kurjatto-Renard studies the intergenerational conversation established among characters in this novel, which the author sets against a backdrop of ethnic fusion, elements of the Ojibwe tradition and a universe of symbolic names. Kurjatto-Renard's perspective, full of admiration for her author, emphasizes a reading of hope in the novel, one in which the text serves as a vehicle for communicating the force of serenity confronting pain and the necessity of accepting it in our lives. In this same part of the book, and through the analysis of several poems written by two male Chicano and six Chicana writers, Oliva Cruz argues the subversion of female archetypes carried out in a significant part of Chicano/a literature. These archetypes, which once were linked to submission and shame, after the arrival of the Chicano Movement turned into symbols of pride and resistance in the works analysed. Through the visions of authors coming from very different backgrounds, Oliva shows the diverse views that characterize the present-day Chicano understanding of pain and of the female body as its principal recipient, both in real-life Chicano and Mexican societies and in the mythical stories that deal with Mexico's legends and folklore. In doing so, Oliva manages to outline a rich panorama of the reconsiderations of the "classical" Chicano myths, that explains the central role of the female experience and the construction of female sensitivity in modern Chicano writing.

Gender is the topic of the second part of the book, which opens up with Isabel Durán's essay on breast cancer narratives. For Durán, cancer writing means a "return of the real" (51) whose vision questions the romanticized understanding of illness "à la Baudelaire" (52), that is, the display of the crudity of living with cancer in a literary style that could closely resemble naturalism. Durán poses the critical interest in trauma and disability studies as the next great topic for critical discussion after class, gender and race. She possibly makes here a covert reference to the canon of the *Bildungsroman* tradition, when she compares the new narratives of pain to the ordered, pristine world of Goethian novels of development. The way in which Durán wisely interprets such comparison radicates in the ability of cancer narratives to become universal —as her choice of primary sources: the work of American black poet Audre Lord, the essays of Spanish Sociology professor María Ángeles Durán and the autobiography of the daughter of a former Spanish Prime Minister Mariam Suárez, consequently shows. For Durán, "autoscriptography" helps the threatened self to rebuild itself into a coherent sense of completion. She then goes on to discuss the impact of war lexis on the description, treatment and indeed on the very concept of cancer and the individual will to control it. Through this, she establishes bold connections between war and masculinity, by associating the attack of illness and the reactions of the self and the community (doctors, family, friends) to a very particular "gender trouble," to put it in Judith Butler's terms: the one undergone by women, suffering from a fundamentally female condition, behaving towards it as men do on the battlefield. However, for these writers there exists a specifically feminine focus: the important fact that it is not the battle itself that matters most, but the outcome, survival and the miracle of life.

After an illuminating discussion of the cultural perception of pain starting from the times of Greek philosophy onwards, Gudrun M. Grabher's essay analyses Susan Dodd's *The Mourners' Bench*, offering an extensive study of the experience of brain tumour from a different perspective. The novel does not concentrate so much on how words can express pain to rebuild a coherent sense of self (as it was the case of the cancer narratives explored by Durán in the previous essay); rather, it shows how silence can serve as a tool for communicating pain between people who achieve a special level of understanding, when pain becomes unutterable, far too subjective, and unique. The important thing is not to define or describe pain itself, but to express, as accurately as possible, the state in which the individual finds himself/herself when pain has to be articulated, something for which Grabher acutely uses Wittgenstein's celebrated final sentence of his famous *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus* (1921).

The third part of the book peers into the relation between pain and class. The first essay in this section is Iren Annus's enlightening study about the representation of pain in American painting, from its early, idealized representations of the first American heroes (by Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley). Through the substitution of physical pain for visionary or sacred pain, their paintings tried to maintain the heritage of the idea of pain as an art, that comes from the Middle Ages. For the author, there is a clear difference between this highly stylized representation of physical pain and the less subtle depictions of psychological pain (portrayed through actions like crying, kneeling or fainting) characteristic of paintings and engravings dealing with the suffering of marginalized sectors of the American population (like blacks and women). Annus thus points at the connection between pain as a clear feature of marginalized circles and the fact that most canonical painters in America have been white, male, and respectful towards the dominant value codes. This study, therefore, profusely develops the discussion of both American and European romantic painting, since some of the most prominent European painters, like Goya, Delacroix and Gericault, devoted large parts of their production to the depiction of pain as felt by marginalized sections of the population and as seen or imagined by artists in the times of the Napoleonic campaigns.

One of the most interesting essays in this collection is Erik Kielland-Lund's analysis of the function of violence in identity formation in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*. Kielland-Lund draws an illustrative background to explain how and why a novel like *Fight Club*, which started as a mere first novel by an unknown author, went on to become a turning point in American postmodern fiction and gave its author a celebrity status. Kielland-Lund establishes connections with Lasch, Bly and other feminist theorists to analyse the need for power and violence in the male psyche. *Fight Club* presents itself as one of the defining traits of "the desperate anomy" (121) of the newly defined grey collar class consciousness in modern America. For Kielland-Lund, *Fight Club* is a logical step forward into the literary tradition of the Puritans, Thoreau and the Beat generation, since physical pain is understood in the novel as a proof of life, like Thoreau's experience in his Walden cabin. Palahniuk's idea goes, however, in the opposite direction: both authors, one at each extreme of the continuum of American writers reject the American Dream and protest against the consumerism of their times. One does it through pacifism, the other through violence. Using dichotomies such as rural versus urban, nature versus debris, with Palahniuk's novel we pass "from Thoreau, the 19th-century Transcendentalist, to Tyler Durden, the millennial anarchist" (123-124).

Nieves Pascual opens the last section of this remarkable book, devoted to pain in relation to space. In "The Architecture of Illness" she analyses narratives of anorexia to explore the interrelation between body and health *versus* illness; something that has preoccupied some of the most prominent architects since Roman times. The anorectic patient objectifies herself in her quest for a personal space that finds its perfect definition in the controlled, and controlling, space of hunger —she creates her own body. Pascual supports her point by establishing associations between the description of the conditions of several anorectic patients told in their

own words, and the buildings they have visited or inhabited. The result is a deep reflection on the lives and suffering of these patients, whose visions are often misunderstood or ignored.

The book closes with Antonio Ballesteros González's essay on *Maus*, Art Spiegelman's Holocaust narrative in comic book form. For Ballesteros, the narration of the Holocaust horror is depicted through a vehicle that comprises both narration and image. It purposely serves both fragmentary representation —a mirror representation of the image of abandoned, mutilated corpses that haunts the collective memory of the Holocaust— and the depiction of the author's quest for coming to terms with his father (a survivor from the Auschwitz camp who developed a complex, painful relation to his own and others' suffering). The author's unavoidable sense of guilt, transmitted to him by his parents, experiences an impossible and masochist reverie because he himself did not suffer at the concentration camps, which stands both as an atonement for his parents' torment and, as Ballesteros points out, "a paradoxical yearning for the real" (153).

At the beginning of this review, it was stated that *Feeling in Others* is a splendid critical work for many reasons, some of which deserve to be pointed out: its variety in perspectives and primary sources under analysis; the informative, and at the same time profound, scope of its essays (which makes it a real pleasure to be read); and its interdisciplinary approach, or even its careful editing process, which shows in the final result. However, there is one reason which is probably the most important of all: the special insight, and indeed the urgency, of works which help us understand the pain of others, regardless the face of that pain, in troubled times like ours. Everyday we are witnessing the suffering of many, near and far from us, and in too many different ways.

Marta González Acosta

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