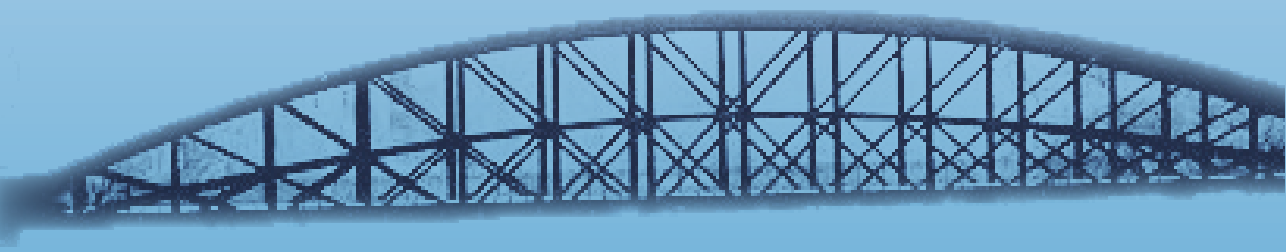
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Exploring Syntactic Complexity in Opinion Writing by L1 Spanish Learners of English at CEFR B1 and B2 Levels: Automatic Analysis Using L2SCA

Análisis del desarrollo de la complejidad sintáctica en textos de opinión de aprendientes de inglés como lengua extranjera con L1 español en los niveles B1 y B2 del MCER: análisis automático mediante L2SCA

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Abstract: This corpus-based study explores syntactic complexity in an understudied text type, opinion writing, by L1 Spanish EFL students at CEFR B1 and B2 levels. A subsection of the *FineDesc Learner Corpus* (106 opinion texts per level, 212 texts in total) was analysed by means of Lu's *L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyser* (L2SCA). The findings indicate that learners tend to reduce the length of sentences and T-units and increase clause length. A decrease in the amount of subordination is found together with an increase in coordination in phrases and clauses. In general terms, phrasal sophistication remains similar at both levels.

Keywords: Syntactic complexity; opinion writing; CEFR B1 and B2 levels; *L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer* (L2SCA); L1 Spanish learners of English.

Summary: Introduction. Measuring Syntactic Complexity: An Overview. Using L2SCA to Analyse Syntactic Complexity in Learner Writing. Methodology. Results and Discussion. Conclusion.

Resumen: Este estudio de corpus examina la complejidad sintáctica en un tipo textual poco estudiado, los artículos de opinión, producidos por estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera con L1 español en los niveles B1 y B2 del MCER. Se analizó una subsección del *FineDesc Learner Corpus* (106 textos de opinión por nivel, 212 en total) mediante el *L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyser* (L2SCA) creado por Lu. Los resultados apuntan a una tendencia de los estudiantes a reducir la longitud de las oraciones y de las unidades T, a incrementar la longitud de las subordinadas, a disminuir el grado de subordinación, y a aumentar la coordinación tanto a nivel sintagmático como oracional. En términos generales, la sofisticación sintagmática es similar en ambos niveles.
Palabras clave: Complejidad sintáctica; textos de opinión; niveles B1 y B2 del MCER; *L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer* (L2SCA); estudiantes de inglés cuya lengua materna es el español.
Sumario: Introducción. Medición de la complejidad sintáctica: una visión general. Uso de L2SCA para analizar la complejidad sintáctica en la escritura de aprendices. Metodología. Resultados y discusión. Conclusión.

INTRODUCTION

Learner language development has traditionally been analysed in second language acquisition (SLA) by means of Skehan's three-dimensional L2 proficiency model which includes complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF). Nowadays, CAF measures, especially those related to the analysis of complexity (Alexopoulou et al.; Barrot and Agdeppa; Barrot and Gabinete; Díez-Bedmar, "NP complexity;" Díez-Bedmar and Pérez-Paredes; Khushik and Huhta; Lu), are also employed in learner corpus research (LCR). Complexity, considered a core indicator of L2 language development (Bulté and Housen; Skehan; Wolfe-Quintero et al.), has been defined as "the quantity and variety of linguistic components and of the relationships between them" (Bulté et al. 540).

Within complexity, linguistic complexity is defined as "a dynamic property of the learner's interlanguage system at large and as a more stable property of the individual linguistic elements that make up the interlanguage system" (Housen and Kuiken 463). Three subdimensions are considered in linguistic complexity (Bulté and Housen; Lu), namely lexical complexity, discoursal complexity, and syntactic complexity, also known as grammatical complexity. Syntactic complexity, in turn, can be subclassified into three main subconstructs (Norris and Ortega 561): (a) global or overall complexity, which typically concerns sentence-level length and overall structural elaboration; (b) complexity via subordination, also referred to as clausal complexity; and (c) subclausal complexity by phrasal elaboration, also known as phrasal complexity. These three main

subconstructs try to capture the multidimensional nature of complexity (Biber et al. "Characteristics of Conversation;" Norris and Ortega).

Research on syntactic complexity dates back to the 1930s with the first studies conducted with first language (L1) written and spoken production (Larsen-Freeman). By the 1970s, second language (L2) scholars (Hakuta; Hunt) began adapting L1 complexity measures to L2 learner production to identify developmental indices. In the 1980s, Skehan proposed his CAF model which considered three constructs, complexity, accuracy and fluency, as the three dimensions of L2 proficiency. Although they were initially treated as dependent variables (Housen et al.), CAF constructs "have also increasingly figured as the primary foci or even as the independent variables of investigation in SLA" (Housen and Kuiken 3), applied to a wide array of contexts from classroom-based research to experimental work (Lan et al.; Lu; Ortega). Since each CAF dimension offers a different perspective on L2 performance, the CAF model is best understood as consisting of "multifaceted and multidimensional concepts" (Housen and Kuiken 5). Normally, CAF publications focus on one of the dimensions, complexity, and more specifically syntactic complexity, being the most analysed one.

Despite the fruitful results in the L2 syntactic complexity literature, four main issues point to the need for further research in the field to fully understand syntactic complexity development in learner writing. First, academic writing, more specifically argumentative writing, has been extensively analysed due to the higher syntactic complexity of academic texts (Barrot and Gabinete; Casal and Lee; Khushik and Huhta; Lu; Lu and Ai; Ran; Zhang and Yang). However, non-academic text types have received little attention in the literature. Second, different variables are employed to classify learner texts into proficiency levels (institutional status, students' results in standardised tests, CEFR levels, etc.). As a result, findings may not be fully comparable and tendencies in syntactic complexity may be hindered by the (more or less appropriate) classifications of students' proficiency levels. Third, different syntactic complexity measures are employed in the literature, which makes it difficult to compare the results obtained. Finally, little is known about syntactic complexity development in learner writing by students from specific L1s.

This paper, therefore, aims to contribute to the syntactic complexity literature by providing an analysis of syntactic complexity development in opinion writing by L1 Spanish learners of English at CEFR B1 and B2

levels. In doing so, information on a text type which is not considered academic writing is provided at two well-established CEFR levels by a learner population which is normally underrepresented in syntactic complexity studies (but see Díez-Bedmar, *NP complexity*; Díez-Bedmar and Pérez-Paredes; Lahuerta Martínez, "Analysis," "The Role").

The main objective of this paper is to describe syntactic complexity development in opinion writing by L1 Spanish learners of English at CEFR B1 and B2 levels. To account for the multidimensional nature of syntactic complexity, three main research questions are posed:

- RQ_1: Are there differences in syntactic complexity regarding global complexity measures?
- RQ_2: Are there differences in syntactic complexity regarding clausal complexity measures?
- RQ_3: Are there differences in syntactic complexity regarding phrasal complexity measures?

1. Measuring Syntactic Complexity: An Overview

One of the earliest complexity measures was the T-unit, also known as minimal terminal unit, defined as "one main clause plus whatever subordinate clauses happen to be attached or embedded within it" (Hunt 735). The T-unit was later defined as "an independent clause, accompanied by any associated dependent clause" (Larsen-Freeman, "Adjusting Expectations" 580), and it was the most frequently employed measure in L1 and L2 syntactic developmental studies (Barrot and Agdeppa; Casal and Lee; Larsen-Freeman; Lu; Ortega; Skehan). In fact, the T-unit was involved in most of the measures which were considered to be the best CAF measures in the meta-analysis by Wolfe-Quintero et al. These measures, which consider T-units, subordination ratios, and sentence length, were therefore frequently employed in the syntactic complexity literature and shaped decades of research.

Building on the synthesis by Wolfe-Quintero et al., Ortega carried out a meta-analysis by further refining the understanding of syntactic complexity through the evaluation of the relationship between commonly used measures and L2 proficiency. Her findings highlighted that some indices do not demonstrate consistent or strong associations with proficiency. In particular, length-based measures (e.g., mean length of T-unit or sentence) proved to be the most consistent and reliable indicators

of development, while other measures, especially those related to subordination, displayed greater variability across studies. Although T-unit-based measures have traditionally occupied a central role in syntactic complexity research (Hunt; Wolfe-Quintero et al.), their continued use has been questioned in recent years, with some scholars arguing that clause-based measures may provide a more informative unit of analysis and others highlighting the limitations of traditional T-unit-based approaches for capturing advanced writing development (Biber et al., "Characteristics of Conversation"; Lu; Norris and Ortega). Nevertheless, both T-unit-based and sentence-based measures remain widely employed in L2 writing research, as seen in the use of the mean length of sentence measure and the mean length of T-unit measure, respectively, and are employed to explore their similar or different capturing of syntactic complexity as well as for comparative purposes with previous studies'.

A turning point in syntactic complexity research emerged in the first decade of the 21st century, when the T-unit was found to be a less informative unit of analysis than the clause (Lu) and subordination-based metrics were challenged as suitable ones to capture syntactic complexity in texts at advanced levels (Biber et al., "Characteristics of Conversation"; Norris and Ortega;). Biber et al. ("Should We") provided in 2011 a number of phrasal elaboration measures which characterised L1 academic writing. These measures focused on phrasal elaboration rather than clausal embedding to analyse L1 academic writing because academic writing is characterised by noun phrase (NP) complexity more than by subordination. In a subsequent study, Biber et al. ("Predicting Patterns") further validated the role of phrasal elaboration in a study of learner writing with texts written in the TOEFL exam. The results showed that high-scored essays were characterised by nominalisations and complement-clause structures. As a result of these studies, the importance of fine-grained syntactic complexity measures, as opposed to the traditional large-grained or coarse-grained measures, led researchers to include such measures in their studies and explore further syntactic complexity measures at phrase level as derived from learner corpus research (Díez-Bedmar, "NP complexity;" Díez-Bedmar and Pérez-Paredes; Kyle and Crossley; Kyle; Kyle et al.; Seo and Oh).

The progressive inclusion of fine-grained syntactic complexity measures, together with the traditional course-grained ones, is also seen in the development of software to automatically analyse syntactic complexity, which made the process less difficult and tedious (Châu and

Bulté). *Coh-Metrix* (McNamara et al.) was one of the first pieces of software designed to analyse syntactic complexity. In 2010, Lu introduced the *L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer* (L2SCA) to facilitate large-scale analyses of syntactic complexity with a set of 14 indices in five dimensions (length of production unit, overall sentence complexity, amount of subordination, amount of coordination, degree of phrasal sophistication), which were selected thanks to the previous meta-analyses by Wolfe-Quintero et al. and Ortega.

All the L2SCA measures are coarse-grained indices, as can be seen in the fact that they "take length into account by using the number of clauses, T-units, or sentences as the denominator" (Polio and Yoon 167). There are two stages in the L2SCA analysis, as determined by Lu. First, the preprocessing stage, which employs the Stanford Parser (Klein and Manning, as cited in Lu "Automatic Analysis of Syntactic Complexity"), and identifies sentence boundaries and assigns part-of-speech tags (POS tags). Second, the analysis stage, which uses Tregex (Levy and Andrew qtd. in Lu, "Automatic Analysis of Syntactic Complexity") to search for specific syntactic patterns and count the number of occurrences. The L2SCA was validated using the Written English Corpus of Chinese Learners, a learner corpus consisting of 3554 essays written by university students majoring in English in China (Lu, "Corpus-Based Evaluation of Syntactic Complexity"). L2SCA has been widely employed to track syntactic complexity development in different contexts, as seen in Barrot and Agdeppa; Barrot and Gabinete; Casal and Lee; Khushik and Huhta; Lu; Lu and Ai; Ran; Polio and Yoon; and Zhang and Yang.

In 2016, Kyle released the *Tool for the Automatic Analysis of Syntactic Sophistication and Complexity* (*TAASSC*). TAASSC includes the coarse-grained ones in L2SCA and fine-grained indices for a comprehensive analysis of L2 syntactic complexity. The software is based on 31 features as it takes both clauses and phrases into account. Those 31 features are further specified with 132 metrics of phrasal complexity, and 190 usage-based metrics of syntactic sophistication (Kyle).

The software has been used in a number of publications to analyse, for instance, the extent to which fine-grained measures reflect writing quality scores in EFL by comparing these measures to the traditional syntactic complexity indices provided by L2SCA (Kyle and Crossley), determine if fine-grained grammatical complexity measures could predict differences in the difficulty of two major English proficiency tests in China

(Lin) or the connection between syntactic complexity and the quality of argumentative essays written by second-year students (Dong and Pu).

2. Using L2SCA To Analyse Complexity in Learner Writing

Syntactic complexity is analysed in SLA studies and, more recently, in LCR studies, where learner corpora compiled according to strict design criteria are investigated. Although writing may occur in a variety of real-world contexts, most L2 writing research has been conducted in educational settings (Ortega), where the majority of learner corpora have been collected. These learner corpora have been analysed using: a) coarse-grained and fine-grained indices from automatic software (Barrot and Agdeppa; Barrot and Gabinete; Casal and Lee; Dong and Pu; Kyle et al.; Lu; Lu and Ai; Polio and Yoon; Ran; Zhang and Yang); b) selected indices proposed by Biber et al. "Characteristics of Conversation"; c) corpus-driven measures (Díez-Bedmar, *NP complexity*); or d) combinations of automated and corpus-driven measures (Díez-Bedmar and Pérez-Paredes). Since the present study employs L2SCA, a widely used tool to analyse syntactic complexity, a review of studies using this software is provided in the following section.

Lu, Barrot and Agdeppa, and Khushik and Huhta analysed L2 syntactic complexity at different students' proficiency levels. Lu "Corpus-Based Evaluation of Syntactic Complexity" examined 3,554 essays from the Written English Corpus of Chinese Learners (WECCL) to explore syntactic variation across four levels of proficiency (Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4) in the writing of L2 students from nine Chinese universities. The results showed that the complex nominals per clause, mean length of clause, complex nominals per T-unit, mean length of sentence, and mean length of T-unit measures are particularly reliable indicators of proficiency Level 4, as they showed a steady, linear increase across levels.

Barrot and Agdeppa also studied whether CAF measures can effectively distinguish learner writing at four CEFR levels (A2, B1.1, B1.2 and B2). To do so, they analysed over 5,000 essays in the ICNALE corpus, which is composed of college-level student writing from 10 Asian countries/regions. Using L2SCA, their findings aligned with Wolfe-Quintero et al. and Lu, confirming that the length of production units (MLS, MLT, and MLC) differ across proficiency levels. As learners move from A2 to B2, there is an increase in the length of production units, as

seen in a higher frequency of clauses and sentences. Most coordination and subordination measures also showed significant differences as they increased with proficiency level. Likewise, the two indices of phrasal sophistication (CN/C and CN/T) increased with proficiency level, from the lower level to the more proficient ones.

In Khushik and Huhta's research, essays by L1 Sindhi or L1 Finnish students at A1, A2, and B1 CEFR levels were analysed. They employed measures from L2SCA (i.e., VP/T, DC/T, CP/T, CP/C, C/T, DC/C) as well as from *Coh-Metrix*. Their findings revealed that production length (MLC and MLS measures) increases from A1 to B1, subordination use (DC/T, C/T, DC/C) progressively increases in the three levels, the two coordination ratios (CP/T and CP/C) remained largely the same in the three levels, and the phrasal sophistication VP/T index was found to discriminate between the three levels (A1, A2, and B1).

Other studies have highlighted the importance of the L1 variable in L2 syntactic complexity. In Lu and Ai, the argumentative essays by college-level EFL learners from various L1 backgrounds at CEFR B2, C1, and C2 levels were compared with those written by native English-speaking university students. Their results revealed that Tswana learners showed higher subordination (C/T, CT/T, DC/C, and DC/T), Russian students used comparatively limited subordination but a greater reliance on coordination, as seen in the CP/C, CP/T, and T/S ratios, French learners displayed higher phrasal sophistication (CN/C and CN/T), and German students showed a greater ratio in the length production measures (MLS, MLC and MLT).

The role played by the text type has also been analysed in the L2 syntactic complexity literature employing L2SCA. Polio and Yoon compared the syntactic complexity of two text types (narrative writing and argumentative writing) with mainly L1 Mandarin Chinese students. Using 12 measures from LS2CA, the results showed that length production measures (MLS, MLT, and MLC) and phrasal sophistication complexity indices (CN/T, CN/C, and VP/T) were significantly higher in argumentative writing, especially the MLT and VP/T ratios. Those results suggest that when writing argumentative essays, ESL writers tend to use more verb phrases—as well as more complex nouns and coordinated phrases—within each T-unit, which in turn contributes to longer T-units. However, no differences were found between both text types regarding subordination and coordination ratios.

Ran compared the syntactic complexity in essays written by English majors (EMJs) and non-English majors (NEMJs). To do so, a corpus of 200 argumentative texts was analysed with the 14 measures of syntactic complexity in L2SCA. The results revealed different patterns depending on the group: NEMJs produced significantly higher values in length production measures (MLC, MLT, and MLS), coordination indices (CP/C and CP/T), and phrasal sophistication (CN/C), whereas EMJs showed significantly higher levels of subordination, as reflected in the DC/C, DC/T, CT/T, and C/T measures. The results point to the different complexification patterns in each group: NEMJs had a tendency towards phrasal elaboration and EMJs exhibited a greater use of clausal subordination.

Barrot and Gabinete examined the possible differences in complexity, accuracy, and fluency in ESL vs. EFL writing at CEFR B1.2 level in 1870 essays from the ICNALE-Written corpus by means of three L2SCA measures, C/T, DC/C and MLC. The results revealed differences in writing performance by ESL and EFL students. The ESL group showed higher levels of syntactic complexity in DC/C and MLC measures, whereas the EFL group had a higher performance in phrasal sophistication (C/T measure). The learners' L1 backgrounds may have also played an important role in the different types of complexification which characterise their essays.

The importance of individual differences in L2 syntactic complexity development was highlighted by Bulté and Housen. Using the MLT and MLC measures, they showed that while the L1 Dutch EFL group as a whole displayed relatively steady progress in syntactic complexity, individual learners followed much more variable, and often different, developmental paths if compared to the whole group. Likewise, Zhang and Yang's four-semester longitudinal study using MLT, C/S, DC/C and CP/C measures also highlighted the individual and dynamic trajectories in L2 syntactic complexity development.

Finally, Casal and Lee examined the relationship between syntactic complexity and writing quality. Their study analysed 280 research papers written by first-year ESL undergraduate students whose L1s were mainly Mandarin or Arabic and whose proficiency levels were upper-intermediate to advanced (approximately CEFR B2–C1). Syntactic complexity in these texts was then measured using five L2SCA indices, namely MLC, MLT, T/S, C/T, and CN/C. The results showed minimal variation from lower to higher proficiency levels in the clausal measures (T/S and C/T) and more

important differences in global measures (MLT and MLC) and in the phrasal measure (CN/C). In particular, the CN/C ratio showed that lower-rated papers contain fewer complex noun phrases, whereas higher-rated papers show a more frequent use of nominal structures. All in all, the findings reveal that, while clausal complexity does not strongly correlate with writing quality, global and phrasal syntactic complexity (as seen in the T/S, C/T, and CN/C measures) are key indicators of higher-rated writing.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Learner Corpus

This study employs a subsection of the *FineDesc Learner Corpus* (Díez-Bedmar, *FineDesc Learner Corpus*). This 1.3-million-word learner corpus is composed of 6375 pass-only written productions by 3412 L1 Spanish candidates who took the CertAcles English Exam Suite at CEFR B1, B2 or C1 levels in different ACLES-accredited University Language Centres in Spain.[1]

Only texts which had been evaluated as being at the level by, at least, two independent CEFR-expert raters in the ACLES-accredited University Language Centres,[2] were compiled in the learner corpus, which ensures the CEFR level of each text in the *FineDesc Learner Corpus*.

As shown in Table 1, 212 opinion texts were analysed for this study, 106 at CEFR B1 level and 106 at CEFR B2 level.

[1] Further information on the *FineDesc Learner Corpus* is available at www.finedesc.com.
[2] ACLES stands for *Asociación de Centros de Lenguas en la Enseñanza Superior* (Association of Language Centres in Higher Education). Further information about the Association and the CertAcles Exam Suite is available at https://www.acles.es/en Adhering to ACLES guidelines, accredited University Language Centers utilise a structured quality assurance framework to evaluate written production. This framework ensures high assessment standards by integrating continuous rater training, standardization sessions, and inter-rater reliability analyses, subject to cyclical external auditing by ACLES.

Table 1. Learner corpus breakdown for this study

	CEFR B1 level	CEFR B2 level
No. of texts	106	106
No. of words	16,298	23,049
Total	212	39,347

Opinion texts were selected for the study because opinion writing is underanalysed in syntactic complexity research. The reason is that syntactic complexity research has traditionally focused on academic writing, particularly argumentative writing, which is considered more syntactically demanding than narrative or expository texts (Lu; Polio and Yoon).

An opinion text is a persuasive genre in which writers express a personal stance on a debatable issue and support it by providing reasons and justification for their viewpoint, rather than by developing extensive evidence with previous research (Rose; Wang et al.). Unlike argumentative writing, opinion writing requires the writer to present claims and supporting arguments directly, without extensive engagement with previous research or lengthy evidential development (Rose). Linguistically, this genre is characterised by the explicit expression of causal and justificatory relations, as writers are expected to provide clear reasons in support of their viewpoints (Wang et al.). It also tends to favour accessible vocabulary, limited use of specialised terminology, and a style that prioritises clarity and reader engagement (Rose), which results in texts which are not as syntactically complex as argumentative texts or other text types which are considered to be academic texts (Wang et al.).

However, the analysis of syntactic complexity in opinion writing is highly relevant for three main reasons. The first one is that this text type is frequently employed in everyday life and, as a result, learners need to use it effectively in different communicative situations. Second, learners are frequently required to write opinion texts in high-stakes foreign language certification or accreditation exams at different proficiency or CEFR levels. As a result, a description of syntactic complexity in this text type across CEFR levels may help learners make progress in syntactic complexity to express their opinions and perform better in such important exams (for academic and/or professional reasons). Finally, the study of syntactic complexity in opinion writing at different CEFR levels

contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of syntactic complexity development in learner writing.

3.2 Syntactic Complexity Measures

This study employs L2SCA for a number of reasons. First, the software L2SCA (Lu) has proven to be a reliable and valid tool for L2 syntactic development for the automatic analysis of the texts in the learner corpus (e.g., Barrot and Agdeppa; Casal and Lee; Lu and Ai; Polio and Yoon; Ran; Zhang and Yang). Second, it contains a set of global, clausal, and phrasal measures that enables a comprehensive and systematic analysis of syntactic complexity. Finally, this software has been extensively used in the literature with various text types and texts at different proficiency levels (e.g., Barrot and Adgeppa; Barrot and Gabinete; Bulté and Housen; Casal and Lee; Khushik and Huhta; Ran; Lu and Ai), which facilitates the comparison of the results in this study and those in previous publications.

As seen in Table 2, this software provides fourteen measures divided into five dimensions that capture the multidimensional nature of syntactic complexity, with measures at the global, clausal, and phrasal level.[3]

[3] Lu's ("Automatic Analysis," based on Cooper) definition of complex nominal, which is considered in the degree of phrasal sophistication dimension, includes: a) nouns modified by adjectives, possessives, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, participles, and appositives; b) nominal clauses; and c) gerunds and infinitives in subject position. Therefore, Lu's definition of complex nominals includes syntactic structures which are beyond the scope of a phrase, as seen in b) and c).

Table 2. Lu's 14 complexity indices/ratios in the five dimensions considered

Dimension		Measure/index
Overall sentence complexity	C/S	Clauses per sentence
Length of production unit	MLS	Mean Length of sentence
	MLT	Mean Length of T-unit
	MLC	Mean Length of Clause
Amount of subordination	C/T	Clauses per T-unit
	CT/T	Complex T-unit ratio
	DC/C	Dependent clauses per clause
	DC/T	Dependent clauses per T-unit
Amount of coordination	T/S	T-units per sentence
	CP/T	Coordinated phrase per T-unit
	CP/C	Coordinate clauses per clause
Degree of phrasal sophistication	CN/C	Complex nominals per clause
	CN/T	Complex nominals per T-unit
	VP/T	Verb-phrase per T-unit

Source: Adapted by the author from Lu ("Automatic Analysis")

Although some L2SCA indices have been argued to closely capture related dimensions of syntactic complexity (Norris and Ortega), the 14 measures in L2SCA were employed in the present study to provide a comprehensive description of syntactic complexity in learner opinion writing and to ensure the comparability of results with previous studies, regardless of their use of all the L2SCA measures or a selection of them.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

Due to the non-normal distribution of the data ($p > .05$), Mann-Whitney tests were run to find statistically significant differences in the indices/ratios in L2SCA in the two CEFR levels. Effect sizes were also calculated.

4. Results and Discussion

To facilitate comparison of our results with those reported in other studies, our findings are presented in relation to the 14 measures across the five dimensions of L2SCA (Section 4.1), as well as through the consideration

of global, clausal, and phrasal syntactic complexity indices (Section 4.2). It should be noted that some variability exists in the terminology used across studies in syntactic complexity research. Equivalent measures may be labelled differently (e.g., "Mean Sentence Length" and "Average Sentence Length"), although they refer to the same underlying construct. This consideration is taken into account when interpreting and comparing results across studies.

4.1 Exploring the Five Dimensions in L2SCA in L1 Spanish EFL Opinion Writing at CEFR B1 and B2 Levels

4.1.1 Overall sentence complexity

Following Lu, the clauses per sentence ratio (C/S) was employed to analyse overall sentence complexity. As seen in Fig. 1, reported in Table 3 and illustrated in examples 1 and 2,[4] opinion writing at CEFR B2 level shows a statistically significant decrease in the C/S ratio if compared to CEFR B1 level.[5] This result is in line with Barrot and Agdeppa, who first observed an increase of this ratio at earlier stages (A1, A2, and B1.1), followed by a decrease at CEFR B2 level.

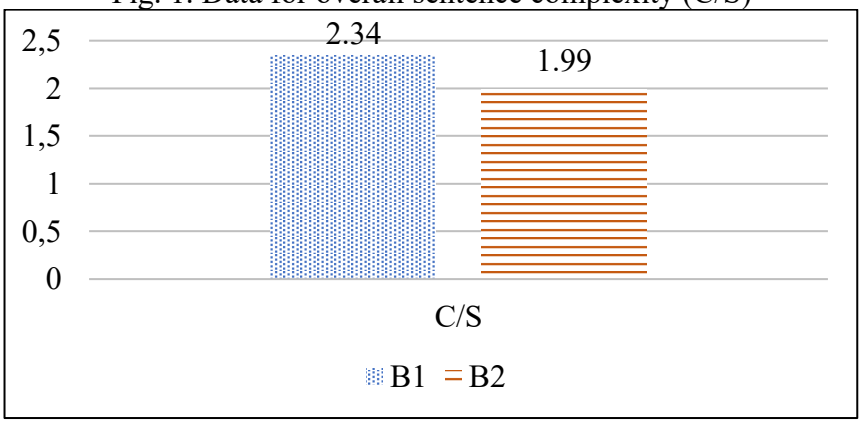
[4] All examples are taken verbatim from the candidates' texts.

[5] The stretches of language measured in the ratios have been underlined in the examples to make them more reader-friendly.

Table 3. Statistical analyses: results

	CEFR B1 level	CEFR B2 level	Mann-Whitney statistics		
C/S	*Mdn* = 2.13; *IQR* = .86; *M* = 2.34; *SD* = .93	*Mdn* = 1.92; *IQR* = .57; *M* = 1.99; *SD* = .50	*U* = 4077.50	*z* = -3.45	*p* = .001 *r* = .24
MLS	*Mdn* = 19.58; *IQR* = 7.14; *M* = 20.92; *SD* = 7.24	*Mdn* = 17.89; *IQR* = 6.1; *M* = 18.72; *SD* = 5.24	*U* = 4518.00	*z* = -2.46	*p* = .014 *r* = .17
C/T	*Mdn* = 1.81; *IQR* = .62; *M* = 1.91; *SD* = .50	*Mdn* = 1.69; *IQR* = .42; *M* = 1.72; *SD* = .35;	*U* = 4399.50	*z* = -2.73	*p* = .006 *r* = .19
DC/C	*Mdn* = .41; *IQR* = .15; *M* = .40; *SD* = .13	*Mdn* = .36; *IQR* = .13; *M* = .35; *SD* = .095	*U* = 4379.50	*z* = -2.77	*p* = .006 *r* = .19
DC/T	*Mdn* = .75; *IQR* = .50; *M* = .80; *SD* = .43	*Mdn* = .62; *IQR* = .34; *M* = .63; *SD* = .27	*U* = 4410.50	*z* = -2.71	*p* = .007 *r* = .19
CP/T	*Mdn* = .30; *IQR* = .30; *M* = .33; *SD* = .21	*Mdn* = .38; *IQR* = .30; *M* = .43; *SD* = .27	*U* = 4477.00	*z* = -2.56	*p* = .011 *r* = .18
CP/C	*Mdn* = .16; *IQR* = .16; *M* = .18; *SD* = .12	*Mdn* = .24; *IQR* = .16; *M* = .25; *SD* = .15	*U* = 3972.00	*z* = -3.69	*p* = .000 *r* = .25

Fig. 1. Data for overall sentence complexity (C/S)



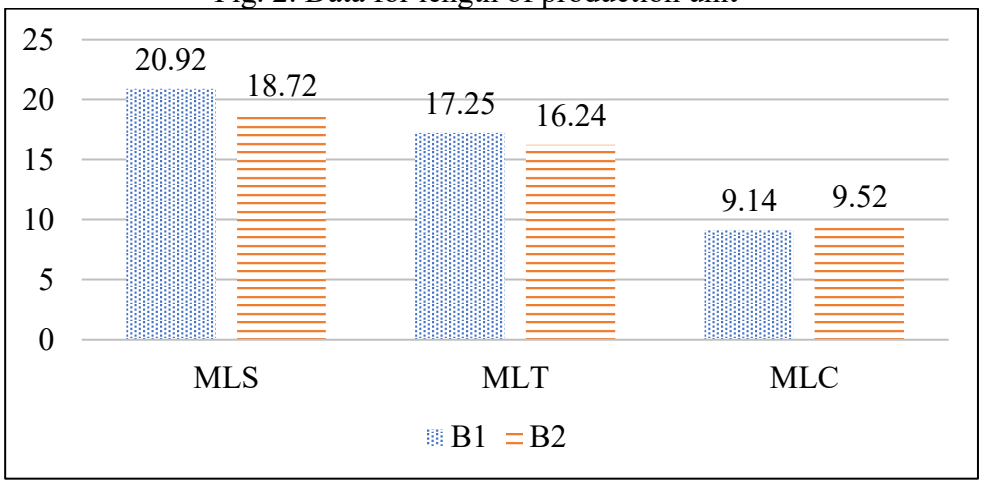
(1) It is said that *owning a dog or a cat costs a lot of money*. (B2_60157)
(2) But in the other side, *the most disadvantage is that you waste a lot of time working so you have less time to study, so you will be more stressfull*. (B1_9301)

4.1.2 Length of production unit

Two out of the three length of production unit measures, namely mean length of sentence (MLS) and mean length of T-unit (MLT), revealed that CEFR B2 learners write shorter sentences (contrast examples 3 and 4) and shorter T-units (examples 5 and 6) (Fig. 2), even though only the MLS ratio showed a statistically significant difference (see Table 3). Interestingly, the sentence-based measure (MLS) seems to capture the differences in syntactic complexity across the two levels better than the T-unit-based one (MLT), as only the former shows statistically significant results.

The third length of production unit measure, the mean length of clause ratio (MLC), reflects a slight non-significant increase from CEFR B1 to CEFR B2 level, which might point to a tendency by CEFR B2 level students to write longer clauses than their CEFR B1 level counterparts, as seen in examples 7 and 8. Therefore, whereas the length of production unit measures which consider global complexity measures decrease from one level to the next in our data, the measure which analyses the length of the clause (i.e., a clausal complexity measure, MLC) seems to point to the opposite tendency.

Fig. 2. Data for length of production unit



(3) *One informe of the university of Philadelphia show that most of the students think that doing a master's degree is a waste of time*. (B1_9493)
(4) Due to modern lifestyle, *to achieve health has developed such a concern within teens*. (B2_10132)
(5) Now a days, *lot of students that must work for paying their bills many times they quit from the course because they have not time enough to study properly*. (B1_9290)
(6) *Young people should practise a sport because the exercise produce benefits in our lifes*. (B2_70068)
(7) Democratic societys should not allow these situations. (B1_9290)
(8) Lot of people support the idea of *having a good time in gym with friends*. (B2_70025)

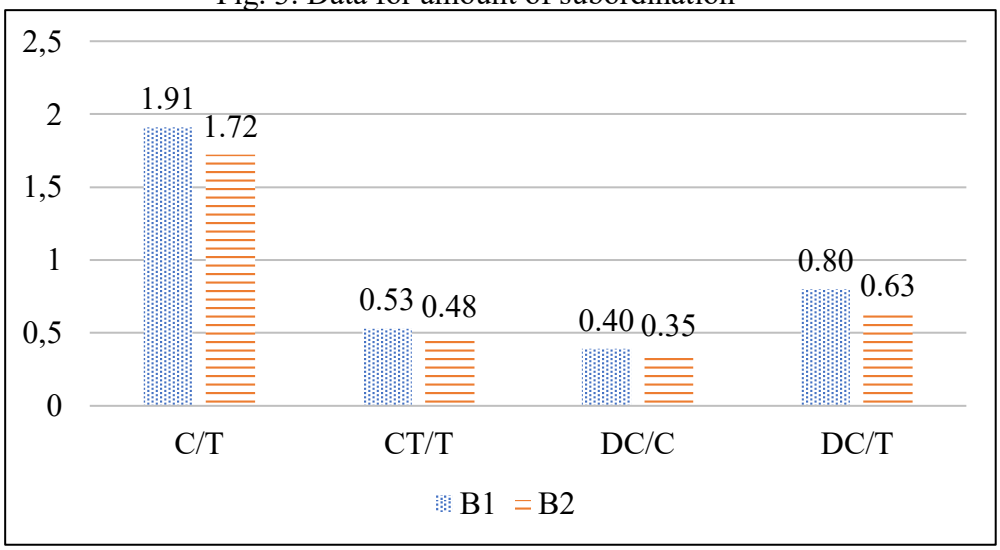
The findings in this paper regarding the MLS ratio support those by Lu and Ran, who reported a decrease in the average sentence length as learners become more proficient. However, our results concerning the non-significant decrease in the MLT ratio may contradict those by Barrot and Agdeppa, Bulté and Housen, Casal and Lee, and Zhang and Yang because these studies show a linear increase in this syntactic complexity measure as students progress in their English instruction.

The perceived increase in MLC at B2 level found in our study, although non-significant, may be found to be in line with the data by Bulté and Housen, and Zhang and Yang, who reported that learners tend to produce more clauses as they progress in their language learning process.

4.1.3 Amount of subordination

The results of all the measures employed to analyse the amount of subordination in the opinion texts at CEFR B1 and B2 levels showed a decrease from one level to the next. However, only three out of the four measures, namely clauses per T-unit measure (C/T)—examples (9) and (10), dependent clauses per clause (DC/C)—examples (11) and (12), and dependent clause per T-unit (DC/T), reveal a statistically significant decrease in the use of subordination at CEFR B2 level (Fig. 3 and Table 3). The other ratio, the complex T-unit ratio (CT/T)—examples (13) and (14), also suggests a decrease in the use of subordination across levels, but was found not to be statistically significant.

Fig. 3. Data for amount of subordination



(9) So, *if you have the time and the money and you are interested in improving your proffesional CV, why don't doing a master's degree*? (B1_9458)

(10) At last but not least, *it takes a lot of time to take care of them*. (B2_60126)

(11) In conclusion, I would recommend a master's degree to people that *either want to further their knowledge* or *to people who need it for more long-term objectives*. (B1_9506)

(12) But it is important for young people to stay active *because their actual lifestyle will determine their future one*. (B2_70038)

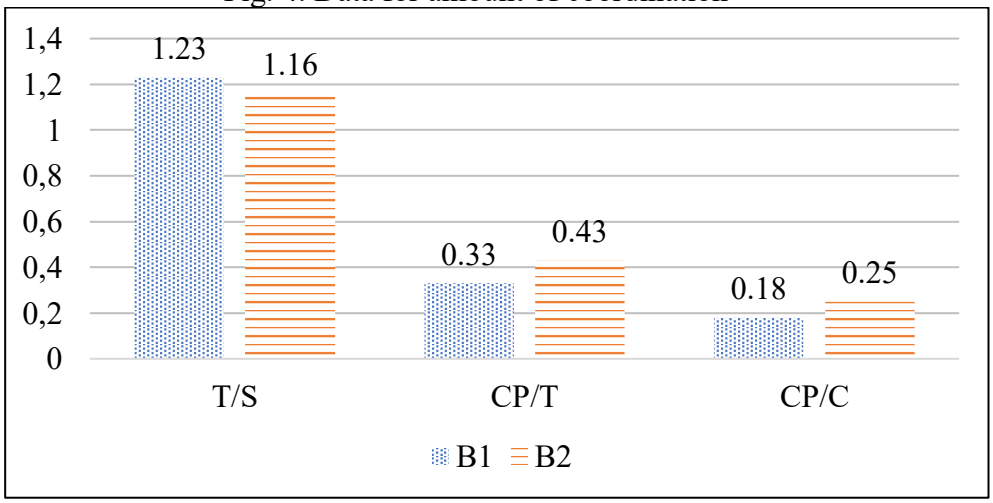
(13) On the other hand, you will acquire a high level of knowledge in a more specific area, *which is an advantage if you want to become an expert in your field*. (B1_9453)
(14) The downside of this creatures is that *fullfilling their needs can be really expensive*. (B2_60120)

When this decrease in subordination from CEFR B1 to B2 level in our data is considered together with Khushik and Huhta's results, who reported a linear increase in DC/C from A2 to B1, and Barrot and Agdeppa's findings, who observed a continued increase in DC/T from B1.1 through B2, a non-linear pattern emerges. While previous research shows a steady increase in subordination up to CEFR B2 level, our results suggest a decrease at this level. Subordination development, therefore, may not follow a uniform trajectory in different text types.

4.1.4 Amount of coordination

Contrary to the generalised decrease in subordination in opinion texts from CEFR B1 to B2 levels, our findings (Fig. 4 and Table 3) show statistically significant increases in coordination in coordinated phrases per T-unit ratio (CP/T) and coordinated clauses per clause ratio (CP/C), as illustrated in examples 15 to 18, and 19 to 22, respectively. Only the T-units per sentence ratio (T/S) pointed to a non-significant decrease from CEFR B1 to CEFR B2 levels.

Fig. 4. Data for amount of coordination



(15) If you feel confortable working *and* learning money, you could left the university. (B1_9301)
(16) In the other hand, if you don't do a master's degree you lose the oportunity to increase yours knowledge *and* meet new people. (B1_9479)
(17) Apart from excersising *and* eating healthy it it really important to take care of our mental health. (B2_70038)
(18) Usually, doing exercise for children and young people promotes a regular style of life with longer sleep times for them helping to keep them also mentally active and less prone to mental diseases and also more happy. (B2_70064)
(19) That's what our students ask in their last year of carreer, *and* in this article we're going to take you out of doubt. (B1_9508)
(20) It gives you economic independence *and* also prepares you for your future job. (B1_9299)
(21) Most young people take for granted their health *and* often forget about the good habits. (B2_70038)
(22) That could be a nice idea, but before give this step, is nenessary be realistic and evaluate pros and cons. (B2_60127)

A decrease in the T/S ratio with proficiency level has also been reported in Barrot and Agdeppa, Casal and Lee, and Lu. In our data, the decrease in the T/S ratio, although not significant from the statistical point of view, seems to indicate that B2 learners produce shorter sentences with fewer multiple independent clauses per sentence, which is common at lower proficiency levels. This result supports the claim by Barrot and Agdeppa, Lu, and Zhang and Yang that more advanced writers often demonstrate greater control over clause integration and sentence organisation, which results in shorter but structurally denser sentences.

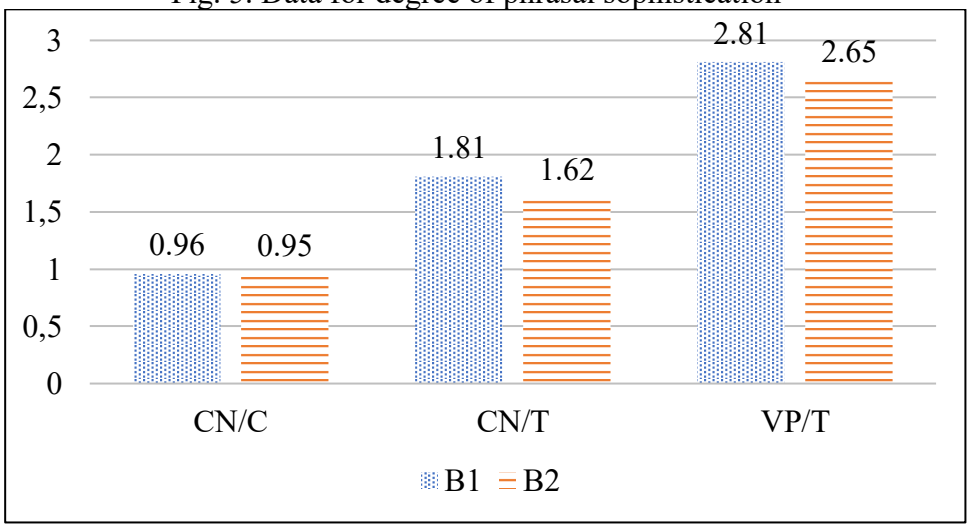
The statistically significant increase in the CP/T and CP/C ratios is also in line with previous research which found an increase of coordination in the production of students at more advanced levels. Barrot and Agdeppa, for instance, showed that the CP/C ratio remained the same from A2 to B1.1 but increased from B1.1 to B1.2 and B2. Lu also revealed that advanced learners exhibit a more frequent use of coordinated phrases as both the CP/T and the CP/C increased in levels 2, 3 and 4, suggesting that as learners reach higher proficiency levels, they still resort to coordination to express syntactic complexity. Khushik and Huhta highlighted, however, that the increase in coordination may be determined by the learners L1, since L1 Finnish students employed more coordination at A2 and B1

levels, but L1 Sindhi learners were found to use coordination more at the A levels (A1 and A2).

4.1.5 Degree of phrasal sophistication

The phrasal sophistication measures did not reveal statistically significant differences across the levels analysed. The complex nominals per clause ratio (CNC)—see examples 23 and 24, showed quite similar results at both levels and the complex nominals per T-unit ratio (CN/T)—see examples 25 and 26), and the (verb phrase per T-unit ratio (VP/T), pointed to a decrease from CEFR B1 to B2 level, as seen in Fig. 5.

Fig. 5. Data for degree of phrasal sophistication



(23) *students with familiar economical problems* (B1_9290)
(24) the importance *of regular movement on the preventing of several diseases* (B2_70055)
(25) Having a part-time work during the academic period have *some positive and negative aspects that must be considered*. (B1_9493)
(26) As far as I am concerned, *any type of physical activity* will be useful to yourself. (B2_70044)

The similar CN/C ratio at both CEFR levels in this study contrasts with previous results in the literature (Barrot and Agdeppa; Casal and Lee; Lu). Barrot and Agdeppa reported an increase in nominalisations, included in

Lu's concept of complex nominals, from B1.1 to B2. Casal and Lee showed that advanced learners exhibit a higher frequency of CN/C if compared to lower learners. Lu ("A Corpus-Based Evaluation") highlighted that Level 4 students outperformed their Level 1 counterparts regarding CN/C.

Our findings concerning the slight non-significant decrease in the CN/T ratio do not coincide with the previous literature either. Barrot and Agdeppa demonstrated that there was an increase from B1 to B2, the progression being higher from B1.2 to B2. Likewise, Lu confirmed that students' production of complex nominals per T-unit at Level 4 duplicates the one at Level 1. Seo and Oh, with learner production at higher levels, reported that CEFR B1 and B2 students use fewer complex nominals if compared to students at C1 and C2 levels.

The comparison of the results obtained in the CN/C ratio as well as the CN/T ratio with those in the previous literature, therefore, shows that there is a text type effect on phrasal sophistication development. In fact, the academic text types in Barrot and Agdeppa, Casal and Lee, Lu, and Khushik and Huhta show an increase in phrasal sophistication whereas it remains similar in opinion texts.

Finally, the verb phrase per T-unit ratio (VP/T) seems to point to a slight non-significant decrease at CEFR B2 level in our data. Therefore, CEFR B2 learners may tend to employ fewer finite and non-finite verb phrases per T-unit than their CEFR B1 counterparts. This finding contradicts those by Barrot and Agdeppa, and Khushik and Huhta. Barrot and Agdeppa found a slight increase in this measure between A2 and B1.1 levels, but an important increase from CEFR B1.2 to B2 level. Khushik and Huhta also revealed an increase in the VP/T ratio as learners' proficiency level increased from CEFR A1 to A2 and B1 levels.

4.2 Global, Clausal and Phrasal Syntactic Complexity Measures in L1 Spanish EFL Opinion Writing at CEFR B1 and B2 Levels

The 14 measures/ratios in the five dimensions established by Lu can be classified into global, clausal and phrasal complexity measures.

Findings in the syntactic global measures (RQ1), that is, those which consider sentences and T-units, reveal that at CEFR B2 level students write shorter sentences and T-units with fewer clauses which are found, in turn, longer than that at CEFR B1 level. This finding indicates that learners produce more information-dense clauses as their proficiency level

increases, a pattern which has also been reported by Barrot and Agdeppa, Bulté and Housen, Casal and Lee, Lu, and Zhang and Yang.

In the case of clausal complexity measures (RQ2), that is, those which involve clauses, there is a statistically significant decrease in three out of the four ratios which involve subordination (i.e., C/T, CD/C and DC/T), but statistically significant increases in two out of the three ratios which measure the amount of coordination (CP/T and CP/C). CEFR B2 learners, therefore, are found to express their opinions reducing the degree of subordination (both at T-unit and clause levels) and increasing coordination. The only coordination measure which shows a non-significant decreasing tendency is T/S (T-units per sentence), which can be considered a global complexity measure. The decrease in this ratio, therefore, may be considered to be in line with the general decrease in the syntactic global complexity measures.

In terms of phrasal sophistication (RQ3), our findings reveal non-statistically significant differences in the ratios which involve complex nominals. Both VP/T and CN/T may suggest a slight decrease at CEFR B2 level. First, the VP/T result may point to the students' less frequent use of independent clauses within the same T-unit, in line with the decrease in the C/S ratio (clauses per sentence) also found in this study. Second, the lower CN/T ratio at B2 level may suggest a reduced density of complex nominals per T-unit. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution. Lu's framework does not measure phrasal complexity by means of fine-grained measures but rather through broader indices of phrasal sophistication. In fact, the consideration of ratios with complex nominals in the degree of phrasal sophistication measures in Lu entails syntactic units which go beyond the phrase boundary and extend to the clause.

Despite the differences in the text types analysed in the literature, namely the diverse variables employed to classify students' texts into different levels, the students' L1s and the varying number of measures in L2SCA employed in the different studies (Section 2), some similarities are found in the previous publications and this study. The decrease in two global measures related to sentence length (MLS and MLT, the former showing a statistically significant difference) resembles the tendency identified by Lu and Ran, who report that increases in proficiency do not necessarily lead to longer sentences but rather to more compact structures. The non-significant increase in mean length of clause (MLC) as proficiency advances may also align with observations by Bulté and Housen and Zhang and Yang. Likewise, the statistically significant

decrease in four clausal complexity measures (C/S, C/T, DC/C and DC/T) and the statistically significant increase in the use of coordination (CP/T and CP/C) from B1 to B2 to convey the information in their texts is in line with findings by Khushik and Huhta and Lu, who report that more proficient learners often rely on coordination more, as an alternative to subordination to express syntactic complexity.

The main differences encountered in this paper and the previous publications are found in subordination and complex nominals. First, the findings in this study show that learners at B2 level rely more on coordination rather than subordination. This tendency contradicts the results in the literature which report more frequent subordination as proficiency increases (Barrot and Agdeppa, Khushik and Huhta, Lu). Second, complex nominals remain largely the same in both levels in this study, even showing a slight decrease at B2 level. This result in our data contradicts previous research which shows an increase in the CN/C and CN/T ratios (Barrot and Agdeppa, Casal and Lee, Lu). It may be the case that complex nominals are more commonly used in argumentative essays than in opinion writing and, hence, their increase in argumentative writing in opposition to their stabilisation or even decrease in opinion writing.

5. Conclusions

All in all, our findings indicate that L1 Spanish EFL students' syntactic complexity at CEFR B2 level is characterised, when compared to their CEFR B1 level counterparts, by a slight decrease of global syntactic measures related to the length of the sentence, T-unit or number of independent clauses and finite and non-finite verb phrases in a sentence or T-unit (MLS, MLT, T/S and VP/T), but an increase in mean length clause. There is also a tendency for most clausal complexity measures to decrease, as B2-level opinion writing shows fewer clauses per sentence and per T-unit, including dependent clauses. These students' production shows, however, a tendency to complexify their language by means of clausal coordination more than their CEFR B1 counterparts. Phrasal sophistication, however, does not reveal important differences between both CEFR levels, contrary to the general tendency to increase noun phrase complexity in academic writing, especially argumentative writing, reported in the syntactic complexity literature.

This paper has described syntactic complexity development at two CEFR levels in L1 Spanish EFL opinion writing, an under-researched text

type. Although most research on syntactic complexity focuses on academic writing, especially argumentative writing (Barrot and Agdeppa; Khushik and Huhta; Lu; and Ran), because of its higher syntactic complexity (Biber et al. "Predicting Patterns of Grammatical Complexity"; Polio and Yoon), we believe that it is necessary to analyse syntactic complexity development in other text types. This is so because of three main reasons. First, the results obtained may help provide a comprehensive description of syntactic complexity in learner writing, including academic and non-academic text types. Second, opinion writing is frequently employed by language users all around the world. Third, there are a number of text types, such as opinion writing, which prove important for students in high-stakes language accreditation exams and, therefore, in their academic achievements. Learner corpus-based analyses of syntactic complexity in those text types are necessary to inform teaching and assessment practices which may help learners progress in the writing of such important text types.

Our study has employed the text CEFR level as the criterion for the students' proficiency level. Although most syntactic complexity studies have employed different criteria to classify texts into different levels, more studies nowadays make use of the CEFR levels (e.g., Barrot and Agdeppa; Díez-Bedmar, "NP complexity;" Khushik and Huhta; and Lu). The consideration of the well-established CEFR levels in CEFR-aligned learner corpora will, undoubtedly, facilitate the comparison of the results obtained in different studies so that a better description of syntactic complexity in learner writing may be provided.

The research presents a number of limitations which may be addressed in future research. First, the number of texts per CEFR level may be increased so that the results are more representative of learner writing at those levels. Efforts should be made to employ fully CEFR-aligned learner corpora which ensure that the texts analysed are at the established CEFR level. Second, the measures/ratios in L2SCA may be complemented with those in other automatic software, such as TAASC (Kyle), so that more fine-grained complexity measures are also considered and phrasal complexity in opinion writing can be more comprehensively analysed. Third, future research could also investigate both lexical complexity and syntactic complexity to explore the interaction between lexical and syntactic development and obtain a more comprehensive account of overall linguistic complexity in L1 Spanish EFL learners' writing. Fourth, another promising future line of research could use

longitudinal and contrastive interlanguage designs, including motivational and self-regulatory candidates' profiles, to examine whether stagnation in syntactic complexity reflects a developmental plateau in learner writing or whether similar patterns are also found in native-speaker writing. Fifth, future studies may also extend the present analysis to other non-academic genres, such as narrative writing, to investigate whether differences in syntactic complexity found in argumentative writing and opinion writing also emerge across other genres. Finally, more variables regarding the candidates who wrote the exams in the *FineDesc Learner Corpus* (i.e., their gender, whether or not they attend a preparation course before taking the exam or not, the status of English in their plurilingual repertoire, their L1s, etc.) may be considered to analyse the effect they may have on the syntactic complexity in their texts. Studying the effects that other variables, such as the students' L1 (Khushik and Huhta) and the communicative purpose of the task (see Polio and Yoon), may also prove important to achieve a comprehensive understanding of syntactic complexity development in learner writing.

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Blue and Green Music to the Fear: Centring (on) Periphery through Decolonial Translation

Música azul y verde contra el miedo: centrando (en) la periferia a través de la traducción descolonial

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Abstract: Disconcerting trends of decline in the use of the Galician language marked a record low ebb in 2024 and saw its degradation to a statistical minority in Galicia for the first time in its modern history. Nevertheless, this article asks not what we can do for Galician, but what Galician can and does do for other languages and for the wider, alternative ecosystem of peripheral epistemology. Specifically, it explores the translational interaction between Galician and Irish English as a source of sustainable, renewable energy for both. The analysis focuses on the poetry collection *Diario de Crosses Green* by Martín Veiga and its translation into English by the Irish poet and translator Keith Payne.
Keywords: decolonial translation; globalization; periphery; Martín Veiga; Keith Payne.
Summary: Introduction. Cosmopolitanism from the margins. Decolonial translation. Centring (on) periphery. Hits and misses. Learning to read and reading to learn. The power of naming. Blue and green music to the fear. Conclusions.

Resumen: El preocupante declive en el uso del gallego marcó un mínimo histórico en el año 2024 cuando por primera vez en su historia moderna el idioma se convirtió en una minoría estadística en Galicia. Sin embargo, este artículo no se pregunta qué podemos hacer por el gallego, sino qué puede hacer el gallego por otras lenguas y por un ecosistema alternativo más amplio basado en la epistemología periférica. Con este propósito, explora la interacción traductora entre el gallego y el inglés irlandés como fuente de energía sostenible y renovable para ambos. El análisis se centra en el poemario *Diario de Crosses Green* de Martín Veiga (2016) y su traducción al inglés del poeta y traductor irlandés Keith Payne (2018).
Palabras clave: traducción descolonial; globalización; periferia; Martín Veiga; Keith Payne.

Sumario: Introducción. Cosmopolitismo desde los márgenes. Traducción descolonial. Centrando (en) la periferia. Aciertos y oportunidades perdidas. Aprender a leer y leer para aprender. El poder de nombrar. Música azul y verde contra el miedo. Conclusión.

any center can be the center of the globe as long as we can see the real connections that bind us. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2016)

INTRODUCTION

Disconcerting trends of decline in the use of the Galician language marked a record low ebb in 2024 and saw its degradation to a statistical minority in Galicia for the first time in its modern history (IGE). Nevertheless, this article asks not what we can do for Galician, but what Galician can and does do for other languages and for the wider, alternative ecosystem of peripheral epistemology. Specifically, it explores the translational interaction between Galician and the English spoken at the transcolonial margins of Europe—Irish and Hiberno English[1]—as a source of sustainable, renewable energy for both.

A more obvious approach would be to assess the empowering effect of translation from Galician into more dominant languages, in terms of increasing international awareness of Galician and its appeal to members of other linguistic systems (Jones 7). However, the unequal power relations implicit in such a centre-periphery perspective undermine the putative benefits of increased visibility, instrumentalizing translation as a tool of modern imperialism (Van Elteren). Instead, the analysis investigates alternative perspectives such as "peripheral wisdom" (Fernández), "positive marginality" (Parker), "decolonial cosmopolitanism" (Mignolo, "Border Thinking"), and "globalectics" (Ngũgĩ, "Globalectics") to advocate for a dynamic of *cosmopolitanism from the periphery through translation* as a way of expanding the repertoire, robustness, and self-reputation of peripheral cultures and linguistic systems. The aim is both to reclaim the English of Ireland as the postcolonial resource it has been since its inception (Cambria), and to flip the narrative of regret and despair over the shortcomings and sustainability of Galician as a linguistic culture. This article thus tells a different story of

[1] On the difference between Irish English and Hiberno English, see Christiansen (63). This article uses the term "Irish English" to reflect translator Keith Payne's less marked, yet distinctly Irish idiom.

Galician and other minoritized languages, as driving forces for innovation and reconnection within the co-peripheral linguistic cultures with which they come into contact through translation.

Despite obvious historical, political, and linguistic differences, Ireland and Galicia shared comparable socio-economic and cultural conditions well into the later twentieth century, including predominantly rural economic structures, widespread poverty, and affective and intellectual oppression by a traditionalist Catholic church.[2] The colonial status of both has been questioned on the basis of their geographical embeddedness in Western Europe, historical lack of sympathy with Indigenous struggles further afield, and frequently enthusiastic contribution to the colonial enterprise (Cleary 20–21). However, as Joe Cleary explains, although countries like Ireland and Galicia "belonged to the same geo-cultural locale, the same orbit of capital, as the major European imperial powers, [they were] integrated into that orbit in a very different way to [their] European neighbours" (23). Both cultures may, therefore, be considered not just postcolonial but transcolonial, in terms of their shared experience of domination, disenfranchisement, and peripheralization.[3] In a speech to the Irish parliament in 1999, the then president Mary McAleese quoted historian Luke Gibbons's (3) famous dictum that "Today's Ireland is a first world country but with a third world memory, a memory to keep us humble, to remind us of the fragility of it all." As argued by Enrique Dussel, the historical exclusion of countries like Ireland and Galicia from the structures and processes of power grants them an "alterity" (42) of experience, perspective, and understanding that positions and capacitates them to move beyond "the binary oppositions dear to the nationalist and imperialist enterprise" (Said xxvii) and resist the "new and worrying boundedness" of globalization (Fernández 137).[4] The historically rooted

[2] Among the extensive literature in this area, see, for example: Earner-Byrne (2017) on the Catholic poor in Ireland; Lee (1989) on the prelude to and first sixty years of independence; Ferriter (2009) on conservative official morality in modern Ireland; Beiras (1972) on economic underdevelopment in Galicia; and Rodríguez-Lago (2004) on the Catholic church in Galicia during the Franco dictatorship.

[3] On the emergence of postcolonial studies in Ireland in the 1980s and the consideration of Ireland as a postcolonial entity, see also Gibbons (1996). On the institutionalized colonial dependence of Galicia within the Spanish state and its consequences, see Beiras (1972) and Carballal (2019).

[4] Ireland's resumption of the EU presidency in July 2026 (its eighth since 1975) might seem to contradict this notion of "exclusion" from the structures of power. However, it is important to bear in mind that while Ireland is structurally inside the EU, it is not part of

sense of vulnerability, solidarity, and non-sovereignty associated with the colonial experience seems not only timely but urgent as a corrective to the "radical forgetfulness" of corporatized transnationality, and the corporatist slide in Irish life and politics post-2008 in particular (Negra and McIntyre 60–61). This study explores how alterity in the production and translation of literature may be turned to empowering, regenerative effect as a form of counter-discourse and the basis for cross-peripheral collaboration.

While this study is informed by decolonial and postcolonial theory, it is also grounded in translation studies, particularly in work on poetry translation and the politics of representation. Following Lawrence Venuti's distinction between domestication and foreignization, translation is understood here not as a neutral transfer but as an ethically and aesthetically charged practice that negotiates cultural difference through degrees of visibility and resistance. Michael Cronin's notion of "ecotranslation" and his emphasis on linguistic diversity further frame translation as a site of cultural and ecological sustainability, especially in the context of minoritized languages. Building, finally, on Maria Tymoczko's postcolonial approach, the analysis reads translation in terms of asymmetrical cultural relations of repression and resistance.

Francis Jones argues that the "multi-layered content and complex language" (9) involved in poetry translation make it a particularly fruitful site of analysis of intercultural relations, agents, networks, and habitus. The ideological component of translation is thus especially acute in the case of poetry owing to its "greater cultural complexity and cultural involvement" (Tymoczko, *Translation* 30) and the "messy richness" (Jones 17) of "personal, interpersonal and poetic action within a complex real-life context" (24). If poetry translation processes depend on the "motives, life stories and personae of their main actors" (24), decolonial translation interrogates those motives, deepens and dilates the life stories involved, and draws attention to the shifting, permeable boundaries of self. Decolonial translation intention aligns closely with Douglas Robinson's analysis of translation as "embodied dialogue," "cross-cultural conversation," and "felt connections" that "can restore us to ourselves—to our full humanity" (258). This humanizing, experiential focus on somatic response and the translator's ability to "project [themselves] imaginatively

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the politically and epistemically constitutive centre, which has been linked to the "ideologies and assumptions that sustained the practice of colonialism" (Eklund 3; see also Hansen and Jonsson).

into the other's body" (17) reflects the situated, memoried hereness of decolonial translation against the abstractions and false universals of globalization.

The analysis in this article focuses on the poetry collection *Diario de Crosses Green* by Martín Veiga and its translation into English by the Irish poet and translator Keith Payne. Veiga's work represents a dialogue between the lived, sedimented Galician tradition of the poet and his perceptions and experiences of his adopted Irish city, Cork. For its part, Payne's translation allows the English reader to inhabit this (counter-)Anglophone world through the eyes and expression of a Galician other. My purpose is not to review Payne's translation or to comment on the quality of the work per se. Payne is an eclectic and grateful reader, a lively and sensitive writer, and an active observer and knower of people, and *Crosses Green* is, moreover, the result of a close collaboration with Veiga and approved by him. What I do propose is to interrogate the work from the point of view of decolonial translation, understood as a source of enrichment not only for the translated work but, more enduringly, for the target Irish English language itself.

1. Cosmopolitanism from the Margins

The destructive reality of globalization is highlighted by George Ritzer in his critique of what he terms "the globalization of nothing:" the progressive removal of distinctive, substantive content from the elements that fill and define our existence "so that they can be marketed in a different time or place" (196). Arundhati Roy, meanwhile, has portrayed globalization as "a light which shines brighter and brighter on a few people and the rest are in darkness, wiped out. They simply can't be seen. Once you get used to not seeing something, then, slowly, it's no longer possible to see it" (123). As well as warning of the inequalities inherent in the phenomenon, her metaphor also draws attention to its progressive normalization of absence and indifference. While Bronislaw Szerszynski and John Urry (465) have written optimistically about the potential of global media and mobility to facilitate post-nationalist encounter and exchange through sport, art, travel, and entertainment, such utopianism seems overstated in the face of globalization's fundamentally Western, capitalist connotations (Mignolo, "Border Thinking" 102–04).

Cosmopolitanism has been defined as "an ethical, political, and moral philosophy . . . with rich implications for how people view the world, one

another, and themselves" (Warf iii). In its liberal form, it denotes a rootless universalism. Yet this "banal cosmopolitanism" is a strictly top-down model: "It is possible with enough money to 'eat the world'" (Beck 260). What is more,

> recent world history seems to dictate that surviving, let alone benefiting from, these new civilizational forces [global free trade and financialization, corporate deterritorialization and transnationalized production, globalized labour use, competition and class conflicts, supranationally coerced globalized policy consulting and formulation, internet communication and cyberspace, globally orchestrated bioscientific manipulation of life forms, global risks of all kinds, transnational demographic realignments, cosmopolitanized arts and entertainments, and globally financed and managed regional wars] requires every nation to actively internalize them and one another. (Beck 261)

The theoretically cosmopolitan worldview is thus rooted in the West, reflects the perspective of the rich, invisibilises local cultural influence and experience, and assumes a more systematically interconnected world than is the reality for the vast majority of people on the planet (Calhoun, quoted in Beck 268).

Against this fallacious cosmopolitanism of asymmetrical dialogue between power centre and periphery, numerous scholars have centred their focus on the margins in search of a more truly, non-coercive global perspective. Chris Rumford and Anthony Cooper (280) highlight the cosmopolitan potential of borderlands as a place where binary distinctions blur and the illusion of permanence is exposed. James W. Fernández contrasts the wilfully blinkered, self-serving vision of the centre with what he refers to as the "wisdom" of the periphery, a clear-sightedness born of the necessarily open, comparative, and self-questioning nature of life beyond (that is, excluded from) the structures, processes, and obsessions of power. The periphery's exteriority makes it a privileged site for observing and understanding "what is otherwise obscured" (Parker 10): the multiplicity of silenced subaltern histories, the reality and rich offerings of cultural plurality and exchange, and the centre's material dependence on and exploitation of the other (Baban 382, 384).

Another alternative to cosmopolitan projects which "have failed to escape the ideological frame imposed by global designs" (Mignolo, "Cosmo-polis" 724) is Walter Mignolo's theory of "decolonial

cosmopolitanism," or "critical cosmopolitanism from the exteriority of modernity (that is, coloniality)." This critical cosmopolitanism problematizes the logic of inclusion that "presupposes that the agency that establishes the inclusion is itself beyond inclusion" (736) and calls for silenced, marginalized voices to participate fully in the global conversation—not "be participated" (743). Similarly, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o ("Globalectics" 8) recommends a "globalectics" that "embraces wholeness, interconnectedness, equality of potentiality of parts, tension and motion . . . a way of thinking and relating to the world, particularly in the era of globalism and globalisation," and the fundamental need to move the centre "from its assumed location in the West to a multiplicity of spheres in all the cultures of the world" ("Moving" xiv). Critical, decolonial cosmopolitanism from the colonial margins, therefore, rejects the hierarchical distinction between cultures, languages, experiences, and perspectives, and centralized control and management of knowledge, proposing in their place a paradigm of dialogue, mutuality, and "diversality" (Mignolo, "Cosmo-polis" 743).

2. DECOLONIAL TRANSLATION

Traditionally, translation has been considered an instrument of colonization (Tymoczko, *Translation*). In a colonial context, negotiation between cultures is always driven by the interests of imperial control, and translation generally reflects the power relationship between source and target cultures. Translation is never innocent, therefore, but the result of deliberate decision-making processes (such as source text selection and translation strategies) that involve issues of power and ideology (Vidal Claramonte 82; 87). This colonial paradigm persists in the era of neo-imperial globalization, where the ideal of cosmopolitanism as a form of "global belonging" and encounter with diverse others (Szerszynski and Urry 465) is belied by the ideologically manipulated dominance of supposedly universal Western, capitalist models and values.[5] However, just as cosmopolitanism may be decolonially reimagined as a regenerative

[5] Notions of prestige, reputation, and "international readers" (Tymoczko "Post-colonial Writing" 29) are themselves conditioned by post-imperial, Western-globalized standards. The admission of peripheral literatures into this canon (e.g.: Irish Nobel and Booker prize winners) does not negate their emergence from and continued negotiation with conditions of historical marginality (see, for example, Holmes on "gatekeeper and tastemaker" literary prizes; and Huggan on "prizing otherness").

locus of interaction between dissenting communities at the margins (Mignolo, "Border Thinking"), so translation within that space may be reclaimed by peripheral cultures as a source of epistemic healing and justice (Yohannes).

Translational interaction at the periphery is an opportunity to think, see, and create from a radical perspective and to speak with the shared counter-language of the margins. The permeable nature of the periphery, where borders fade and the narrow classifications of centralist modernity are diluted, makes them a "space of refusal, where one can say no to the coloniser, no to the downpressor" (bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin" 21). Decolonial translation at the periphery, and especially between peripheral cultures, thus becomes an act of linguistic affirmation and resistance.

In contrast to the dominant standard of assimilationist fluency observed in major European languages (Venuti, "Scandals" 12) and the "narcissism" of seeking to recognize one's own culture in the translated cultural other (Venuti, "Invisibility" 12), decolonial translation seeks to preserve and learn from the strangeness of the source text. In a short essay on "the virtues of not understanding," James Boyd White espouses the creative potential of incomplete comprehension as "a spur to investigation, learning, invention" (335) and even cautions against complete transparency as the end of the spectrum where "one finds no life at all, but a kind of death of mind and self" (336). In the same way, bell hooks ("Place of Struggle" 299) encouraged her students "to think of the moment of not understanding what someone says as a space to learn." Truly cosmopolitan translation does not attempt to obscure its cross-cultural dimension or domesticate cultural difference (Sun 92; 105). It implies a non-hierarchical openness to the other and a willingness to question and expand our notion of self through engagement with the unknown and the possibly unknowable (Bielsa 169–70).

3. Centring (on) the Periphery

The travel writer and documentary maker Manchán Magan (209) describes the Irish as "members of a unified cultural archipelago of coastal people who have more in common with each other than with the centralized powers that control them."[6] As bilingual bicultures (Wierzbicka 8) on the

[6] On the "matrix of overlapping identities and practices," "debatable" boundaries, and the problematization of margin/centre relations, see also Norquay and Smyth.

postcolonial margins of Europe, Galicia and Ireland understand innately the existence of other referential worlds.[7] In decolonial terms, Keith Payne may thus be said to be translating peripheral self into peripheral self, local reality into local reality, differently lived history into differently lived history, in a comparable way to how the Irish translating Irish into English in the twentieth century "translated themselves into themselves . . . moving through translation toward decolonization" (Tymoczko *Translation*, 293).

My aim in the rest of this analysis is to illustrate how contact and interaction through translation can enhance the creative energy of the receiving culture, both through the entry of new air from the other language, and through the reconnection with and penetration into self that it provokes. I argue that this process of revitalization and enrichment is freest and most fertile when the source and target linguistic cultures—here, Galician and Anglo-Irish—do not find themselves in "radically different positions in the grid of cultural power" (Tymoczko *Translation*, 26), but rather share a peripheral, postcolonial status and experience. In the context of a centralizing and homogenizing globalization in which local singularity is reduced, emptied, and standardized (Ritzer 195), I contend that Ireland has much to gain from the particularizing, peripheral wisdom of Martín Veiga: to remember and rediscover the verbal and experiential richness of its culture, and the reason for that distinctly Irish form of English that was conceived from the beginning as a counter-language "beyond the boundaries of conquest and domination" (bell hooks, "Place of Struggle" 297).

Derek Attridge writes of poetry as "a social art through and through:" "We may experience poems alone, but we do so as members of a community" ("The Event of a Poem" 196). Like him, I draw on my own reading of the poems when describing the reader's response (explicitly so in Section 5), yet equally assume that "a reader who is responding fully to a literary work lives through it and sometimes lives with it" ("Context, Idioculture, Invention" 696). Mindful of this reader, Jean Boase-Beier

[7] A full analysis of the current state of the Irish language lies beyond the scope of this article. However, it is pertinent to observe that Ireland might be more properly described as "post-bilingual," as used by Hébert in her analysis of minoritized languages in Canada. Though not generally used by sociolinguists, the term does reflect the socially inactive state of Irish in Ireland today, while acknowledging its continuing influence on Irish English as a substrate (Filppula). Nevertheless, a cautionary note against such pessimism is also advisable, in view of recent findings of growing interest in and regard for the use of Irish, especially among younger cohorts (Údarás na Gaeltachta).

underlines the physicality of language as a challenge for translation, quoting Richard Bradford's claim that "the material substance of the sign is never fully distinguished from its signifying properties" (*Style* 13), and emphasizes the embodied nature of meaning: poetic rhythm harnesses "the energies of the body" and imagination is "crucially dependent on the way human beings exist in the world" (*Critical Introduction* 98–99). The analysis that follows foregrounds these embodied affective and experiential dimensions of reading translated poetry, together with the disruptive potential of decolonial translation as a way of "glimpsing possibilities foreclosed by the frameworks that govern daily living" (Attridge, "Once More" 333).

4. HITS AND MISSES

In moving from Galician to English, especially in poetic language, the challenge is to recreate the images, textures, tonalities, and silences of the original in the target poem in a way that is meaningful to English-speaking readers but that maintains the different perspective that the language and linguistic context of Galician give to Veiga's writing (Jones 36).[8] English has a richer vocalic system than Galician, for example, but it is also characterized by a strong tendency towards vowel reduction and consonantal endings. Matching Veiga's free lyricism, Payne adapts the meter and line length to create a more natural reading and recital rhythm for his English version, and echoes, but does not copy, the alliterations, which are often found internally, and which provide unity and fluidity in the original.

Already in the first poem of the volume, "Anatomía das augas / The Anatomy of Water," the translation evinces Payne's ability to look and listen for what is not written, and in this way to represent Veiga's thought process and perception in a more complete way for the English reader. Always attentive to the image and experience behind the word and its sequence within the poem, Payne gives priority to the feeling and flavour of the poem, just as the reader receives it in Galician. The "*equilibrio incerto*" is thus not "uncertain" but "uneasy." The "*correntes nerviosas*" are not "nervous" but "running," like the untrammelled flow of the river. The wounds "*a gurgullaren . . . contra os muros da revolta*" become "*old*

[8] For a comprehensive list of the intrinsic-form and stylistic features found in poetry and translated at the translator's discretion, see Jones (30–31).

wounds," because the churn and stir of the river against its banks is the work of many lifetimes and generations of witnesses.

A atalaia do balcón semella un pasadoiro,
un pasal para cruzar ou a torre con carriza
desde a que gardo un equilibrio incerto
na mensura destas horas augacentas
que definen o meu tempo, cada intre
tan preciso do meu tempo: unha xeira
que tremece, un latexo que se vai
esvaecendo polas correntes nerviosas
a gurgullaren feridas contra os muros
da revolta, ese íntimo recanto
onde o río cobreguea, entre a antiga
fábrica e os casetos vellos, repintados,
onde constrúen botes, ao pé da gris
lameira do aparcadoiro.

This balcony, this lookout is a footbridge,
a moss-faced tower, a stepping-stone
where I hold tight to an uneasy balance
that's the measure of my time in these
soaked hours, every second
of my time: a trembling shift,
a heartbeat that drifts and is washed
away with the running current
as it purls the old wounds round the walls
of the riverbend, this snug reach
where the river writhes by the tired brewery
and the old, repainted boat sheds
that sage by the drab dust
of the car park. (6–7)

In "A luz dos días / The Light of Day," alliteration is used to reinforce or replace the effect created by a verb, noun or image that is more complete in the original than its English equivalent would be. In the case of images that are particularly textured or dynamic in Galician, for example, such as *friaxe*, *lousa*, *remuíño*, *esparexer* or *ronsel*, Payne, variously, adds an adjective to match the second noun ("stinging cold of the beehuts"); reinforces the modifying adjective by compounding alliteratively with the noun ("rain-bright roof slates"); expands the subject noun phrase to

complement the alliteration with a watery homograph ("a spray of flowers floats by on the water"); alliterates internally and externally to recreate the soft, spreading dispersal evoked by the slow sibilance of the original ("light of day dissolves"); and repurposes the alliteration in Veiga's Galician to reinforce the sense of liquid motion ("the wake of the boat weeps through the riverbend").

> Mentres o mundo se esfarela derredor
> arden lonxe as lumaradas do pasado,
> afúndense as lembranzas dos perdidos
> momentos que nunca volverán,
> da friaxe concentrada en alvarizas
> coma nun poema de Uxío Novoneyra.
> . . .
> Mentres en Crosses Green se esparexe a luz dos días,
> mentres o ronsel das barcas bagulla na revolta
> e na rampla respiran cercetas apencadas
> tremeloce o sol contra o metal das chemineas,
> aroman as estancias torradas pradarías, aroman
> o amor funéreos crisantemos, gris incensario de nardos.
>
> While the world around crumbles
> the lumber of the past burns in the distance,
> memories of lost moments are drowned
> and will never surface,
> as the stinging cold of the beehuts
> in Uxío Novoneyra's poems.
> . . .
> While in Crosses Green the light of day dissolves
> as the wake of the boats weeps through the riverbend,
> the mottled teal rests on the slipway
> and the sun shudders against the iron chimneys,
> rooms are perfumed from roasted prairies, love
> perfumed by funeral chrysanthemums, the grey incense of tuberose. (67–68)

On a few rare occasions, however, Payne appears to under-exploit opportunities for enrichment that might be achieved through a more explicitly decolonial intention and ambition. Ease of recognition may produce a more immediate effect but, as Boase-Beier warns, familiarization in translation risks losing the deeper, more lasting effects of the source text since "[its] meaning does not have to be worked out"

(*Critical Introduction* 103). A more decolonial translation in Payne's case would dare to make the reader uncomfortable with an English they may not realize they understand, and therefore push them, in the words of Boyd White, to "investigate, learn, and invent" (335). Payne himself has highlighted the importance of "maintaining the ambiguity of the original," though only up to a point; the translation should not "make it seem like the translator hasn't understood the text or . . . make it even more confusing for the person who's going to read it" (Palacios and Payne 262). Nevertheless, it seems a more defamiliarizing approach that intentionally highlights the uniqueness of the Galician experience and voice would force and also reward the reader to see more, feel more, think more by keeping alive their awareness of difference (Boase-Beier, *Style* 69).

One example of this occurs in relation to Veiga's use of the words "*cantiga*" and "*retrouso*" in the poem "Anatomía das augas / The Anatomy of Water." Though these may seem like minor details, both concepts are so rooted and resonant in Galician culture and memory that the denudation of the verses in English via the decontextualized forms of "run-through" and "chorus" seem like an amputation.[9] The words' very Galician particularity complicates their translation, of course, but cross-linguistic complications are no obstacle for Payne. In this instance, he simply chooses not to delve into the language or particularity of Irish culture in search of an equivalent experiential weight that would highlight its non-generic nature, or to conserve the word in its original form and thus invite the reader to expand their conceptual repertoire through open-minded encounter with a co-peripheral other of culturally equal standing. The loss is not so much in the words that have not been sought, but in the union that they represent between the unique life of a people and its environment. You don't have to understand exactly what a *cantiga* is or how the *retrouso* is sung, you just have to feel it—or have the chance to learn how to.

Other rare examples include the under-translation of Veiga's "*mar dos vellos celtas*" in the poem "Río arriba / Upriver" (144–45) as the more geographically situated "old Celtic Sea," a decision which blanches the original of the "old Celts" of Europe's Atlantic fringes—Amergin, Mil, Breogán—and the hoary seafarers and fishermen that followed and follow them still (the "Atlantic kin" elegized elsewhere in the volume; 56–57). In "Premio de consolación / Consolation Prize" (130–31), Payne appears to

[9] See Wierzbicka on the importance of "key words" as "focal points around which entire cultural domains are organized" (16).

misinterpret the verb tense used in the original ("*estrela que do alto caeu atrás dos muros . . . máis que as fitas que a fortuna nos deixou*"), translating it as a Spanish simple past tense instead of the more likely present perfect: "a star that fell behind the walls . . . more than the ribbons that fortune left us." Galician does not contain compound tenses (except by influence from Spanish and Portuguese; Squartini and Bertinetto 410) but the perfect aspect may be inferred from the context. Here, almost exceptionally, Payne's translation interrupts the boundless immediacy of the scene by opting for the simple past. This mildly Americanised touch is also perceived in the repeated use of "kids" for Galician "*nenos*," "*cativos*," and "*crianzas*," and in the slightly jarring "back yards" (for "*xardíns traseiros*") in "Milagre de luz / The Miracle of Light" (34–35).

Overwhelmingly, however, the effect of Payne's translation is the opposite: richly local, situated, and situating. In "Dunmore Head" (140–43), Payne even goes so far as to incorporate in his English translation the Galician word "castro," in reference to the pre-Roman fortified settlement typical in Northern Spain and associated with the region's Celtic past, where Veiga himself writes of "*os confíns circulares*." In the same poem, Payne's translation is rich in precise terms for features of the Dunmore Head landscape: whirlpools, drumlins, blowholes, bottlenose dolphins, and the "ria," quintessential landmark of the Galician mindscape yet often overlooked by the more peninsularly focused Irish perspective. Notes of Irish and Hiberno English complete his careful rendering of Veiga's living portrait of the land he has adopted as his own. In "Herba na estrada / Grass on the Road" (126–29), Payne sends the reader along "abandoned boreens" ("*polas pistas máis deixadas*"), and the Irish voice is similarly strong is phrases such as "sure what of it" (43), "right enough" (91), and even "the poor dead American monkey" (91), loaded with the historically ambivalent attitude towards the United States of affection and amused distance.[10]

[10] See, for example, depictions of Americans and America in the plays of Brian Friel and Tom Murphy, or novels by Roddy Doyle, Maeve Binchy, and Paul Howard.

5. Learning to Read and Reading to Learn

The poem "A luz dos días / The Light of Day" is an example of how translation can transform the reader's understanding and reaction.[11] As a bilingual reader, I initially experienced a stronger affective response to Payne's translation than to the Galician original. I accounted for this by reasoning that, as English is my native language, Payne's words reached me in a stronger and deeper way because the imaginative and emotional path to their object was more direct. After repeated readings of both together, however, I discovered that Veiga's words now entered and connected with me in the same way. What is of particular interest in this poem, therefore, is the way in which Payne's translation allows non-Galician speakers to connect with the delicate clarity of Veiga's portrayal of an Irish community in mourning, while also enabling access to bilingual readers to an augmented experience of the original in all of its signifying energy. The strength of the portrait lies in Veiga's eye, ear, skin, and soul for detail, yet also in his status as an other who comes to a community from outside and is filled with the sensations and feelings of a people he has met and understood. Payne's translation is the channel that enables readers who are not Galician and may not understand Galician to know themselves through Veiga's other's eyes.

As well as learning to read, inter-periphery translation can also be considered a decolonial act of reading to learn. The parallels with the literacy methodology of that name, "Reading to Learn" (R2L), developed by David Rose and J. R. Martin at the Sydney School at the start of the twentieth century, explain well the decolonial potential of translation between peripheral language cultures. Like translation, R2L is a "scaffolded" (Rose) process involving different stages of reading, comprehension, and reformulation. Detailed reading of the model text (source text, in the case of translation) is designed to increase metalinguistic awareness of features such as genre, tenor, mode, and lexicogrammatical choices, and track how meaning is made in the model text and the linguistic resources used to do so. The crucial final step in Rose and Martin's pedagogy is the rewriting stage. It is here that "appropriation" and integration of resources from the model (or "mentor")

[11] Here I draw on my own experience of the poem as a situated interpretive response to reflect on how translators mediate reader affect through their "*lectécritures*" of the original poem's "interpretive potentials" (Jones 35).

text takes place (Barbeiro 184), including "foreign discursive registers" and "unfamiliar communicative strategies," yet also "opportunities for original creation" (Costa et al. 112). For the translator, as for the pupil, appropriations may include unusual word order, strategic use of punctuation, alliteration, enumeration, and repetition (Costa et al. 157–73).

When translating with decolonial intention, the question of what to do with those appropriations becomes essential. Should the translator always seek "TL-appropriate" patterns and metaphors that allow the reader to recognize themselves more readily in the translation? Or should translation be an opportunity not only to access the conceptual world of the translated other but to expand and enrich that of the target by challenging its linguistic, ontological, and epistemological expectations? The act of translation and reading translation becomes a learning experience when it stretches the reader's worldview with new situated metaphors, alerts them to the pragmatics and personality of idiom, formula, and rhythm, and brings home to them the socio-political dimensions of standard language, dialect, rupture, and reclamation.

6. The Power of Naming

Another very salutary and highly decolonizing behaviour that Veiga's poetry encourages is the act of calling things by their names. Veiga does not reduce, empty, standardize, or universalize the world around him. On the contrary, he continually fills it with specific plants, animals, movements, and sensations that bind and embody us.

Pamela Petro speaks of the "weightlessness" of the English speaker, who travels the world without obstacles but also without knowing how to distinguish between origin and destination; all places become one (166). Mark Abley describes global English as a supermarket: "convenient, huge, hard to avoid, superficially friendly, and devouring all rivals in its eagerness to expand" (56). Michael Cronin, moreover, warns that when a language loses the words to describe specific aspects of its landscape, its speakers risk losing the ability to see the world around them (141). In this sense, Robert Macfarlane denounces that

> The nuances observed by specialized vocabularies are evaporating from common usage, burnt off by capital, apathy and urbanization. The terrain beyond the city fringe has become progressively more understood in terms

> of large generic units ("field," "hill," "valley," "wood"). It has become a blandscape. (23)

Magan describes the words of a people as "wedges that prise back the surface layer of thought and feeling, revealing a deeper truth" (185). Without those words, there comes a time when we can no longer access such truths or the memory of our interrelation with the environment on which they were founded. We lose the "habitat of time," that vision of reality as something lasting, interactive, and divergent, with varying interests and abilities (Bacon). In the neoliberal Ireland of the twenty-first century, the country's language is in danger of becoming increasingly global and less Hiberno, and thereby less capable and even incapable of perceiving the diversity of the world and the diverse ways of living in it (Hickey 172–73). Decolonial translation from co-peripheries like Galicia is a way to halt and reverse that process by forcing readers to engage in the linguistic work of critical, creative reconnection with the real density of their experience.

7. Blue and Green Music to the Fear

The final example in this analysis is the poem "Música azul contra o medo / Blue Music to the Fear," but I wish to focus only on Payne's translation of the title: "Blue Music to the Fear." The question is obvious: why not "Blue Music *against* the Fear"? The direct translation of the preposition would have been easier and still logical yet instead he opts for this peculiar "Blue Music *to* the Fear." Why? Because Payne does not settle for the part, knowing he can reach the whole. Because he attempts to gather within himself the full splay and spectrum of ideas and intentions of Veiga's language, the "wealth of potential meaning in the source text, its signifying energy" (Reynolds 135). And because he knows and feels, like Veiga, that Ireland is not just a tourist idyll or the European Union's best-behaved pupil. Ireland is also, and has been since Joyce's time and before, that sow that eats her own brood: a cannibal of its own citizens that bows to the banks and multinational corporations, and allows its language and art to languish (Kilroy). In this context, the heroes are the great small men and women who have no other weapon than their word or brush—or, to use a phrase by the Galician writer Manuel Rivas, "the most extraordinary technology ever invented: that slight and simple inclination to listen to people." The listeners cited in "Blue Music"—Seán Ó Riada, TP Flanagan,

Pearse Hutchinson—are the misfits of society who fight against the sterile fear deliberately fostered in today's capitalist society.

The phrase that Payne uses for his translation (in my interpretation at least) may be read in the sporting sense of "to take the game/fight *to*" (the other team/the other boxer). It refers to a situation in which the opponent is stronger and a defensive retaining wall will not serve, because no matter how hard and well you defend, after sixty minutes or four rounds, the other side will break through and destroy you with four tries or a flurry of hooks and uppercuts. The only real defence possible, the only chance to parry defeat and prevail, is to attack: to set the pace and the terms of the confrontation yourself. Payne does not translate the preposition: he translates the poem's message of hope and non-violent strength; he translates Veiga's faith in the power of art, beauty, and truth.

In this way, the poem "Blue Music to the Fear" subverts the power dynamic warned of by bell hooks ("Choosing the Margin" 16) when she observed how "[o]ften when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate. *Their presence changes the nature and direction of our words*" (my emphasis). Veiga places his peripheral counter-discourse at the centre and says "let *they* be the ones to respond, let *ours* be the presence to change *their* words." He says "no to the coloniser, no to the downpressor" (bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin" 21), and Payne rallies his resistance into English.

CONCLUSIONS

Martín Veiga is a walker of the world in the Ingoldian sense: a wayfarer, for whom earth, sky, and light are regions of our human body (Ingold, S122). When he invokes his environment, it is never "merely for the purposes of allowing the body to have something material to interact with" (S123). Veiga walks, knowing as he goes and growing knowledge along his path (S133–34). His focus on the experiential details of human engagement with the world draws attention to the tendency of globalized modernity to flatten and hollow out meaningful local realms of experience, and guide them towards putatively universal interests and values (Hornborg 256).

Cultural resilience and creativity require habits of mutualism, cooperation, dialogue, and adaptability, and translation between peripheries is an ideal means of fostering them. Translation at the minoritized margins of global culture challenges the colonial narrative of

a single legitimate centre and thwarts the homogenizing pretensions of neo-imperial capitalism. It reconnects with the particularizing perspective of marginal embodied experience and perception across linguistic boundaries, and, in doing so, resists that universality that attempts to turn its surroundings to itself (Bourdin 65). Against the standardizing, exclusionary ambitions of global neoliberal capitalism, cosmopolitanism from the margins exposes the inadequacy of any one worldview, representing instead an ecosystem of sustainable, transcultural development and exchange across mental and physical borders.

Language is the voice of a people who have lived history in a different way. Magan cautioned of Irish that "when we cull descriptive terms for the world around us we narrow our ability to perceive its diversity" (331). Nearly three decades earlier, Xosé Graña Núñez, likewise, warned of the loss of locally generated lexicon in the Galician language and of the risk of Galician dictionaries becoming "ghost treatises" (58). Veiga's language is defiantly rich and living. Inscribed with the Galician story of marginalization and minoritisation, it contains an enduring and evolving sense of his surroundings, wherever he may be. By helping to share that with other peripheral and postcolonial cultures, translation feeds and inspires the target language, never more so than in the moments of incomplete understanding when the target is pushed more deeply into itself and more expansively beyond itself in search of words that will mean.

Decolonial translation challenges assumptions of cultural legitimacy and dependency, and spurs us to question our rhetorical formations and our positioning in relation to "others" (Graham 42). In learning to read and reading to learn decolonially, we learn to ask "how to write (produce) without being inscribed (reproduced) in the dominant white structure and how to write without reinscribing and reproducing what we rebel against" (Anzaldúa 7–8). Galician to Irish and Hiberno English may be an aim-small-miss-small step, but it is a surefooted one towards greater epistemic reimagination and justice.

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Crossing Borders: Between Juba and Portland in Terry Farish's *The Good Braider*

Cruzando fronteras: entre Juba y Portland en *The Good Braider* de Terry Farish

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Abstract: Terry Farish's *The Good Braider* (2012) explores the migration of a Sudanese adolescent, Viola, and the influence of her migration on her identity. Set during the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005), the novel examines how displacement—spatial, cultural and temporal—shapes identity through cultural displacement. Drawing on Marc Augé's notion of "non-places" (1997), refugee camps and spaces of transit become central to Viola's fragmented belonging. Her braids symbolise the weaving of gendered, racialised and diasporic identities. The tension with her mother, Thereza, reveals the intergenerational impact of forced migration. Ultimately, Farish's narrative redefines refugee literature by foregrounding the emotional and structural dimensions of uprootedness.
Keywords: Identity; forced migration; diaspora; refugee camp; Terry Farish.
Summary: Introduction: *The Good Braider* and Refugee Literature. Escaping from Juba: The Migrant Experience and the Disruption of Belonging. Transitional Journeys: Necropolitics and Non-Places. Viola's Settlement in Maine: The Reconstruction of Identity and the Role of Braiding. Conclusion.

Resumen: *The Good Braider* (2012), de Terry Farish, explora la migración de una adolescente sudanesa, Viola, y la influencia de la migración en la construcción de su identidad. Ambientada durante la Segunda Guerra Civil Sudanesa (1983–2005), la novela analiza cómo el desplazamiento—espacial, cultural y temporal—configura la identidad a través del desplazamiento cultural. A partir de la noción de "no lugares" de Marc Augé (1997), los campos

de refugiados y los espacios de tránsito se convierten en elementos centrales del sentido fragmentado de pertenencia de Viola. Sus trenzas simbolizan la integración de diversos aspectos de su identidad, que abarcan dimensiones de género, raciales y diaspóricas. La tensión con su madre, Thereza, refleja el impacto intergeneracional que causa la migración forzada. Finalmente, la narrativa de Farish contribuye a la literatura sobre refugiados centrándose en cómo el desarraigo afecta tanto a la esfera emocional como a la vida estructural de los refugiados.
Palabras clave: identidad; migración forzada; diáspora; campo de refugiados; Terry Farish.
Sumario: Introducción: *The Good Braider* y la literatura de refugiados. Huida de Juba: la experiencia del inmigrante y la ruptura del sentido de pertenencia. Viajes transicionales: necropolítica y no-lugares. Asentamiento de Viola en Maine: la reconstrucción de la identidad y el significado de las trenzas. Conclusión.

INTRODUCTION: *THE GOOD BRAIDER* AND REFUGEE LITERATURE

From the era of Olaudah Equiano to the ongoing displacement of Palestinians under settler-colonial occupation, forced migration has been driven repeatedly by imperial expansion and colonial violence. During the period of colonial expansion overseas—particularly from the fifteenth to the early twentieth centuries—European imperial powers forcibly reconfigured territorial boundaries and resource distribution, which led to the displacement of Sudanese communities and the restructuring of their social and political structures. In the Sudanese context, the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, administered jointly by Great Britain and Egypt, governed both North Sudan and South Sudan between 1898 and 1956 under a unified colonial administration (Sharkey 2003, 4). After achieving independence in 1956, Sudan was immediately beset by internal strife, culminating in the First Sudanese Civil War (1955–1972) (Poggo 1). The disparities between the North and South of Sudan, especially regarding religion, culture, and political systems, led to the eruption of a second civil war (1983–2005).[1] Such conflict pitted the Arab-Islamic North, with its unified vision of culture and history, against the African South. In contrast, the South encompassed various ethnic groups with distinct tribal polities and land-use systems (Kasabian 5). As Rolandsen notes, "[u]nderlying factors such

[1]This divide, rooted in both religious and ethno-cultural identities, was deepened by colonial administrative practices and uneven development. The North's closer ties to Arab and Islamic identity often stood in contrast to the South's alignment with sub-Saharan African cultural and Christian traditions, reinforcing marginalization and internal displacement. Similar patterns of identity-driven displacement can be observed in other geopolitical contexts, such as in Palestine, where Ilan Pappé describes the use of ethnic and cultural differentiation as a mechanism of control and expulsion (Pappé 30–31).

as civil war legacies, neo-patrimonialism and a weak state made a new civil war in South Sudan possible, if not unavoidable" (171). The war forced many people to leave their homes and resettlement programs dispersed Sudanese refugees all across the world, including American cities like Portland, Maine (Kasabian 5).

Terry Farish's *The Good Braider* (2012), a moving young adult verse novel, explores the intertwined themes of forced migration and personal transformation. Drawing on her experience working with refugee communities, Farish portrays the psychological and cultural challenges Viola faces as she travels from war-torn Juba, South Sudan, to a temporary refuge in Cairo, Egypt, and eventually to Portland, Maine. In this new environment, Viola must navigate the complexities of American society while rebuilding her sense of self. Told from the perspective of the adolescent protagonist, Viola, the novel intimately captures her inner world, alongside that of her mother, Thereza, and her younger brother, Francis, as they flee their homeland. Through Viola's eyes, the story addresses adolescence, cultural displacement, and the lingering effects of trauma. Written in free verse, it traces the family's struggles during their journey and their efforts to adapt and find a sense of belonging in an unfamiliar world. The disruption of their social environment and the redefinition of "home" become central to the evolving sense of self in Viola's family. For this reason, this article focuses on the protagonist and explores how the intersection of place and identity formation reveals that refugees are shaped not only by cultural and social factors but also by their relationship to land and environment—that is, through encounters with new spatial contexts, institutional structures, and interpersonal relations. As is the case with many refugee narratives, *The Good Braider* underscores the inextricable link between the physical journey and the psychological transformation that arises from displacement, particularly for adolescent migrants who must navigate the simultaneous processes of cultural adaptation and identity formation.

Within this framework, this article examines how displacement reshapes identity through spatial and relational dynamics in *The Good Braider*. It is true that most migration narratives vary greatly according to the experiences they represent; however, as John McLeod highlights, critics like Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Avtar Brah have contributed significantly to understanding "the new possibilities and problems engendered by the experience of migrancy and diaspora life" (McLeod, *Beginning* 238). In line with this diversity, *The Good Braider* represents a

significant contribution to refugee literature insofar as it reflects on the realities of contemporary forced migration. Refugee literature, in this sense, invites a rethinking of the world by portraying identities as fluid, non-static and no longer anchored to a single nation-state (Chiang 29). Traditionally, however, migratory movements have often been represented through reductive frameworks such as "unidirectional 'stories of flight'" (Coundouriotis 78) or purely "humanitarian narratives" (Bakara 289) that foreground victimhood and rescue, while neglecting displaced individuals' agency and complexity. These simplified representations and monolithic narratives erase the intricate social, cultural and psychological realities of displacement and contribute to the construction of what Behrman terms the" romanticised figure of the literary exile" (Behrman 38), ultimately silencing different refugee voices. In this context, classical reflections on identity also illuminate the instability of diasporic subjectivities. Heraclitus's metaphor of identity as a river in constant transformation anticipates contemporary understandings of identity as processual rather than fixed (Kahn 53), while Sayad conceptualises migrant identity as shaped by history, culture, language, and social structures (3–4). This theoretical framework provides a useful lens through which *The Good Braider* can be read as a narrative that challenges reductive models of displacement by foregrounding identity as dynamic, relational, and continually reconfigured through forced migration.

Many contemporary literary and cultural theorists, particularly those working with Postcolonial and Diaspora Studies, emphasised that the concept of identity cannot be tied to a single place (McLeod, "Diaspora" 3). This approach is reflected in refugee literature, where identities are often portrayed as "broken mirrors" (Rushdie 11), reflecting the fragmentation and multiplicity produced by displacement (Rupp 35). As Avtar Brah claims, diasporic identities are sustained and "created out of the 'confluence of narratives' of different journeys and links to the 'old country' which create the sense of a shared history" (Brah 183).

Migrant collective belonging and the liminal zones that arise from being situated neither fully in the place of origin nor entirely in the host society are particularly relevant in this context. In fact, Bhabha's notion of "in-between" spaces (1) facilitates the recognition and legitimization of diasporic identities that have historically been excluded from dominant, canonical frameworks of identity. As Bhabha says, there "is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus

on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" so that "these 'in-between' spaces . . . initiate new signs of identity" (1) that reflect refugees' realities. Liminal spaces reimagine identity as not limited by borders or static national allegiances but instead forged through dynamic interactions with the environment. Refugee literature, therefore, plays a pivotal role in reshaping our understanding of identity and space.

Although Farish is not herself a migrant, she explicitly acknowledges the responsibility involved in representing migratory experience. In an interview, she emphasises the need to understand displacement as a lived, embodied, and multifaceted experience shaped by differing positionalities rather than a distant, abstract or reductive condition, stating "I wrote *The Good Braider* about a family, in particular a young girl who survives genocide in Sudan... I absolutely found it necessary to understand this experience and talk to people, who had come to Portland, about their experience" (Farish, "Author" 2:12). Farish's position as a non-migrant author nevertheless prompts an examination of how refugee experience is narratively shaped and mediated. While Farish does not share the lived experience of exile depicted in the novel, *The Good Braider* mitigates these risks by centring Viola's interior consciousness and by resisting a totalising or explanatory stance. The narrative does not claim to speak for refugee communities as a homogeneous whole; rather, it foregrounds one situated, adolescent perspective marked by fragmentation, uncertainty, and ongoing negotiation. In doing so, the text complicates the ethical terrain of outsider authorship without collapsing into paternalistic mediation. This article acknowledges the novel's production context without reducing it to a Western "rescue" narrative. Rather than rendering a reductive framework of salvation or assimilation, *The Good Braider* centres Viola's interior consciousness, relational tensions, and the enduring aftereffects of displacement.

Within this context, this paper focuses on Viola's multifaceted journey, where her physical displacement, particularly from her homeland, plays a crucial role in shaping her identity. For that reason, it is my contention that *The Good Braider* sheds light on the profound impact of forced migration on identity formation, emphasising the spatial dimensions of this process. This article argues that *The Good Braider* reveals how forced migration destabilises identity through displacement, tracing Viola's trajectory from internal displacement in Juba to her resettlement in Maine, where her sense of self is reconfigured through

spatial, relational, and power dynamics. While Maine unsettles her sense of self, it also becomes a site of resilience and communal belonging, where braiding comes to symbolise both the struggles and the strengths that shape her identity. Ultimately, the novel reveals how Viola's forced (dis)placement not only (de)stabilises her sense of self but also becomes the very condition through which her identity is continually redefined.

2. Escaping from Juba: The Migrant Experience and the Disruption of Belonging

In *The Good Braider*, the forced displacement arising from the war between South Sudan and North Sudan and the war itself and act as the catalyst for the disruption of Viola's sense of stability, safety, and identity. Set in Juba, the capital of South Sudan and the protagonist's hometown, the story illustrates how conflict reshapes both individuals and communities. The characters are forced into a constant process of self-redefinition as violence destroys the familiar world around them, pushing them into exile and compelling them to negotiate their identities within an unfamiliar social and cultural landscape. Before the war, Viola's town is depicted as a peaceful, almost idyllic place "surrounded by nature" (Farish, *Good* 40), highlighting a sense of harmony between the people and their natural landscape. War, however, turns Juba into a barren terrain, where "even the trees and birds don't find life in Juba" (40). This environmental devastation signals not only the destruction of physical space, but also the erosion of the cultural and emotional bonds that tie individuals to their homeland (Hodel and le Polain de Waroux 974).

Natural elements, particularly water, also play a pivotal role in shaping Viola's identity and affecting her displacement. The Nile River, symbolically evoked by the blue in the South Sudanese flag, symbolises both life and interconnectedness with Viola and her past (Roozenbeek 17–18). For Viola, however, displacement severs her access not only to the river but to the wider natural and communal landscape it sustains, leaving memory as the only channel through which this environment can be recalled. It is through this act of recollection that the river continues to reinforce a collective sense of community and identity tied to the land (Nowicka 72). In fact, this loss is deeply felt by the characters on a personal and embodied level. As Viola narrates, "she misses the trees that surrounded Juba / when she was young, the tamarind, the acacias, / the dense forest, the shoebill bird in the swamp. / She misses weavers in the

wood" (Farish, *Good* 40). This nostalgic recollection underscores how nature once anchored their sense of belonging, identity, and memory.

From the outset of the armed conflict, systemic oppression and entrapment reshape Viola's sense of home, which she describes as "like a prison" (Farish, *Good* 21). The threat of northern "soldiers breaking into [her] house" (27) turns domestic space into one of vulnerability, collapsing the boundary between interior and exterior. In "Last Offer," the presence of a soldier in the courtyard—once a protected space—recasts it as a site of intrusion and control. The lines "Vomit rises in my throat. / we freeze" and "We lower our heads" (48) reveal how fear gives way to enforced submission. Even basic survival becomes transactional, as Viola recognises, "If we take the sugar, he will own us" (49). This dynamic reflects broader structures of violence, including sexual violence, as Viola's rape by a soldier exemplifies how "rape is an act of war" (Farish, *Good* 186), embedded in systemic gendered oppression (Beyani 31). At the same time, resource scarcity in Juba underscores the harsh conditions shaping this dislocation. From a political ecology perspective, Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" (2) reveals how environmental degradation operates as a gradual yet devastating form of power. In *The Good Braider*, ecological collapse and political abandonment converge, limiting life chances and marginalising refugees both in Juba and during migration. The lack of food and water becomes another weapon of war, as shown when Viola and her grandmother wait in long lines for rations (Farish, *Good* 44). Ultimately, the depletion of natural resources reflects a broader social collapse, where survival itself is undermined by forced separation from the land that once sustained them.

The erosion of safety, security, and agency at home can have profound psychological consequences. As Fox asserts, "home becomes a place of danger" (590). This is further evidenced by the protagonist's claim that she would "rather escape than eat" (Farish, *Good* 21). As Watson and Austerberry explain, the word home conjures images of "personal warmth, comfort, stability, and security" (8), all of which are stripped away through the armed conflict and the act of displacement itself. The loss of home safety is compounded by the inability to use household objects—such as the pot in which asida is prepared, the quinine kept in the house to treat malaria, the stored groundnuts intended for daily sustenance, the comb used to part and plait hair, and the elephant's bone preserved within the home as a relic—that are central to identity formation.

In South Sudan, women's identity has been traditionally and socially bound to the domestic sphere, particularly within the patriarchal household structures that assign gendered roles to everyday labour, where a woman's "job is to cook" (Farish, *Good* 27). Viola's observation that she has "never seen a boy cook before" (113) reflects this culturally embedded and gendered division of roles within the South Sudanese context. In this setting, the kitchen functions not merely as a neutral domestic space but as a site where women's agency is both confined and regulated. Because domestic labour has historically been linked to subordinated and racialised forms of work, including enslaved labour (Cade 299), the kitchen acquires symbolic weight in the novel as a marker of women's limited agency within the patriarchal structure of South Sudanese society, as suggested by Fathi (983). When Viola's home is lost, so is the one place where women had some authority, further disrupting their sense of identity. As Fathi notes, objects and rituals within the domestic sphere become inscribed in our bodies and shape how we construct ourselves (988). When Viola and her family flee Juba, they carry only a few possessions—some food and a book—which represent the scant resources they have to sustain both their bodies and minds (Farish, *Good* 46). Leaving behind their belongings therefore entails more than material loss; it also signifies the rupture of the embodied routines and cultural practices through which identity was enacted. For Viola, exile does not mean liberation from domestic responsibility but the loss of the spatial and cultural framework that had previously given coherence to her role and sense of self. In *The Good Braider*, Farish shows how the war transforms Juba from a lush, life-filled city into a barren and resource-poor place. Therefore, it severs Viola's ties to the land, her community and her cultural memory. This environmental destruction, coupled with gendered violence and forced displacement, undermines her sense of self. In this context, memory and personal possessions become vital anchors for identity. The novel highlights how home and environment are deeply connected to a sense of belonging and agency, and how their loss exposes the fragility of individual identity in the face of conflict.

3. Transitional Journeys: Necropolitics and Non-Places

The journey from Juba to Portland reveals how war and displacement force Viola and her family to move from one place to another. Their survival depends on enduring prolonged periods in temporary spaces and on facing

conditions that determine who is allowed to live and who is not, as Southerners were considered to be disposable. This practice reflects Mbembe's coined term "necropolitics," which evidences the tyrannising "power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" ("Necropolitics" 11). As Viola explains, there is a clear division between the South Sudanese population who "don't want to be Muslim, [they are] people of the south" (Farish, *Good* 151) and northerners. As a result, Viola points out how many people died after Northerners killed without scruple. In a conversation with Andrew, Viola says:

> We don't want to be Muslim, we people of the south.
> He waits.
> I stare at the side of his neck he calls a rugby neck.
> "So many died," I tell him. "You cannot imagine
> how they throw people away." He waits.
> "Millions of my people."
> He keeps looking forward so I cannot see his eyes.
> I keep talking.
> "If they did not kill you, they did other very bad things.
> Things like torture. And kidnap. And rape." (151–52)

In this way, necropolitical power enacts a controlled production of "(un)living" subjects.

Beyond the dynamics of necropolitics and its implications, spaces themselves operate as instruments of social valuation. For instance, in Africa—both in Cairo and Wadi Halfa—Francis 'well-being is disregarded (62) and he ends up dying (65). As Viola states:

> I am surging toward Cairo.
> But Francis seems like he is somewhere else.
> His eyes sink deeper and deeper
> into his head. He cannot eat. No one
> has medicine. Other children around us sicken, too.
> They soil themselves unstopping.
> "Bad water," people say. Bad water in Wadi Halfa. [...]
> I do not want to go on. I want to go back
> to Habuba. She would give Francis clean water
> and some herb to stop his cramps.
> My mother holds Francis.
> We huddle under blankets to ward off the cold air.

> Maybe we are both thinking,
> *What if we had continued on the road*
> *south to Kenya?*
> *Would Francis be healthy then?*
> *Or would we all have died?*
> My mother says, "We cannot know
> if we could have gotten to Kenya,
> and if we had, which would be worse, here or there?" (*Good* 63)

The novel distributes vulnerability unevenly across age and gender. Francis is figured primarily through corporeal decline—illness, hunger, and physical exhaustion—rather than sustained interior reflection. Unlike spectacular violence, his deterioration results from infrastructural abandonment—contaminated water, lack of medicine, and the absence of institutional protection. Here necropolitics operates through exposure because it relegates certain populations to what Mbembe calls "death-worlds" or spaces in which people are subjected to "conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" ("Necropolitics" 40). Viola, by contrast, is positioned as an adolescent female subject whose body is likewise exposed to precarity, even if the narrative does not foreground her physical suffering in the same way. Rather than centring bodily decline, the text highlights the gendered risks that shape her experience and grants readers access to her interior perspective. While Francis's suffering remains largely externalised and material, Viola's is rendered as both bodily and psychological, revealing how displacement is lived differently along generational and gendered lines. This differential exposure to vulnerability becomes even more visible once the family is resettled in the United States. By contrast, Viola is struck by the difference in Maine, where the police—"who to me [Viola] are like soldiers" (102)—act not as enforcers of violence, as soldiers did in Juba (15), but as protectors, explicitly demonstrating concern for human life by insisting that Viola fasten her seatbelt to avoid death or being injured (102).

After their displacement from their homeland—driven by necropolitics—the characters are forced into the aforementioned transient spaces that embody what Marc Augé calls "non-places". These spaces, like checkpoints, means of transport, borders and refugee camps, are characterised by a lack of permanence during an uncertain period, further destabilising the characters' sense of belonging and identity. The sense of a stable identity is disrupted as they enter non-places, where, as Marc Augé

suggests, human beings are left in a state of liminality, neither fully present nor absent, suspended in an indefinite waiting (34). These infrastructures have the power to subject people to a social hierarchy that enables those in authority to either preserve or eradicate lives considered precarious in border spaces (Butler, *Force* 55). While Mbembe's framework identifies the sovereign power to decide over life and death, Butler's notion of precarity helps explain how such spaces produce differential exposure to harm, rendering certain refugee lives less recognizable as deserving of protection. As they pass through these liminal spaces, the characters are uprooted not just physically but also psychologically, struggling to maintain a sense of self. Viola's memories of her life in Juba—now replaced by barren camps and unfamiliar landscapes—show that home was more than just a place: it provided identity, culture and security. The refugee camp near Khartoum, described as an endless stretch of plastic shelters (Farish, *Good* 59), reflects the loss of rootedness and the breakdown of the physical and social structures that once anchored Viola and her family. Therefore, Marc Augé describes non-places, like refugee camps, as places of "accelerated circulation" where the instability of their environment constantly reshapes identity (Augé 34). Such camps function as necropolitical spaces in which life is administered at its bare minimum, while also producing conditions of extreme precarity in which survival remains unevenly distributed. Refugees are neither fully abandoned nor fully protected; rather, they are contained within a system that reduces life to biological endurance. These spaces demonstrate how power can be exercised through containment and regulated scarcity rather than overt violence. Within this environment of containment, displacement also reshapes subjectivity. In line with Caren Kaplan's assertion that travel produces the self through "spectatorship and comparison with otherness" (36), Viola's forced movement from her home to the refugee camp prompts a continuous comparison between her previous life and her present one. This ongoing act of measuring the familiar against the unfamiliar becomes a central mechanism through which her sense of self is renegotiated, and survival itself is reframed across displacement—from Juba, through liminal non-places, to Maine.

In addition, means of transport also function as non-places. Such transitory zones are defined as impersonal spaces where individuals are reduced to cargo and stripped both of agency and dignity (Augé 34). As Marc Augé claims, "[t]he installations needed for the accelerated circulation of passengers and goods (high-speed roads and railways,

interchanges, airports) are just as much non-places as the means of transport themselves, or the great commercial centres, or the extended transit camps where the planet's refugees are parked" (34). In fact, the degrading conditions of their journey mirror the dehumanising transport of livestock, as refugees "sit / on the plane's floor, packed with hundreds of others" (42), reflecting how, as Mbembe (*Critique* 11) notes, African bodies are often reduced to objects or commodities. When travelling, this objectification is further echoed when Viola describes having "the rations strapped / to [her] stomach" (Farish, *Good* 48), recalling the burdens carried by pack animals. In fact, she is treated more like freight than a person (Farish, *Good* 48), highlighting the dehumanising nature of these liminal experiences. Moreover, the metaphor of freight is not merely figurative but is literalised in the bus journey. Viola notes, "The bus is like a truck. We squat, / holding on to the side" (60), collapsing the distinction between passengers and freight. Their bodies are reorganised for transport rather than comfort, as "our bodies lean / into one another as we sleep" (60). The chaos of travel is underscored by imagery of migrants whose movements recall those of peddlers hauling plastic furniture, rugs, cooking pots, and even goats aboard (61) since they are told to "get ready / [and] pack everything on [their] body" (46). The act of being perpetually in transit further denies them the ability to (re)establish a connection with any particular land or community, thereby hindering any sense of stability.

Moreover, bureaucratic structures in the asylum process exert a powerful influence over refugees' lives by limiting their autonomy and destabilising their sense of self. Viola's forced migration and the bureaucratic barriers she faces—such as the need for visas and legal documents—further limit her ability to exert agency over her own life (McConnachie 398). As Butler argues, governmentality and bureaucracy enact a form of power that regulates the population, constraining their movement and, by extension, their lives and identities (*Precarious* 52). While organizations like the UNHCR provide some relief, the asylum process also leaves migrants with little control over their futures. For Viola, waiting years for a "blue card" marks a prolonged period of uncertainty as it is the official confirmation of her eligibility for resettlement (Farish, *Good* 87). Yet the blue card does more than permit movement because it reorganises existence through administrative recognition. Viola reflects, "Inside I see it. The blue card that means / we are eligible for resettlement. I catch my breath" (87), revealing how identity becomes contingent upon eligibility. This bureaucratic

confirmation also reshapes relational perception. She wonders, "Is this woman my mother? This woman—smiling! . . . it's as if I am just seeing her now" (87). The moment culminates in the intimate recognition, "It is as if we breathe the same breath… / She is myself" (87). Bureaucratic validation thus produces a paradoxical re-coherence of identity, even as belonging remains structurally conditional. Travelling through a succession of temporary and impersonal spaces not only prevents her from achieving stability but also exposes her to forms of power that continuously displace and reposition her.

Furthermore, the desperation produced by waiting in long queues for vital resources intensifies over time through what can be understood as a suspension of time. This condition aligns with Friday et al.'s (2025) notion of "temporicide," whereby enforced waiting erodes lived time and confines subjects within bureaucratic and spatial constraints. In Viola's journey, waiting is not a passive interval but a form of temporal dispossession that prevents her from fully inhabiting either present or future. Control is exercised through restricted access to essentials since Viola and her grandmother "*wait* in the food line / in the sun to collect rations" (44; emphasis added) and water (26) while trying not to be killed (44). Water scarcity also acquires a gendered dimension, as women are typically responsible for securing it, exposing them to militarised spaces where resource control becomes domination. Scarcity thus functions as a necropolitical instrument, regulating access to life-sustaining resources and determining whose survival is precarious. Environmental degradation and gendered labour intersect, shaping unequal exposure to risk. Waiting continues throughout their journey, reinforcing uncertainty (64). After they "wait through the dry season / [and they] wait till the rains begin" (Farish, *Good* 56), they travel from Juba to Khartoum (57), then "wait from one day to the next for the / [first] bus to come" (59), and Viola eventually "lose[s] count / of the days it takes" for the second bus (60). Even water transport offers no certainty, as the steamer "will come in a week, / maybe, maybe not. Maybe two. / [They] wait" (60). Ultimately, Viola and her family exist in a constant state of waiting that produces liminal, dehumanising conditions. Prolonged delays, bureaucratic control, and necropolitical violence make survival dependent on externally controlled time, demonstrating that displacement disrupts not only physical space but also the social and personal foundations of life.

4. Viola's Settlement in Maine: The Reconstruction of Identity and the Role of Braiding

Displacement and migration reshape identity and reconfigure personal, familial, and cultural bonds, especially in Viola's adolescence, where border crossing intensifies self-negotiation (Teague 38). These changes are symbolised by her braids, which represent ties to family, homeland, and cultural heritage. In the United States, Viola and her mother, Thereza, both renegotiate their identities, but in different ways. Thereza, as a first-generation refugee, remains attached to her past and resists full immersion in American culture, frequently comparing her present life with Africa (Slatebreakers). From the perspective of migrant motherhood, this resistance operates as a protective strategy shaped by intergenerational trauma and the desire to preserve cultural continuity. This reflects a broader first-generation dynamic in which preservation and adaptation produce unequal forms of belonging within the same family. By contrast, Viola fits Rubén Rumbaut's notion of the "1.5 Generation" (983), showing greater adaptability as her identity shifts between Sudanese and American influences under the pressures of resettlement. This ongoing negotiation creates tension between mother and daughter. As Abdelmalek Sayad argues, diasporic identity is not fixed but formed through continuous negotiation with "one's history . . . traditions . . . language . . . religion . . . or, in a word, with one's culture" (3–4). As a result, a growing sense of alienation emerges, particularly as Thereza struggles with "adjusting to the changed condition" (UNHCR 10). For her, America remains foreign, reflected in her limited use of English, "[only] spoken when useful" (Farish, *Good* 126). Viola, in contrast, embraces English and cultural fluidity as strategies of adaptation and survival. Their differing responses highlight both a generational divide and distinct coping mechanisms, with language functioning as both a barrier and a bridge in their relationship (Kasabian 29).

However, even though Viola is able to embrace cultural fluidity more easily than her mother, she also has difficulties, which are reflected in her braids. Historically, braids in African culture have been deeply tied to identity, community, and social status (Byrd and Tharps 9). Although Africa is home to a wide variety of hairstyles (Sieber and Herreman 56), hair can also signify social and emotional conditions. In Viola's case, her displacement and the mourning for her lost home and brother prevent her

from braiding her hair since "mourning is often expressed by deliberately abandoning the usually carefully coiffed hair" (57). Viola's hair, which is a physical manifestation of her African heritage, becomes a powerful symbol of her fragmented identity. For Viola, the act of braiding transforms into a lost ritual, reflecting her unravelling self amid the trauma of displacement. As her sense of belonging disintegrates, so does her connection to this intimate cultural practice. For that reason, Viola states, "I no longer braid my hair since it is broken. / I used to braid girls' hair in our courtyard in Juba. / I used to give my cousin little twists with bright beads. / We are all separated now, those children and me" (Farish, *Good* 81). Conversely, she contrasts this with the girls she sees in Cairo as she states, "I see girls on Cairo streets who braid extensions into their own hair… But I don't touch my hair. I don't tell him how it hurts, remembering the feel of Habuba's fingers braiding my hair" (81). As a result of such displacement, Viola not only is unable to braid her hair but also chooses to shave her head. In the colonial era, slave traders sought to dehumanise enslaved African people by shaving their hair (Byrd and Tharps, 9). Hairstyles functioned as both social and identity markers, revealing an individual's place of origin, status, or the language they spoke (9). Consequently, when people were unable to express their identity through their hair, their means of communication were limited, "since shaving someone's head equated to erasing their identity" (Nyela, 16). Viola reenacts this symbolic erasure when she chooses to shave her head during moments when she struggles to understand the complexities of her identity (Farish, *Good* 101).

Furthermore, Viola's difficulty—or refusal—to braid her hair reflects not only her connection to cultural traditions but also her ties to family relationships. This is most powerfully expressed in her metaphor of the braid after Viola's brother, Francis, dies. Viola states, "We were three, like three strands. / We lay, three of us, on the steamer, warming each other. / Without the third, I don't know what to do" (82), referring to herself, her mother, and her little brother. The braid thus becomes a visual and tactile metaphor for familial cohesion, displacement and longing. After her brother's death, she is left in a state of despair (67). The loss of Francis, compounded by the experience of displacement, not only fractures her family but also destabilises her inner sense of self, reflected in her refusal to braid her hair. As Viola admits, "I don't do the Sudanese braids in my hair we all do in my culture. Why don't I? I don't know" (185), capturing

the lingering confusion and detachment experienced by many displaced individuals.

In relation to cultural expression, braids in the novel function as a complex form of cultural expression that can both strengthen and complicate a sense of community. On the one hand, they symbolise continuity and connection to homeland, as "[b]raids are from our [their] culture" (Farish, *Good* 83), linking them to African traditions (Bhopal 202). In this sense, braiding fosters belonging amid displacement and operates as a social practice that reinforces bonds among family and friends. It also carries deeper cultural meanings, since "hair in the hands of an enemy, could be incorporated into a dangerous charm or 'medicine' that would injure the owner" (Sieber and Herreman 67). Traditionally passed from mothers to daughters, braiding is central to motherhood and creates spaces of interaction and reconciliation (Babou 4), particularly between Viola and Thereza. In exile, this practice gains further significance as an embodied ritual through which care and cultural memory are preserved, even when other forms of stability collapse. For Viola, allowing her hair to be braided becomes a way of repairing relational bonds and reconnecting with community. At the same time, cultural expression through braiding intersects with tension and control. Thereza initially restricts Viola's integration into American culture, forbidding her relationship with Andrew and maintaining boundaries that exclude outsiders (Farish, *Good* 136). However, this control can also be read as protective, shaped by trauma and heightened maternal vigilance in the aftermath of violence. Thus, her boundary-making reflects both care and fear, even as it creates distance between them. Gradually, though, through the shared act of braiding (203), Thereza softens and begins to acknowledge Viola's need to construct an identity that blends both African and American influences.

The contrast between Africa and America, often shown through natural imagery, also helps to reveal the importance of braiding in Viola's sense of self. This condition can be further understood through Bhabha's concept of "in-between" spaces, which describe identities formed not through fixed origins but through ongoing processes of cultural negotiation (1). In Viola's case, this does not produce a harmonious synthesis but rather a persistent tension between belonging and displacement. Her identity develops in the space between these two worlds, shaped by the continuous negotiation of different cultural influences. This is reflected in

the following symbolic parallels. In America, "a star formation . . . / is called the Elephant's Trunk" (208), while Khartoum "means Elephant's Trunk, / [which is] the shape the two rivers make / when they meet" (209), "when the Blue Nile and the White Nile / come together" (209). These images of convergence—constellations and rivers—mirror Viola's identity as constituted by the meeting of Juba and Maine, Africa and America. Ultimately, Viola starts to understand herself better when she sees how Africa and America connect in her life. At first, she struggles with a sense of incompleteness: "I have been here less than a year, / yet I do not think I can be all Sudanese, all the time. / Already, am I part American? / I don't feel like any *one* thing" (137, added emphasis). Over time, she articulates this complexity more clearly: "I am not American. / Or Sudanese. / I'm not in Sudan and not really in Maine. / Or maybe I'm in both of them / at the same time. / I'm in someplace I'm making *up*" (185). Her identity thus remains fluid and paradoxically defined through its instability, reflecting the "not American enough" positionality (Teague 38). Ultimately, she embraces this duality: "I'm an American girl in Portland, Maine. But I am also a girl from Juba" (213), recognising that her identity emerges from the coexistence of and connection between both worlds.

CONCLUSIONS

In *The Good Braider*, the formation of migrant identity begins with the violent rupture of displacement, which unsettles not only geographical belonging but also cultural and emotional continuity. After the Second Sudanese Civil War, Viola and her family are forced to leave their home and gradually lose their connection to Juba and the sense of stability it once offered. The loss of familiar objects, rituals and family bonds shows that displacement starts not at a border but within the home itself. Such elements that once sustained her identity are stripped away, and survival becomes the priority.

This rupture continues through their journey. The novel highlights how necropolitical forces and transient spaces shape who survives and who does not. Their displacement is marked by encounters with checkpoints, borders, refugee camps, and modes of transport that exemplify Marc Aug'és notion of non-places: transient, impersonal zones that deprive individuals of rootedness and recognition. The characters 'identities are

further destabilised by the dehumanising nature of transport—where they are treated like freight—and by bureaucratic structures that demand legal justifications of their existence, such as the coveted "blue card." In these liminal conditions, survival depends less on agency than on endurance, as waiting—whether for rations, travel, or legal approval—becomes the defining rhythm of their lives. These prolonged periods of uncertainty and waiting reveal the fragility of identity in transit—a constant balance between past and future that makes it hard to hold onto a stable sense of self.

Even though generational tensions still play a role, it is not until Viola reaches Portland that the possibility of reshaping her identity becomes clearer. Settling into a new place does not eliminate the effects of displacement but instead reshapes them. This process demands continuous negotiation and adjustment. While Thereza holds tightly to cultural traditions and resists integrating, Viola, as part of the "1.5 generation," takes a more flexible approach, blending her Sudanese heritage with American influences. Crucially, these contrasting orientations reflect different ways of negotiating displacement: Thereza's preservation seeks continuity after rupture, whereas Viola's adaptation becomes a means of social survival in the host context. In this sense, braiding becomes a key metaphor for identity and repair. Choosing not to braid represents disconnection and cultural loss, while the act of braiding acts as a ritual of reconciliation, linking family members and allowing Viola to embrace who she is. It thus functions not only as a marker of cultural identity but also as a way of restoring connection between mother and daughter. As a metaphor, it extends beyond the personal into natural imagery—stars, rivers, and ecosystems—that highlights the interconnectedness of her identity. Just as strands come together to form a braid, Viola's sense of self is woven from multiple cultural threads, constantly evolving and adapting to new surroundings.

By following Viola's journey from Juba to Portland, the novel shows that migrant identity is not something fixed or inherited; it is a continual process of negotiation and redefinition. Displacement dismantles familiar structures of belonging, while necropolitics and non-places suspend individuals in liminality and resettlement compels a reweaving of cultural elements across generations. Viola's eventual embrace of braiding as both practice and metaphor illuminates how identity can be reconstructed out

of rupture, threading together Sudanese and American influences into a dynamic whole.

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Walk the Talk on Gender Equality: Is the Language of EU Institutions' Staff Regulations Really Gender Neutral?

Predicar con el ejemplo en materia de igualdad de género: ¿el lenguaje del Estatuto de los Funcionarios de las Instituciones de la UE es realmente neutral?

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Abstract: This paper analyses the discourse surrounding the legal framework that governs the career of civil servants working within European Union Institutions, focusing on how equality and diversity values are communicated and embedded in daily professional life. The study employs a methodological approach that examines the discourse found in applicable Human Resources legal provisions currently in use. Particular attention is given to the linguistic features of terminology related to gender and inclusiveness. The research indentifies areas where the language used in the EU human resource legal framework could be improved for the benefit of all staff.
Keywords: corpus-based discourse analysis; human resources management; European institutions; gender neutral language.
Summary: Introduction. Research Hypothesis. Literature Review. Methodology. Research Findings. Conclusions.

Resumen: Este artículo examina el discurso presente en el marco jurídico que regula la carrera profesional de los funcionarios públicos de las instituciones de la Unión Europea, con especial atención a la manera en que se comunican los valores de igualdad y diversidad en la vida laboral cotidiana. El estudio adopta un enfoque metodológico centrado en el análisis del discurso contenido en las disposiciones legales vigentes en materia de recursos humanos. Asimismo, se analizan de forma detallada las características lingüísticas de la terminología relacionada con el

género y la inclusión. El trabajo concluye señalando diversas áreas en las que el lenguaje utilizado en el marco jurídico de los recursos humanos de la UE podría mejorarse en beneficio de todo el personal.
Palabras clave: análisis del discurso basado en corpus; gestión de recursos humanos; instituciones europeas; lenguaje inclusivo.
Sumario: Introducción. Hipótesis de la investigación. Marco teórico. Metodología. Resultados de la Investigación. Conclusiones.

INTRODUCTION

Equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the European Union, enshrined in its founding treaties. Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) states that: "In all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women" (European Council, *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*). Since its ratification in 2000, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union explicitly fosters equality between women and men. The text is legally binding for all Member States of the European Union and for all the European Institutions.

Nevertheless, a first reading of the EU Institutions' staff policies shows that they are written in a language that does not reflect the fundamental EU value of equality between women and men.

1. RESEARCH HYPOTESIS

The aim of this paper is to analyse the use of the English language in the context of the human resources (HR) management of EU Institutions. The research hypothesis is that the language of internal HR policies and legal texts is not inclusive and does not foster or inspire gender equality.

The first consideration, which is plainly evident, is that the language of the EU Staff Regulations (European Council, *Regulation No. 31 (EEC)*) and their HR implementing provisions are simply not gender neutral (McConnell-Ginet; European Parliament, *Gender Neutral Language*). Unmarked masculine forms (Gathercole; Pauwels; Sulis and Gheno) are used in the vast majority of the texts, as provided for in Article 1 of the EU Staff Regulations (1c).

The clash of narratives with the high-level texts (i.e., the Founding Regulations) vis-à-vis the secondary legislation (Staff Regulations) is

reinforced by the reading of the language on the principles of equality and diversity as integrated into the Treaties founding the European Union, and in particular as stipulated by Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, on the EU values:

> The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail. (European Council, *Consolidated Version of the Treaty of the European Union* 17)

The significance of this research lies in the European Union's historical role in shaping the principles of equality and diversity. The core of the European Union is strongly based on the values of democracy, the rule of law and the equal treatment of its citizens, who are celebrated for their diversity.

As these represent core values of the European Union, reflected in its motto "United in diversity," it is highly relevant to examine the discourse (Gee, *An Introduction; How to Do*) produced by "European Union in action" and to assess the consistency in how these values are understood and implemented within EU institutional workplaces.

In particular, this research aims to show that the Discourse of HR legal texts and policies used in the European Institutions (hereinafter referred to as EU HRM legal corpus) is not inclusive and cannot be considered as a good example of gender neutrality.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

With the aim of investigating the Discourse on internal HR management, it is important to define, in the first place, the term "discourse." This is not an easy task, and different scholars have tried to frame its definition over the past decades, contributing to the creation of a sociolinguistics discipline called discourse analysis (Antelmi; Baker, *Sociolinguistics; Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis; Using Corpora to Analyse Gender*; Fairclough, "Discourse and Text;" Gee, *An Introduction; How to Do*; Halliday, *An Introduction*; *Explorations*; Harris; Paltridge; Tannen et al.; van Dijk, *Critical Discourse Analysis*; Wodak and Meyer).

A comprehensive definition of discourse has been given by Tannen et al., according to whom there are three main categories of discourse:

1) Any text that goes beyond a simple sentence.
2) The language in use, in particular how people are "performing" language, for example in interactions, conversations, etc.
3) A broader range of social practices may include non-linguistic and non-specific occurrences of language use. In such sense, discourse includes social interactions and common understandings, as included in a broad system of thoughts and speaking acts regulated by social rules at a particular point in time).

This last category of Discourse, as considered for this study, is defined by James Gee (*An Introduction; How to Do*) as "big D" Discourse, i.e., a system of meaning or ideology that is built in the common interaction among participants. Discourse contrasts with discourse (lowercase), which is simply an instance of communicative acts in a given language (Gee, *An Introduction; How to Do*).

In this context, within the dimension of discursive practice, it is extremely important for this research that language can be a bearer of change; language creates culture, opinions and practices; it is closely linked to the power of the participant in a Discourse (Fairclough, "Discourse and Text;" *Language and Power*). By choosing a certain word in a text, we highlight our attitude and our convictions. The words we choose make us feel like a part of a community define our identity (Fairclough, "Discourse and Text;" *Language and Power*; van Dijk; Baker, *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*; Wodak and Meyer; Gee, *An Introduction; How to Do*).

To analyse the Discourse used in the staff legal framework of EU Institutions, this paper takes into account aspects related to Discourse in the workplace and identity building (Alvesson and Kärreman; Bhatia, "Simplification;" *Analysing Genre*; Cotter and Marschall; Grant and Iedema; Holmes; Kärreman; Koester; Kutatlezde; Mautner; Mayr, *Language and Power;* "Institutional Discourse;" McQuaid et al.; Rodríguez; Shen et al.; ten Thije and Maier; Wodak et al.).

The paper is also grounded in studies on the Discourse on equality and diversity, in particular in relation to gender neutrality (Ahmed; Baker,

"Language;" *Public Discourses*; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet; Goddard and Mean; Harrington et al.; Hankivsky; Özbilgin and Tatli; Talbot).

3. METHODOLOGY

Although there is a wide range of corpus-based resources on the European acquis (Baisa et al.; Steinberger et al.), this research focuses on the rules and legal provisions related to the management of human resources currently in force in EU Institutions.

A specialized corpus—the EU HRM legal corpus—was created specifically for this research; the corpus contains all the currently applicable staff rules for civil servants working for the institutions of the European Union. This corpus consists of fifty-eight documents (on forty-seven HR-related subject matters), and it includes different types of legal documents. The most important document of the corpus is the Staff Regulations of Officials (SR) and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants (CEOS).[1] The corpus also includes 57 implementing provisions of the Staff Regulations, which are staff policies giving voice to the different rules applicable by virtue of the SR and CEOS.

The total amount of tokens in the corpus is ca. 216,000. Although the size of the corpus could be considered small, it is important to mention that its representativeness (Sinclair) is complete:

> The value of a corpus is clearly dependent not on its size but on what kind of information we can extract from it. Therein lies the importance of corpus tools; we need to have tools that can provide us with the information that we desire. (Anthony 146)

As mentioned, the corpus is specialized: its genre is well defined and the documents collected in the corpus are a complete set of all the applicable rules related to the management of staff working for the different EU institutions.

The main part of the research analysis will be devoted to the examination of semantical aspects, encompassing how meaning is created in particular instances and how EU values are reinforced with the use of a gender neutral language (Baker, *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*; Dooley and Levinsohn; Fairclough, "Discourse and Text;" Gee, *An*

[1] See: https://eu-careers.europa.eu/en/documents/regime-applicable-aux-autres-agents/.

Introduction; How to Do; Glynos et al.; Harris; Halliday, *An Introduction; Explorations*; Hodges et al.; Hyland; Jørgensen and Phillips; Maingueneau; Paltridge; Strauss and Feiz; Tannen et al.; van Dijk, *Critical Discourse Analysis*; Wodak and Meyer).

The use of language in the EU HRM legal corpus is being examined in the context in which it is utilized (Baker, *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*), following the idea that "language is not necessary discourse. Discourse is linked to context. Discourse requires participants. Discourse is built on responsivity. And Discourse is bounded by structure" (Strauss and Feiz 9).

The internal framework of rules and provisions sets the foundation of what all staff need to know and how they are expected to perform their duties. In fact, the Discourse of the EU HRM legal framework sets the performative view of the organisation vis-à-vis its workforce (Bréda et al.; Cotter and Marschall; Holmes). Because of organisational dynamics, everyone is faced with an established set of norms and rules, but also values that determine and contribute to the creation of one's own identity within the organisational structure (Baker, *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*; Cotter and Marschall; Edward; European Commission, *The Business Case for Diversity*; Gee, *An Introduction; How to Do*; Penas-Ibáñez and López-Sáenz).

Regarding the (per)use of the language in this communicative context, EU civil servants structure their experiences of reality (Foucault) and try to "digest" them as their own. In fact, as determined by Wodak and Fairclough ("Critical Discourse Analysis"), "organizations are socially constructed through acts of languaging which create situations, knowledge, social identities and relationship between people and groups" (258). This implies that organizations naturally bring together diverse individuals, and that establishing common ground can help improve cooperation and integration among all staff members (Bréda et al.).

In our opinion, if the management of equality, diversity, and gender neutrality is not consistent with the principles and values that have crafted the identity of the European Union itself, a dissonance might be perceived both internally by staff members and externally by the general public.

For the purpose of determining the discourse around the values of equality and diversity in the EU HRM legal corpus, the latter is analyzed in this research in the Austinian sense (Austin), i.e., Discourse as an overall "speech act." Consequently:

> Almost any speech act is really the performance of several acts at once, distinguished by different aspects of the speaker's intention: there is the act of saying something, what one does in saying it, such as requesting or promising, and how one is trying to affect one's audience. (Ingber 134)

This might seem like a bold assumption, but it should be noted that the EU HRM legal corpus prescribes and guides the behavior of all EU staff in the various stages of their working life in the EU institutions. Even the least qualified and experienced staff members consult the corpus, at least on some occasions, for guidance or to understand the rules governing their working life. As mentioned, the EU HRM legal corpus regulates the legal aspects related to career, working time, family allowances and emoluments, requests for special leave or pension management, together with the implementation of social measures and insurance entitlements.

Since the nature and the tone of the different provisions in the corpus are clearly prescriptive, it is to be expected that staff members receive equality and diversity discourse in the corpus as a well-established framework to embrace equality in EU institutions.

By analyzing various aspects of this discourse, this research highlights that organisational corporate texts are significant and entail a certain agency, which can make the difference in the EU internal context and its set of values (Cotter Marschall). As aforementioned, the overall Discourse on gender in the EU HRM legal corpus is considered insufficient to guarantee that gender mainstreaming is implemented successfully.

4. Research Findings

The first finding on the lack of gender neutrality refers to the use of unmarked masculine forms throughout the corpus, stemming from the first Article of the EU Staff Regulations, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper:

> Any reference in these Staff Regulations to a person of the male sex shall be deemed also to constitute a reference to a person of the female sex, and vice-versa unless the context clearly indicates otherwise. (European Council, *Regulation No. 31 (EEC)* 4)

As the plural form might be used in the English language (Pearce), the arguments for using only the masculine pronoun cannot be defended. This

article was firstly introduced with the reform of the Staff Regulations of 2004, supposedly to address gender neutrality.

It seems that article 1c of the Staff Regulations was introduced only as a disclaimer, hence denying responsibility for the absence of references to the feminine gender, and possibly to avoid revising the references to male staff members in most parts of the Staff Regulations. The concealed message of the legislator, however, becomes plainly evident as an attempt to avoid changing all the pronouns in the Staff Regulations and at the same time to raise awareness of the need to use inclusive language that respects the gender identity of female staff members.

The concordance of the pronoun "he" amounts to 506 hits in the entire corpus (Fig. 1), which is not surprising, given the caveat expressed in Article 1c, quoted above.

Fig. 1. KWIC results for the term "he"

Concordance Hits 506

Hit	KWIC	File
1	Article 55b of the Staff Regulations. He may do so by applying for	C(2004) 1314 Job sharing (1).txt
2	months' notice. In the latter case, he may be transferred or reassigned to	C(2004) 1314 Job sharing (1).txt
3	out in Articles 2 and 3, he shall be replaced by the designated	C(2004) 1318 Commission driver
4	reserve driver are not fully used, he shall remain available to the Commission'	C(2004) 1318 Commission driver
5	) of the Staff Regulations, if s/he is physically and mentally able to	C(2004) 1318 Recruitment of dis:
6	a mental or physical impairment, s/he shall state in his/her report	C(2004) 1318 Recruitment of dis:
7	, as determined below, is provided. S/He shall also state whether in his/	C(2004) 1318 Recruitment of dis:
8	months after the date on which he attains this age. The request must	C(2004) 1364 Calculation of pens
9	months of the date on which he is notified of the amount to	C(2004) 1364 Calculation of pens
10	of the child can prove that he or she actually and habitually lives.	C(2004) 1364 Family allowances.
11	's brother or sister, even if he or she has no means whatsoever,	C(2004) 1364 Household allowan
12	official's household and 20% where he or she does; for the remaining	C(2004) 1364 Persons to be treat
13	child is requested or of which he or she is the usufructuary. This	C(2004) 1364 Persons to be treat
14	, the official must provide evidence that he or she is contributing regularly to	C(2004) 1364 Persons to be treat
15	former member of a European institution. He/she shall be remunerated on a	C(2004) 1588 Disciplinary proced
16	certificate promptly to the Medical Service he or she must notify or have	C(2004) 1597 Absences of sickne
17	the official is unable to travel, he or she must notify the medical	C(2004) 1597 Absences of sickne
18	person concerned is fit to work, he or she shall immediately inform the	C(2004) 1597 Absences of sickne
19	grounds for a period during which he or she has already been authorised	C(2004) 1597 Absences of sickne
20	part-time working on medical grounds, he must ask the Medical Service?	C(2004) 1597 Absences of sickne

The second interesting feature of the research refers to the use of feminine forms. The pronoun "she" does not occur independently at any point in the text, revealing that gender sensitivity is not reflected in the text. There are only seven instances in the corpus where the combined form "he or she" is used. This renders the phrase in Article 1c—"and vice versa unless the context clearly indicates otherwise"—largely redundant, since the context never indicates otherwise.

In order to further explore the principle of gender sensitivity in language, it is necessary to analyze the use of masculine and feminine pronouns combined, not only in the Staff Regulations but also in the rest of the EU HRM legal corpus. The findings of the research point to the fact

that there is no consistency in the use of the terms "he" and "she." Different forms are used to express the subject or object in feminine or masculine form: "he," "she," "he or she," "he/she," "him," "her," "him/her," "him or her," "his," "her," "hers," "his/her," "his or her." In particular, to refer to both female and male, we can find in the corpus the combined forms "he or she," "he/she," "s/he."

It seems that the form "he/she" was included in the Staff Regulations' reform of 2004, which reveals that the inconsistency in the use of masculine and feminine pronouns responds to the different policies on linguistic diversity embedded in the EU HRM legal framework.

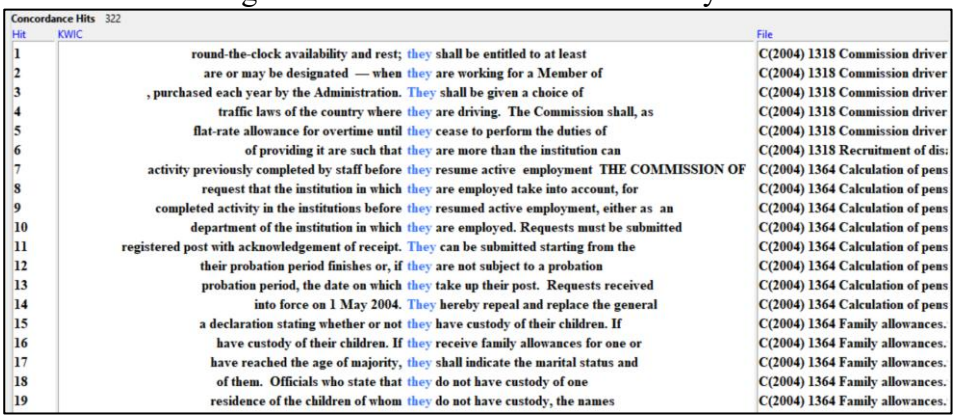
This is a crucial factor in determining the consistency in style of the various parts of the corpus, as diachronic variation, stemming from provisions written in different years, often plays a significant role.

The research showed that the use of the masculine stand-alone form or the masculine/feminine form in the corpus is rather inconsistent. It should be noted that the presence in the EU HRM legal corpus of the unmarked masculine form "he," for example, is rather limited in all implementing provisions. In these texts, in fact, the feminine form is used in combination with the masculine one in many instances, while in the Staff Regulations this is not the case; rather, the opposite holds. In the Staff Regulations, the use of the unmarked masculine form seems to be standard practice.

We can observe that the use of the masculine form is a settled and established practice in the Staff Regulations of Officials and Condition of Employment of Other Servants, while the combined masculine/feminine form is preferred over the unmarked masculine form in the language of implementing provisions. As mentioned, the consistency in such sense is also rather limited since there is no clear rationale for the use of the two forms. While there are certain exceptions as outlined below, the use of the unmarked masculine form may be perceived as discriminatory towards women (Gathercole; Pauwels; Sulis and Gheno).

The gender-neutral form "they," as recommended in the paper Gender Neutral Language of the European Parliament (European Parliament, *Gender Neutral Language*) is also not present in the corpus. The form "they" hits only 322 times in the corpus, and it is not always used to guarantee a better gender neutrality.

Fig. 2. KWIC results for the term "they"



Concordance Hits 322

Hit	KWIC	File
1	round-the-clock availability and rest; they shall be entitled to at least	C(2004) 1318 Commission driver
2	are or may be designated — when they are working for a Member of	C(2004) 1318 Commission driver
3	, purchased each year by the Administration. They shall be given a choice of	C(2004) 1318 Commission driver
4	traffic laws of the country where they are driving. The Commission shall, as	C(2004) 1318 Commission driver
5	flat-rate allowance for overtime until they cease to perform the duties of	C(2004) 1318 Commission driver
6	of providing it are such that they are more than the institution can	C(2004) 1318 Recruitment of dis:
7	activity previously completed by staff before they resume active employment THE COMMISSION OF	C(2004) 1364 Calculation of pens
8	request that the institution in which they are employed take into account, for	C(2004) 1364 Calculation of pens
9	completed activity in the institutions before they resumed active employment, either as an	C(2004) 1364 Calculation of pens
10	department of the institution in which they are employed. Requests must be submitted	C(2004) 1364 Calculation of pens
11	registered post with acknowledgement of receipt. They can be submitted starting from the	C(2004) 1364 Calculation of pens
12	their probation period finishes or, if they are not subject to a probation	C(2004) 1364 Calculation of pens
13	probation period, the date on which they take up their post. Requests received	C(2004) 1364 Calculation of pens
14	into force on 1 May 2004. They hereby repeal and replace the general	C(2004) 1364 Calculation of pens
15	a declaration stating whether or not they have custody of their children. If	C(2004) 1364 Family allowances.
16	have custody of their children. If they receive family allowances for one or	C(2004) 1364 Family allowances.
17	have reached the age of majority, they shall indicate the marital status and	C(2004) 1364 Family allowances.
18	of them. Officials who state that they do not have custody of one	C(2004) 1364 Family allowances.
19	residence of the children of whom they do not have custody, the names	C(2004) 1364 Family allowances.

In order to further explore the most interesting features related to the use of the masculine and feminine pronouns in the EU HRM legal corpus, this research throughly examined the provisions with a high degree of inconsistency in the use of those pronouns, as we can find examples where the combined "he/she" form is used, implying that both pronouns need to be included to ensure gender-inclusive language:

> The divorced spouse of an official or a former official shall be entitled to a survivor's pension, provided that, on the death of the former spouse, he/she can justify entitlement on his/her own account to receive maintenance from him by virtue of a court order or as a result of an officially registered settlement in force between himself/herself and his/her former spouse. (European Council, *Regulation No. 31 (EEC)* 121)

This example is excerpted from Article 27 of Annex VII, and it was added in the 2004 Staff Regulations reform. This example reveals that the addition seems to be in line with the ongoing non-sexist language practices in 2004, which tended to use both pronouns to avoid being interpreted as biased or discriminatory against women (Council of Europe).

There is another implementing provision, the Commission Decision on disciplinary procedures (C(2004) 1588), which also includes the same form "he/she." However, it is to be noted that other implementing provisions of the same period display the inconsistent use of either the unmarked masculine only or the combined "he or she" forms. A possible explanation for this could be related to the different drafters of the text or,

more specifically, to the chefs de file, which is the department within the Commission responsible for each subject matter.

These inconsistencies may, therefore, be attributed to their interpretation of the policies of the EU on the use of non-sexist language in documents and communications. Nonetheless, thorough scrutiny of the different rules on the same legal topic (in this case, pensions) confirms a lack of consistency in the use of gender pronouns that cannot be attributed to either the time when the provision was drafted or to the particular subject matter. The implementing provision on transfer of pension rights, for example, addresses the same subject matter, but uses the gender form "he and the combination "he or she" interchangeably, and never uses the form "he/she."

Another example is the implementing provision on absences because of sickness or accident (C(2004) 1957), where most gender forms are the combined "he or she," except for one instance where only the unmarked masculine pronouns "he" and "him" are used:

> Part-time work on medical grounds will be granted by the Medical Service either on its own initiative or following a request by the official or other servant. If it is the official or another servant who requests part-time work on medical grounds, he must ask the Medical Service for a medical examination and produce a reasoned attestation from the doctor treating him. (European Commission, *Absences*, 7)

Of the remaining implementing provisions which use an inconsistent mix of pronouns, two include all forms ("he," "he/she" and "he and she"), three include "he" and "he or she" and one includes "he" and "he/she." All data are reported in Table 1:

Table 1. Use of masculine and feminine pronouns in the different texts of the EU HRM legal corpus

Implementing provision	Masculine form only	Masculine and feminine	Mixed
Staff Regulation and Condition of Employment of Other Servants	he	he/she	yes
Job-sharing C(2004) 1314 of 14/04/2004	he		
Duties of Commission drivers C(2004) 1318 of 07/04/2004	he		
Recruitment of disabled persons C(2004) 1318 of 7/04/2004		s/he	
Calculation of pension rights C(2004) 1364 of 15/04/2004	he		
Persons treated as dependent child C(2004) 1364/2 of 15/04/2004		he or she	
Family allowances C(2004) 1364/4 of 15/04/2004		he or she	
Household allowance C(2004) 1364/4 of 15/04/2004		he or she	
Disciplinary procedures C(2004) 1588 of 28/04/2004 and C(2010) 8180 of 24/02/2010		he/she	
Sickness or accident absences C(2004) 1597/11 of 28/04/2004	he	he or she	yes
Anti-Harassment C(2006) 1624/3 of 26/04/2006		he or she	
Middle management C(2008) 5028/2 of 9/09/2008 and C92016) 3288 of 16/06/2016		he or she	

Missions guide C(2008) 6215 of 18/11/2008 and C(2017) 5323 of 27/09/2017		he or she	
Teleworking C(2009) 10224 of 18/12/2009 and C(2013) 9045 of 16/12/2013		he or she	
Temporary occupation of management posts C(2009) 7839 of 19/10/2009		he/she	
Family leave C(2010) 7494 of 05/11/2010		he/she	
Parental leave C(2010) 7572 of 05/11/2010		he/she	
Employment of Contract Staff C(2011) 1264 of 02/03/2011 and C(2013) 8967 of 16/12/2013	he	he or she and he/she	yes
Transfer of pension rights C(2011) 1278 of 03/03/2011	he	he or she	yes
Reclassification of CAs C(2013) 2529 of 03/05/2013 and C(2014) 2222 of 07/04/2014		he or she	
Assistance with home care or sick child C(2013) 4876 of 07/08/2013		he or she	
Outside activities C(2013) 9037 of 16/12/2013	he		
Classification C(2013) 8970 of 16/12/2013	he		
Working time C(2014) 2502 of 14/04/2014		he or she	
Part-time work C(2013) 9046 of 16/12/2013	he	he or she	yes
Leave C(2013) 9051 of 16/12/2013	he	he or she and he/she	yes
Education allowance C(2013) 8971 of 16/12/2013		he/she	

Place of origin C(2013) 8982 of 16/12/2013	he		
Removal expenses C(2013) 9040 of 16/12/2013	he		
Leave on personal grounds for officials . . . C(2013)9054 of 16/12/2013	he		
Appraisal of officials and temporary agents C(2013) 8985 of 16/12/2013	he	he or she	yes
Promotions C(2013) 8968 of 16/12/2013		he or she	
Reimbursement due to officials assigned non-EU C(2013) 8990 of 16/12/2013	he		
Housing policy C(2013) 8965 of 16/12/2013	he	he/she	yes
Living conditions allowance C(2013) 9032 of 16/12/2013		he/she	
Policies for engagement of temporary staff C(2013) 9049 of 16/12/2013	he		
Appraisal of contract staff C(2014) 2226 of 07/04/2014	he	s/he	
Adviser functions C(2016) 3214 of 07/06/2016	he		

Of particular interest is the provision on the engagement of contract staff (C(2013) 8967), where we can find a prevalence of the combined form "he or she," one instance in which the drafter included the form "he/she," and another instance in which only the variant "he" is included. The use of the inclusive or unmarked masculine form "he" in this provision is particularly revealing when analyzing non-sexist and gender-inclusive language within the EU legal framework since the pronoun refers to the role of the appeal assessor:

> The appeal assessor shall be the Director-General carrying out this duty at the moment of his or her first intervention in the appraisal procedure. He

> may delegate the role of appeal assessor to a member of senior management. (European Commission, Engagement 12)

The role of the appeal assessor is normally performed by the Director-General in the European Commission and the use of the inclusive "he" draws the attention to the fact that such prominent role in the hierarchy is usually held by a man. Thus, the use of the unmarked masculine form may affect the social perception of professional roles and "lead to a male bias in mental representations" (Horvath et al. 1).

This is a clear example of unmarked masculine form that supports an increase in male representation, contributing to making women less important in the workplace, especially beyond certain managerial levels. In contrast, when referring to the role of contract staff, which by nature does not involved any managerial responsibilities, a combination of masculine and feminine pronouns is present. The use of gender-fair alternatives, in this case, indicates that women can also be associated with this particular role.

To validate this hypothesis that word choice reflects implicit gender bias and may affect the social perception of professions, the implementing provision on the appraisal of contract staff (C(2014) 2226) was analyzed. This provision follows a remarkably similar pattern in the use of gender forms to the provision on the engagement of contract staff since the combined forms "he or she" are used when referring to the role of contract staff and the unmarked masculine pronoun "he" is used to refer to a countersigning officer:

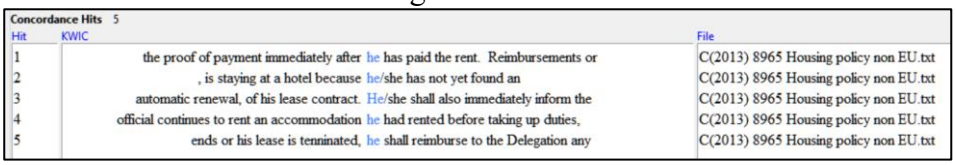
> The countersigning officer shall verify whether the appraisal procedure has been respected and whether the report has been drafted in a coherent manner, in accordance with these general implementing provisions and consistent with the Staff Member's performance. He shall confirm, complete or modify the report. (European Commission, Appraisal of Contract Staff 5)

It should be noted that, similarly to the appeal assessor, the countersigning officer is a manager, normally ranking as high as a director. This confirms that masculine pronouns are preferred for referring to high-ranking roles, while word pairs combining masculine and feminine pronouns are usually chosen when referring to low-ranking roles.

Another interesting example of inconsistent and biased use of gender forms in the corpus can be found in the implementing provision on housing

outside the EU. In this text, the variations included are "he/she" and "he." It is particularly interesting to note that "he" is the form used with verbs related to rent and payment—"rent," "reimburse," "pay"—and "he/she" is used with verbs related to arrangement and information—"find," "inform" (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. KWIC of the pronoun "he" in the implementing provision on housing outside the EU



Concordance Hits 5

Hit	KWIC	File
1	the proof of payment immediately after he has paid the rent. Reimbursements or	C(2013) 8965 Housing policy non EU.txt
2	, is staying at a hotel because he/she has not yet found an	C(2013) 8965 Housing policy non EU.txt
3	automatic renewal, of his lease contract. He/she shall also immediately inform the	C(2013) 8965 Housing policy non EU.txt
4	official continues to rent an accommodation he had rented before taking up duties,	C(2013) 8965 Housing policy non EU.txt
5	ends or his lease is tenninated, he shall reimburse to the Delegation any	C(2013) 8965 Housing policy non EU.txt

Without prejudice to the fact that pronoun choice might be unintentional, these patterns may reflect bias related to gender stereotypical roles, where the man is the one in charge of paying the rent and the woman the one in charge of practicalities, such as liaise with housing agents to find a place to rent and inform the administration:

> The use of words, phrases, and language constructions related to gender role stereotypes can reflect societal perceptions of strengths, gentleness, or household roles associated with certain genders. (Salsabila et al.)

In the corpus, there are also some examples where pronouns are not linked to gender stereotypes. One example can be found in the implementing provision on leave, where, as described above, the patterns of pronoun choice vary from the unmarked masculine form "he," to the more inclusive word pairs "he or she" and "he/she." It is worth mentioning that all the pronouns used in this text refer interchangeably to staff members as well as to the Appointing Authority, with no difference in the use of masculine *vis-à-vis* the role of management. It can, therefore, be concluded that, in this specific provision, inconsistencies in the use of pronouns do not reflect bias related to gender roles and do not contribute to reinforcing the social perception of masculine vs feminine professions.

These findings are corroborated by the analysis of collocations. A particularly illustrative example to highlight the predominant unmarked masculine form is the study of two different collocates, "husband" and "wife." While the corpus brings scarce evidence of neutral terms, such as

"spouse(s)," with only 33 tokens, it is interesting to read the discourse that the terms "husband" and "wife" bring along.

In fact, the term "spouse" has been introduced in the EU HRM legal corpus with the 2013 revision and is used in different instances together with the terms "husband" and "wife." Although a positive shift to a more neutral language is taking place, there are still examples where the terminology is neither fostering the integration of LGBTI persons nor contributing to embracing diverse sexual orientations and identities within the EU staff. For example, in different provisions, mostly related to payments and allowances, the terms "wife" and "husband" are still the only ones attested.

The data included in Table 2 and Table 3 clearly show that both "husband" and "wife" collocate with each other, and that both terms have some collocates in common, such as "employed," "official," "request." The term "wife" is the only one which also collocates with words such as "maternity," "birth" and "death," words which never collocate with the term "husband" in the EU HRM legal corpus.

Table 2. Collocates of the term "husband"

Frequency	Freq (L)	Freq (R)	Stat	Collocate
1	1	0	14.9721	cases
7	0	7	14.6095	wife
1	1	0	11.1647	foregoing
1	0	1	9.1141	both
3	3	0	8.66223	cases
1	0	1	8.51265	employed
1	1	0	8.05322	meaning
5	0	5	8.02722	officials
5	0	5	7.90815	are
4	0	4	7.84796	who

Table 3. Collocates of the term "wife"

Frequency	Freq (L)	Freq (R)	Stat	Collocate
7	7	0	14.6095	husband
1	1	0	14.6095	cases
1	1	0	10.8022	foregoing
1	1	0	10.2876	deceased
2	1	1	9.63223	maternity
1	1	0	9.08595	birth
1	0	1	8.75153	both
3	3	0	8.29966	cases
1	0	1	8.15008	employed
5	0	5	7.66465	officials

Although this may be explained by the diachronic nature of the EU HRM legal corpus (Barone), drafted over a span of more than fifty-five years and bearing a different sensitivity towards gender-inclusive language, it shows a stereotypical role associated with the concept of "wife" (Salsabila et al.). Since the text has not been redrafted in recent years, this lack of sensitivity regarding the power of language to foster or hinder equality is obvious and needs to be redressed.

These considerations lead to another important aspect highlighted by this research, which is related to the situated meaning of the discourse on gender in the EU HRM legal corpus. In other words, without prejudice to the disclaimer of Article 1c of the EU Staff Regulations, one may wonder how the continuous use of the unmarked masculine forms throughout the entire corpus is perceived.

Besides the use of gender-neutral pronouns, looking into the nouns related to gender neutrality, it is interesting to note that no shift has been made on a diachronic dimension on the use of more inclusive denominations. In fact, some examples of the use of non-gender-neutral nouns in the EU HRM legal corpus are related to terms such as "chairman," which is used instead of "chairperson" or simply "chair." The term appears 47 times in the corpus and its occurrence is not particularly surprising, given the fact that in Europe there is still a European Ombudsman and not an Ombudsperson. The use of terms which are not gender-neutral, such as "chairman" in this example, reinforces gender stereotypes such as "man as professional" and "woman as silence" (Fuertes-Olivera).

CONCLUSIONS

In any communicative act, there are two distinct types of meaning which the recipient perceives (Gee, *An Introduction*). On the one hand, the general meaning, when the recipient has general expectations on how language is normally used. On the other hand, a particular context meaning in which the recipient interprets the sense of the communication as situated in a particular context. Words and sentences in a specific communication do not always align with the general understanding or use of a word, although they contribute to shaping the general practice of participants in communication.

Unmarked masculine forms usually activate male-only representations, resulting in the drastic invisibilization of women. The findings of this research show that the massive use of unmarked masculine forms in the EU HRM legal framework might contribute not only to decreasing the level of gender sensitivity in staff working for the EU institutions, but it may also lead to interpreting its discourse as biased and discriminatory against women.

In fact, the results of the investigation conducted on the rules governing the legal framework of EU civil servants show that the instances of the masculine pronoun "he" amounts to 506 hits, while "she" appears only a few times and mostly in the lexical bundle including the masculine form "he or she." While there are cases where "they" as gender-neutral pronoun is used, the term occurs only 322 times in the corpus.

This is a flagrant contradiction to the principles of the EU on the use of gender-neutral language (European Parliament, *Gender Neutral Language*). This situation may contribute to the construction of a prototypical image of the male EU staff member as null gender, thus perpetuating the assumption that the default and normative gender is male rather than female (Fuertes-Olivera; Wagner et al.).

At the same time, the findings point to a possible shift towards gender-neutral language, as illustrated by the growing use of terms such as "spouse," instead of "husband" and "wife," and the choice of more inclusive pronouns, such as "he or she" and "he/she," in some of the latest legal provision.

In addition, the analysis demonstrates that the EU HRM legal framework establishes a robust set of rules to safeguard dignity and ensure equal treatment for all individuals, in line with the policies and principles of the EU institutions. Considering all initiatives of the the EU institutions

towards a more inclusive working environment, the trend is surely going in the right direction.

The identity of the civil servants working for the EU institutions, and their endeavors to foster gender equality, may be strengthened by a more consistent use of gender-neutral language, which could reaffirm the core values and principles of the European Union by embedding them in all its texts.

After conducting this research, it is a contention of the author that the magnitude of the effect of such an effort to improve gender-neutral language in the EU Staff Regulations would be substantially impactful on the staff working for the European Union.

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Cartographies of Loss and Resistance in the Palestinian Diaspora: Homeland, Memory and the Female Body in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* and Lina Meruane's *Volverse Palestina*

Cartografiando la pérdida y la resistencia desde la diáspora palestina: hogar, memoria y el cuerpo femenino en *Mornings in Jenin*, de Susan Abulhawa, y en *Volverse Palestina*, de Lina Meruane

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Abstract: This article examines *Mornings in Jenin* by Susan Abulhawa and *Volverse Palestina* by Lina Meruane through the lens of postcolonial feminism, along with contributions from memory studies, and decolonial theory. It argues that both writers transform language into a homeland of resistance, reimagining exile as a space of gendered agency and narrative reclamation. While Abulhawa reconstructs collective memory through English realism, Meruane reclaims Palestinian identity through Spanish introspection. Across linguistic and cultural divides, both authors articulate a decolonial poetics of survival where storytelling becomes the final act of return.
Keywords: exile; language; postmemory; decolonial feminism; Palestinian diaspora.
Summary: Introduction. Postcolonial Feminist Readings of English and Spanish Palestinian Diasporic Narratives. Home, Exile, and the Imagined Return. Memory, Postmemory, and Generational Inheritance. Gendered Bodies and the Politics of Suffering. Conclusions.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza *Mornings in Jenin* de Susan Abulhawa y *Volverse Palestina* de Lina Meruane desde la perspectiva del feminismo poscolonial, incorporando contribuciones de los estudios de la memoria y la teoría decolonial. Se sostiene que ambas escritoras convierten el lenguaje en una patria de resistencia, transformando el exilio en un espacio de agencia femenina y de recuperación narrativa. Mientras Abulhawa reconstruye la memoria colectiva mediante el realismo en inglés, Meruane reivindica la identidad palestina a través de la introspección en español. A pesar de las divisiones lingüísticas y culturales, ambas articulan una poética decolonial de supervivencia donde narrar es el último acto de retorno.
Palabras clave: exilio; lenguaje; posmemoria; feminismo decolonial; diáspora palestina.
Sumario: Introducción. Lecturas feministas poscoloniales de narrativas diaspóricas palestinas en inglés y español. Hogar, exilio y el retorno imaginado. Memoria, posmemoria y herencia generacional. Cuerpos generizados y la política del sufrimiento. Conclusiones.

INTRODUCTION

The narratives of the Palestinian diaspora, particularly those penned by women, constitute a vital and insurgent archive against historical erasure and geopolitical silencing. Operating from within and across the languages of global power, these writers perform a dual act of translation: transforming personal exile into collective testimony and repurposing colonial idioms into vehicles of decolonial remembrance. This article examines two singular contributions to this corpus: Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010), written in English, and Lina Meruane's *Volverse Palestina* (2013), composed in Spanish. Though emerging from distinct linguistic landscapes and generational vantage points—Abulhawa from the heart of Anglophone discourse and Meruane from the Latin American periphery—both texts converge in their profound exploration of loss, resistance, memory, and the gendered reclamation of identity. In the pages that follow, loss and resistance will be analyzed through the lens of postcolonial feminism not as sequential phases but as a unified whole, examined through three interconnected axes: the lost homeland, reconstituted through narrative; the workings of memory, which defies temporal erasure; and the female body, which becomes both a site of wounding and a vessel for resurgence.

Susan Abulhawa is a Palestinian-American novelist, poet, and activist whose work centers on exile, memory, and intergenerational trauma within the Palestinian diaspora. Her debut novel, *Mornings in Jenin*, offers a sweeping historical narrative that traces one family's displacement from the village of Ein Hod during the 1948 Nakba through subsequent decades of war, occupation, and diaspora. Blending intimate focalization with

geopolitical history, the novel situates private grief within the broader structure of settler colonialism, foregrounding how forced migration fractures kinship, identity, and belonging while also sustaining forms of cultural continuity. In a different but dialogic register, Lina Meruane—a Chilean writer of Palestinian descent—approaches Palestinian identity from the positionality of diasporic return. In *Volverse Palestina*, Meruane constructs a hybrid memoir-chronicle that documents her journey to Palestine in search of familial and historical roots, interrogating the affective and political dimensions of "becoming" Palestinian from afar. Whereas Abulhawa fictionalizes collective trauma through a multigenerational realist saga, Meruane mobilizes autofictional and essayistic strategies to explore belated identification, mediated memory, and the ethics of witnessing, together mapping complementary literary cartographies of Palestinian identity across displacement and return.

Ultimately, the two authors' views of resistance converge in their insistence on storytelling as a fundamental act of survival—a means of defying the finality of exile and inscribing Palestine onto the global literary map. Yet they diverge in their formal and philosophical approaches to this task: where Abulhawa's epic realism mounts a resistance of reconstruction, painstakingly rebuilding a world to prove its historical existence, Meruane's introspective autofiction enacts a resistance of deconstruction, relentlessly questioning the possibility of fully possessing either memory or homeland. Together, these distinct strategies illuminate the rich plurality of the Palestinian literary voice, demonstrating that resistance is not a monolithic cry but a polyphonic conversation across generations, languages, and genres.

1. Postcolonial Feminist Readings of English and Spanish Palestinian Diasporic Narratives

The exploration of identity in the works of Susan Abulhawa and Lina Meruane demands a theoretical foundation that foregrounds postcolonial feminism while also drawing on memory studies, decolonial theory, and spatial thinking. Their narratives of Palestinian displacement, written in English and Spanish, resist hegemonic constructions of Arab womanhood and contest the erasures produced by colonial histories.

At the core of this framework lies postcolonial feminism, which exposes how global power structures marginalize women of the Global South within both colonial and mainstream feminist discourses. In this line

of thought, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's article "Under Western Eyes" critiques Western feminism's tendency to homogenize "Third World women," arguing that colonization entails structural domination and the suppression of heterogeneity (Mohanty 333). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theorization of the subaltern further questions whether women who are doubly silenced by patriarchy and imperialism can attain self-representation, insisting that "the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous" (Spivak 271). These insights are crucial for reading Abulhawa and Meruane, whose texts speak from positions of racialized and gendered exile, refusing both the universalization and the silencing of Palestinian womanhood.

Postcolonial feminism also illuminates the gendered politics of Orientalist representation. In *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed traces how colonial regimes instrumentalized images of Arab and Muslim women to legitimize domination, a dynamic that Lila Abu-Lughod revisits in *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, where the figure of the Muslim woman becomes a pretext for imperial rescue. Abulhawa's works, *Mornings in Jenin* and *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015), counter the trope of the "oppressed Arab woman" by foregrounding female resilience and relational forms of agency within ongoing occupation and displacement. Meanwhile, working from Latin America and the United States, Meruane's narratives reclaim Palestinian women's voices from within Western and Latin American cultural fields, inhabiting what Sara Suleri terms "imperial intimacy," a space in which colonial power is experienced not as a simple binary but as an intricate, everyday entanglement (Suleri 9). Rather than writing from a position of pure exteriority to Western modernity, both authors negotiate, appropriate, and subvert the very discourses that have historically defined and constrained them.

Diaspora theory provides a second pillar for this postcolonial feminist approach by conceptualizing exile as an ongoing process rather than a completed rupture. Stuart Hall famously defines identity as "a production which is never complete, always in process" (Hall 222), a formulation that resonates with Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity and the "Third Space" where cultural meanings are renegotiated (Bhabha 55). For Palestinian diasporic subjects, identity is not anchored solely in a lost homeland nor dissolved into the host nation; instead, it is formed in the interstices between dispossession, adaptation, and political struggle. Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora* emphasizes that diaspora is not only

about routes but also about the affective geographies of memory, longing, and the contested politics of return. On the other hand, Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile* describes exile as "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place" while acknowledging the critical and creative possibilities that displacement opens (Said 180). Abulhawa and Meruane transform that rift into literary energy, crafting gendered narratives in which exile becomes a site of reconfiguration rather than pure loss.

To sharpen this focus on space, it is necessary to introduce spatial theory to define cartography and geopolitics as key terms to define what both authors achieve with their works. Following relational conceptions of space, cartography in this paper refers not merely to literal maps but to the narrative and symbolic mapping of routes, borders, and everyday spaces through which Palestinian women's lives are organized and imagined. In Abulhawa and Meruane, such feminist cartographies chart movements across camps, cities, checkpoints, and domestic interiors, tracing how these spaces are saturated with memory, affect, and power. Geopolitics, by contrast, designates the material and discursive structures—occupation, borders, citizenship regimes, and racialized surveillance—that shape who can move, who can return, and whose suffering is rendered visible. Read together, cartography and geopolitics illuminate how gendered exile is lived at the intersection of intimate spaces and global power formations, allowing the novels to be understood as postcolonial feminist remappings of Palestinian space.

Within this spatialized framework, memory studies function as a supporting tool that clarifies how the past inhabits the present of diasporic women. Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory describes how descendants of trauma survivors inherit memories they did not themselves experience, yet that profoundly shape their identities. For many diasporic Palestinians, especially those born in exile, Palestine is known through transmitted stories, photographs, and silences rather than direct experience. In *Mornings in Jenin*, Abulhawa's intergenerational narrative follows Palestinian women whose private grief is inseparable from collective dispossession, exemplifying Cathy Caruth's claim that trauma is constituted by its belated, unassimilated return rather than by a single original event (Caruth 4). Dominick LaCapra's distinction between "acting out" and "working through" helps articulate how these texts dramatize oscillations between compulsive repetition and critical engagement, as characters alternately relive and re-narrate inherited wounds.

Meruane's *Volverse Palestina* performs a related, yet formally distinct, act of postmemorial reconstruction. Writing from Chile and in Spanish, she stages a journey to Palestine as both physical travel and narrative inquiry into family origins, practicing what Svetlana Boym calls "reflective nostalgia," a mode that "dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging" and "lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history" rather than idealizing a lost home (Boym 41). Reflective nostalgia here becomes a feminist method for questioning inherited myths, acknowledging fragmentation, and imagining solidarities that do not depend on a purified or fully recoverable past. In both Abulhawa and Meruane, memory thus emerges as an aesthetic and political practice of resistance to erasure, a practice that is always mediated by language.

Language itself is the third axis of this framework: it is where postcolonial feminism, decolonial thought, and memory converge. Writing in English, Abulhawa engages the colonial language to "decolonise the mind," in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's sense, transforming the idiom of empire into a vehicle for Palestinian testimony. Lina Meruane, by contrast, writes predominantly in Spanish, a language historically marked by Iberian colonialism yet also by Latin American anti-colonial struggles and traditions of testimonio. Jacques Derrida's reflections in *Monolingualism of the Other* highlight how language is always, to some extent, the property of the Other, producing a constitutive linguistic estrangement that resonates with diasporic experience. Walter Mignolo's concept of "border thinking" further clarifies Meruane's position: situated at the epistemic borders of the Arab world and Latin America, she produces knowledge from the peripheries of multiple cultural and linguistic systems (Mignolo 61). This border epistemology echoes Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, where "mestiza consciousness" names a mode of identity formed through the negotiation of overlapping linguistic and cultural borders (Anzaldúa 77). Abulhawa similarly inhabits a literary "Third Space" of enunciation (Bhabha 37), where code-switching, translation, and intertextuality become strategies for reimagining Palestinian identity across English, Arabic, and other idioms.

These translingual practices feed into a broader decolonial feminist praxis that the novels collectively enact. Boaventura de Sousa Santos's call for "epistemologies of the South" urges attention to knowledges produced from sites of struggle and marginality (de Sousa Santos 19). Abulhawa and Meruane respond to this call by writing from the margins of empire—U.S. and Latin American contexts deeply implicated in global power

structures—while centering Palestinian women's experiences of war, displacement, and everyday negotiation. Frantz Fanon's reflections in *Black Skin, White Masks* on language as both a marker of colonial alienation and a site of psychic conflict are reworked in Abulhawa's fiction: English becomes not simply the sign of assimilation, but a weaponized resource for narrating Palestinian histories to global audiences. In Meruane's case, the Spanish-language tradition of testimonio enables her to link Palestinian dispossession to Latin American histories of dictatorship, exile, and resistance, forging a South-South solidarity that exceeds Eurocentric geopolitical frames.

Finally, transnational feminist theory and affect studies help name the specifically gendered dimensions of this decolonial, spatial, and mnemonic project. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan argue that transnational feminism must account for how globalization produces differentiated subjectivities, rather than assuming a unified category of "women" (Grewal and Kaplan 13). Abulhawa's fiction often centers maternal figures whose labor of care and remembrance functions as a form of political endurance, while Meruane's narrators foreground embodied vulnerability—illness, partial blindness, and visibility—as critical lenses on power. Sara Ahmed's notion of "affective economies" elucidates how emotions such as shame, loss, anger, and pride circulate between individual bodies and collective histories, turning affect into a terrain of political struggle (44). bell hooks's distinction between marginality as imposed exclusion and marginality as a chosen "location of radical openness" offers a vocabulary for the resistant positionality that both writers claim (hooks 153). Chela Sandoval's "differential consciousness" further captures the strategic shifting of perspectives, identities, and rhetorical modes through which their protagonists navigate overlapping systems of oppression (Sandoval 140).

Therefore, Abulhawa's Anglophone and Meruane's Hispanophone narratives will be read as postcolonial feminist cartographies of gendered exile and translingual memory: they map Palestinian women's lives across contested spaces, languages, and geopolitical regimes, transforming literature into a decolonial practice of remembrance, resistance, and reimagination.

2. HOME, EXILE, AND THE IMAGINED RETURN

The idea of home in both *Mornings in Jenin* and *Volverse Palestina* is profoundly paradoxical: it signifies both origin and exile, belonging and loss. For both authors, Palestine is less a territorial certainty than a narrative homeland, a space that survives through recollection and language. However, their approaches diverge: Abulhawa reclaims a dispossessed homeland through collective memory, while Meruane reconstructs an inherited identity from the fragmentary perspective of a Chilean-Palestinian diaspora.

Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* begins with a visceral image that condenses the tension between intimacy and violence: "Amal wanted a closer look into the soldier's eyes, but the muzzle of his automatic rifle, pressed against her forehead, would not allow it" (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 11). This scene epitomizes the novel's tragic geometry: Palestine is glimpsed only through the barrel of a gun, the gaze perpetually obstructed by occupation. In spite of this fact, the novel resists erasure by anchoring its identity in the earth itself. The opening chapter recalls a prelapsarian Eden: "A small village east of Haifa lived quietly on figs and olives, open frontiers and sunshine" (13). This pastoral image of Ein Hod, rendered in lyrical prose, reclaims the continuity of a land violently redefined by history. The sensory detail—figs, olives, sunshine—transforms memory into resistance, asserting Palestinian rootedness before displacement. This rootedness is embodied in the figure of Yehya, whose connection to the land is so profound that it is literally inscribed in his hands: "Age-dappled and rough, his farmer's hands were infused with the melanin truths of those hills. The truth that an olive branch flowers only once … Yehya's hands knew those facts from a lifetime devoted to trees and their earth" (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 60). Home, for Yehya, is not an idea but a physical extension of the self, making the loss of the land a form of bodily amputation.

Meruane's *Volverse Palestina*, by contrast, begins not from possession but from estrangement:

> To return. That is the verb that assaults me every time I think about the possibility of Palestine. I tell myself: it would not be a return but merely a visit to a land where I have never been, from which I do not hold a single

> own picture . . . It would not be my return, but a borrowed return.[1] (Meruane 13)

Her repetition of "return" underscores an existential crisis: she is heir to an absence, compelled to translate someone else's nostalgia. Whereas Abulhawa's characters remember exile, Meruane inherits it. Her relationship to Palestine is mediated through imagination, archives, and paternal silence. This mediation is fraught with uncertainty; even the family name, a primary anchor of identity, becomes suspect. When a relative in Beit Jala tells her, "You are not Meruane . . . You are Saba" (Meruane 58), the very foundation of her inherited home—the name passed down through generations—crumbles, revealing the fragility of the narratives that connect her to a place she has never seen. The "home" she seeks is not a physical structure but a stable story, and that story is suddenly in doubt.

Furthermore, in *Mornings in Jenin*, the catastrophe of 1948 becomes both historical and mythic. Abulhawa writes that "forty generations of sin and charity, of cooking, toiling, and idling . . . carried away by the notion of entitlement of another people" (48). The rhythm of this sentence transforms dispossession into liturgy: daily gestures—cooking, toiling—become sacred remnants of a stolen continuity. This sense of a profound, linear history being violently truncated is reinforced by the Arab practice of naming children to preserve genealogy, a tradition Yehya reflects upon as he calculates "the number of generations who had lived and died in that village . . . a task made simple by the way Arabs name their children to tell the story of their genealogy" (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 48). The loss of the land is also the severing of this chain of names, a rupture in the very act of storytelling that defines a people. Yehya's futile return to his village crystallizes this transformation of nostalgia into martyrdom: "He had gone happily to the heaven of martyrs" (63). Death becomes the only possible mode of return, underscoring how exile recasts the homeland as an eschatological promise. Even in death, he is marked by his return, his face wearing "a smile" (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 63), a testament to the peace found in a final, fatal connection to the land.

Meruane's exploration of return, on the other hand, is far more ambivalent. When her father refuses to cross the Israeli checkpoint into the

[1] All the quotations from *Volverse Palestina* have been translated from the original Spanish into English by the author of this paper.

West Bank, she observes about her father: "He would not submit to the arbitrary wait . . . to be called a foreigner in a land he considers his own, for there it remains, uncoquered, the house of his father" (14). The father's refusal embodies a new mode of exile—one not imposed by force but chosen to preserve dignity. Later, she writes how the father reflects on how "[t]hat house has long ceased to be ours . . . It is closed with a key that no longer belongs to us" (25). The locked house becomes an emblem of generational dispossession: ownership survives only as memory. If Abulhawa's home is lost to violence, Meruane's is lost to time, but both are suspended between memory and the impossibility of return. This suspension is poignantly captured when she and her siblings stand before the family's former home, only to find it locked and inaccessible, its interior erased by an earthquake and fire: "It is locked with a key that is not ours anymore . . . I can't see anything, insist the voice of my little-brother, looking through the peephole. And perhaps there is nothing to see" (Meruane 25–26). The home, the ultimate symbol of origin, offers no visual confirmation of the past, only a void.

Emotionally, these narratives diverge sharply. Abulhawa externalizes grief through collective lament, crystallized in Dalia's scream as her son is torn from her arms: "'Ibni! Ibni!' ('My son! My son!')" (*Mornings* 46). The maternal cry collapses personal and national anguish as the mother's loss becomes the nation's wound. Meruane, by contrast, approaches exile through skepticism and irony: "I would be called a Palestinian, perhaps an exile, but I do not know my land" (31). Her confession destabilizes the rhetoric of authenticity that often dominates diasporic narratives. Abulhawa's prose is epic in tone—affirming endurance and sacrifice—whereas Meruane's is self-reflexive and anti-heroic, interrogating the very legitimacy of her longing.

Both authors suspend chronological time to depict the timelessness of displacement. Abulhawa writes that "the year 1948 in Palestine fell from the calendar into exile, ceasing to reckon the marching count of days … becoming an infinite mist of one moment in history" (*Mornings* 48). This is the central articulation of how historical time fractures into repetition and stasis, echoing the cyclical temporality of trauma. For the refugees in Jenin, 1948 is not a past event but a perpetual present. Yehya's despair upon realizing his tent has been replaced by a clay house—"The symbolic permanence of the shelter was too much to bear. He would rather have stayed in the cloth dwelling, its leaky top and muddy floor confirming only a temporary exile" (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 56)—shows how the physical

marker of time passing is itself a source of trauma, a confirmation that the rupture is not a momentary nightmare but a permanent condition. The family is stuck, waiting in "that interminable year, with its surreal twist of fate and tentative conclusion, stretching on and on, renewed each morning with the news" (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 55). Meruane similarly observes that "[t]he recapitulation of the past has become doubtful even for my father" (16). This doubt is a product of time's fracture; the linear narrative of family history has been broken. For her father, the past is not a clear chronology but a collection of questionable fragments, a condition that Meruane inherits. This is further emphasized by the loss of official records: her grandfather's birthdate is uncertain because "the birth certificate was lost when the Palestinian church burned down" (Meruane 23). Another fire, another erasure, another fracture in the timeline that makes the past inaccessible and dubious. The cyclical nature of this destruction—the family home in Chile also burns—creates a traumatic echo, a repetition of loss across generations and continents, trapping the family in a cycle where home is always under threat of immolation. In both texts, historical time fractures into repetition and stasis, echoing the cyclical temporality of trauma.

Ultimately, writing itself becomes the only viable form of return. For Abulhawa, narrative restores what exile erases: through storytelling, Palestine endures in collective consciousness. Her prose becomes an act of reclamation—a textual homeland that survives colonial erasure. For Meruane, writing is explicitly positioned as a substitute for physical return: "To go or not to go, that will be my question. To go and write, or not to go and never leave my Palestine in writing" (*Mornings* 32). Her formulation of writing as return articulates a postmodern inversion: the act of narration itself constitutes belonging.

Thus, while Abulhawa reimagines Palestine through communal resistance and generational continuity, Meruane constructs it through introspective translation and postmemory. Both, however, convert exile into a geography where they can be creative, transforming displacement from silence into voice, from absence into text.

3. Memory, Postmemory, and Generational Inheritance

In both *Mornings in Jenin* and *Volverse Palestina*, memory serves as the principal means by which identity is constructed, transmitted, and contested. For the Palestinian subject in exile, recollection is never

individual, it is collective, transgenerational, and political. The two writers, however, approach this inheritance from distinct temporal positions: Susan Abulhawa writes as the child of direct displacement, while Lina Meruane writes as the grandchild of migrants who left long before the Nakba. Through this temporal distance, their works dramatize two modes of remembrance, Abulhawa's living memory and Meruane's postmemory in Marianne Hirsch's sense: the imaginative reworking of an inherited past that one never lived directly. This distinction is crucial: where Abulhawa's narrative seeks to mend the tears in the fabric of memory, Meruane's dwells in the frayed edges themselves.

In *Mornings in Jenin*, memory functions as a form of resistance against both historical amnesia and personal despair. Abulhawa's characters carry memory as both burden and weapon. Amal, the novel's protagonist, lives under its tyranny, yet the novel consistently demonstrates how storytelling imposes coherence upon inherited chaos. This is evident in the figure of Haj Salem, the camp elder who functions as a living archive. Amal notes that

> [h]e was the most animated and lively character of [her] youth, and it was he who passed history on to the camp's children. [Her] treasure of Palestinian folklore and proverbs came from him. It was he who gave [her] the names and stories of people [she] would encounter as miscellaneous victims of war in the history texts that [she] would read decades later. (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 96)

Haj Salem's oral narratives transform abstract historical victims into named individuals with stories, creating a coherent lineage between the past and the future. He is the human embodiment of the novel's own project: to ensure that no Palestinian becomes a mere statistic, that every life retains its narrative thread. Amal's eventual ability to write her family's story is built upon this foundational inheritance of structured, purposeful storytelling.

The most striking emblem of this inheritance is the separation of Amal from her brother Ismael, renamed David by an Israeli family. This fraternal rupture literalizes the fragmentation of Palestinian identity. Yet the novel does not leave this rupture open; it meticulously works toward its resolution. This resolution is prepared decades in advance through the persistence of embodied memory. When David, as a young Israeli soldier,

first encounters Yousef, his biological brother, in a prison clinic, something stirs within him despite his ignorance of his origins:

> Is it possible they captured a Jew by mistake? A Jew who is related to me? A Jew who came to Palestine without knowing his relatives had also survived? He searched his mind for answers, opening and closing the doors of memories for a clue to who, or what—if anything—this prisoner might be to him. A tear slid from the corner of the Arab's eye. Ismael! He reached his hand toward the soldier and fell unconscious again. (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 118)

Even without conscious memory, the body recognizes its kin. The scar on Ismael's face, a mark of his infant life in Ein Hod, becomes the physical evidence that will later allow David to piece together his true identity. The narrative ensures that the fragmentary clues—the scar, the tear, the inexplicable recognition—accumulate into a coherent picture that can be assembled and understood.

Lina Meruane's *Volverse Palestina*, by contrast, stages the crisis of postmemory: the tension between inherited narratives and lived distance. Her voice oscillates between fascination and skepticism toward the very memory she seeks to recover. This skepticism is rooted in the fundamental instability of the materials she inherits. The family's past is not preserved in coherent stories but in fragments that resist assembly. When she asks her father about the names carved on their grandparents' tombstone, he cannot remember: "My father shifts in his seat, trying to remember which ones were carved into the stones" (Meruane 15). Even the final, physical inscription of identity on a grave is subject to the erosion of memory. The Arabic names of her grandparents—Salvador or Isa? Milade or María?—exist in a state of unresolved translation, hovering between languages and identities without settling into a definitive version. This is not memory that can be passed down; it is memory that dissolves with each passing generation.

Where Abulhawa's narrative is saturated with the immediacy of trauma, Meruane's is marked by anxiety over authenticity. This anxiety is compounded by the political dimensions of naming itself. She reflects on the impossibility of neutral language in the region: "The very definition of the territory, as we already discussed in a message, is problematic. Simply choosing to name cities with certain names and not others in this region is equivalent to a declaration of war" (Meruane 34). If even the act of naming

a place is a political act fraught with erasure, how can she, a diasporic descendant, hope to reconstruct an authentic narrative? The tools of storytelling themselves are compromised before she begins. Her inheritance is not a story but a minefield of contested terminology, where every word choice carries the weight of erasure and counter-erasure. This awareness paralyzes any attempt at coherent reconstruction.

Both writers foreground the act of storytelling as the means by which memory survives exile. In *Mornings in Jenin*, Amal reconstructs her family's past through oral and written testimony. This reconstruction is portrayed as a sacred duty, a way of honoring the dead and ensuring that their lives retain meaning. When Amal reflects on her mother Dalia's decline, she notes that

> her favorite scarf was tightly wrapped on her head, its hems pouring down her shoulders. That scarf had been a present from Baba years ago... Now yellowed by time, it had been white with ornate stitching along its border. When Mama's body finally caught up to her mind, which had departed the world soon after the 1967 war, I kept that scarf, and I still have it, tucked safely in a small box that holds what remains to me from my family. (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 99)

The scarf is a tangible object of memory, a physical thread connecting her to a past that, while painful, can be held and preserved. The small box containing these remnants is a metaphor for the narrative itself: a carefully kept collection of meaningful objects that, together, tell the story of a family. The narrative imposes order on these remnants, arranging them into a meaningful whole. Similarly, Meruane frames her entire narrative as a quest to reclaim a story before it disappears. Yet while Abulhawa's storytelling seeks to recover coherence, Meruane's exposes its impossibility. She writes from a position of radical uncertainty, acknowledging that the past may be irretrievable. When she contemplates visiting the family home in Beit Jala, her father warns her it is pointless: "That house years ago ceased to be ours . . . It was dismantled and rented out, the house, and then came the fire. They also got rid of the corner store where my grandfather sold fabric by the meter" (Meruane 18). Unlike Amal's carefully preserved scarf, there is no physical remnant left to anchor Meruane's narrative. The house is locked, the store is gone, the objects have been dispersed. There is no small box of family treasures to

unpack and arrange. She must build her story from absence itself, from the negative space left by what has disappeared.

All in all, while Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* performs the memory of direct dispossession, Meruane's *Volverse Palestina* enacts the uncertainty of diasporic aftermemory. The former mourns a stolen homeland, the latter interrogates the inheritance of mourning itself. Together, they illuminate the continuum between memory and postmemory—the living and the inherited—revealing how Palestinian identity persists not through possession of place, but through the persistent, imperfect act of remembering.

4. Gendered Bodies and the Politics of Suffering

Both *Mornings in Jenin* and *Volverse Palestina* inscribe the experience of exile not merely in language but in the female body. In both texts, womanhood becomes a political text, a living archive that carries the burden of displacement, memory, and resistance. The maternal, wounded, and observing bodies of Abulhawa's and Meruane's protagonists function as corporeal sites where personal grief intersects with collective trauma. Read through a postcolonial feminist lens, these bodies materialize what Chandra Talpade Mohanty identifies as the structural entanglement of gender and colonial power, while also challenging Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question of whether the subaltern woman can speak by demonstrating that speech often occurs through embodied suffering rather than explicit political declaration. Yet while Abulhawa's writing transforms the female body into a repository of historical endurance, Meruane's work situates it as a mirror of epistemic fragility, questioning the authority of both memory and vision itself.

In *Mornings in Jenin*, the body is the first terrain of occupation. The scene in which Dalia gives birth in a refugee camp epitomizes this. This connection between the maternal body and the land is established from the very beginning of the family's trauma. During the 1948 Nakba, as Dalia flees Ein Hod, the text emphasizes the profound physical disorientation of losing a child:

> Dalia stopped and so did time. She screamed like she hadn't when her father burned her hand. A loud, penetrating, consuming, unworldly scream from a mother's deepest agony. From the most profound desire to reverse time, just

> a few minutes. If there is a God, he heard Dalia's wail. (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 46)

Here, the scream of "Ibni! Ibni!" ('My son!') is not just grief; it is the physical eruption of a history interrupted, a body whose purpose—to nurture and protect—has been violently severed by the machinery of a new state. Later, the child stolen from Dalia, raised as the Israeli David, is haunted by the same scene. His adoptive father, Moshe, is perpetually tormented by "the image of the Arab woman and her children," (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 50) and the sound of her scream, "Ibni, ibni!" echoes inside his head as a demon he cannot escape (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 52; 118). The stolen child's very existence is thus a physical testament to his birth mother's trauma, a living scar on the body of their shared history. In spatial-theoretical terms, Abulhawa constructs a feminist cartography in which the refugee camp is remapped through childbirth, transforming abjection into generative persistence. Dalia's motherhood becomes inseparable from dispossession; to bring life into the world is simultaneously to affirm continuity and to expose it to annihilation. Her body, deprived of a stable home, stands as the most immediate embodiment of nationhood.

Abulhawa extends this metaphor of bodily endurance through Amal, Dalia's daughter and the novel's central consciousness. Amal's life, marked by loss, becomes an anatomy of historical trauma. When she leaves for America and finds herself being "the Palestinin girl of pitiable beginnings" (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 198), she remarks that pain was the only inheritance her mother left her, and thus she redefines maternal legacy as transmitted suffering. This articulation resonates directly with Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory: Amal inherits not land but affect, not property but wound. Trauma, as Cathy Caruth argues, is constituted by its belated return, and Amal's subjectivity is structured by precisely such repetition—an unassimilated history that insists on reappearing in the body. This inheritance is literalized in the shrapnel wound she receives during the Six-Day War, an event that merges her physical development with national catastrophe. As she hides in the kitchen hole, the explosion that kills her baby cousin Aisha marks her forever: a piece of shrapnel, "[s]o small and light, how could it have cut her open like that?" (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 86). This moment is the violent, physical punctuation of her childhood, a trauma etched into her memory and flesh. Later, as a young woman, Amal is shot by Israeli soldiers, the bullet tearing

into her abdomen—the same part of her body that has just begun to bleed with the arrival of her first period (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 141–42). This cruel coincidence intertwines her emerging womanhood with political violence, framing her reproductive capacity as a target and making her body an archive of the occupation's incursions. In Abulhawa's prose, pain becomes the central language of belonging and the proof that Palestine continues to exist through its wounded bodies. The physical suffering of women—rape, childbirth, hunger—acquires testimonial authority and transforms the female body into what Judith Butler would call a site of grievability, that is, a space that demands recognition of the humanity denied to the politically dispossessed.

Abulhawa often locates female resistance precisely in maternal suffering. When Amal reflects on her mother's silent endurance, she recognizes that silence itself is a form of political agency:

> Yousef turned everything inward, as Dalia had done. He cloistered the pain, letting it tangle with powerlessness. Silence consumed their little shack in Jenin, and both Amal and Yousef would later recall those times with a thick taste of emptiness. Toughness found fertile soil in the hearts of Palestinians, and the grains of resistance embedded themselves in their skin. (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 130)

The silence of women in *Mornings in Jenin* carries generational weight: it is an unspoken history preserved in gestures, lullabies, and recipes. Such domestic practices constitute what Avtar Brah terms the "affective geography" of diaspora, where memory is sustained not in official archives but in embodied repetition. The kitchen, the cradle, and the refugee tent become counter-geopolitical spaces, intimate sites where colonial displacement is symbolically undone through care and continuity. Abulhawa asserts in her writing that Palestinian women, long represented as victims, are in fact the carriers of collective endurance.

In contrast, Lina Meruane's *Volverse Palestina* reframes the politics of embodiment through the lens of perception and fragility. Her autobiographical narrator approaches the journey to Palestine not as a return but as a mediated encounter with an inherited narrative: "It would be a borrowed return, a returning in the place of someone else. My grandfather. My father" (Meruane 13). This recognition situates the narrator's relationship to Palestine within a framework of displacement even before the journey begins. Palestine is not an experienced homeland

but a transmitted story, "a background rumor, a narrative invoked to save a shared origin from extinction" (Meruane 13). The act of seeing thus becomes epistemologically charged: to encounter the land is to confront the fragility of the inherited myth. This ambivalence aligns with Svetlana Boym's concept of reflective nostalgia, which resists restoring an idealized homeland and instead dwells in fragmentation and doubt. For Meruane, to see is not to confirm belonging but to risk epistemic rupture. Where Abulhawa's women are bound by physical suffering, Meruane's narrator experiences epistemic dislocation, a fragmentation of self produced by the collision of identity and perspective.

Encounters with Palestinians repeatedly expose the instability of her position. When a man recognizes her surname, he tells her with surprise: "You are a Palestinian, you are an exile. You don't know your land?" (Meruane 31). The remark, posed almost casually, exposes the paradox of diasporic identity: she is recognized as Palestinian precisely through the absence of lived experience. Later, when a supposed relative questions her genealogy, the narrator confronts an even deeper rupture: "Something twists inside my head. Something collapses. If I am not Meruane, then who am I?" (Meruane 59).

The irony embedded in these moments reveals a distinctly postmodern discomfort: she cannot fully inhabit either the physical or symbolic space of her origin. Here, Stuart Hall's theorization of identity as a process becomes embodied: Meruane's narrator inhabits Bhabha's "Third Space," negotiating hybridity under the gaze of others. Her body, unlike Dalia's or Amal's, is not marked by visible wounds but by estrangement—an exile inscribed in perception rather than blood.

Meruane's representation of womanhood, by contrast, resists idealization. She rejects the trope of the suffering mother as national allegory. Instead, her narrative centers on self-analysis and critical observation. The female body appears as a site of scrutiny and surveillance. The narrator recounts waiting in line under the watch of soldiers while "we answer questions and show our papers," holding in one hand her Chilean passport and in the other her identification card marked as potentially dangerous.

The contrast between Abulhawa's and Meruane's treatment of the body mirrors their broader political aesthetics. Abulhawa's realism transforms pain into solidarity while Meruane's essayistic introspection turns alienation into critical distance. For Abulhawa, the womb and the land are intertwined metaphors of persistence: both violated, yet both

generative. Her maternal figures convert biological reproduction into historical survival, insisting that Palestinian existence continues despite expulsion. For Meruane, the body is an unstable signifier, neither fully Palestinian nor fully Western, marked by what Homi Bhabha would call "hybrid visibility," a state in which identity is constantly negotiated through the gaze of the other. If Abulhawa's female body operates as monument—solid, enduring, testimonial—Meruane's operates as mirror, reflecting the fractures of diasporic identity and the epistemic instability of inherited narratives.

Despite these divergences, both writers converge on one fundamental insight: that the female body bears the inscription of geopolitical violence. In Abulhawa, this inscription is carved in childbirth and mourning, and in Meruane, it is etched through border interrogations and the discomfort of belonging nowhere. Together, they enact what this theoretical framework defines as a postcolonial feminist cartography: a remapping of Palestine through gendered embodiment, where exile is neither abstract nor purely territorial but materially lived in flesh, memory, and perception. Their female narrators embody a sort of marginality as resistance, an ability to transform displacement into a vantage point from which to critique power.

Ultimately, *Mornings in Jenin* and *Volverse Palestina* expose the body as the most intimate site of the Palestinian question. For Abulhawa, the body signifies survival through pain, and for Meruane, it reveals the instability of identity itself. One writes the body as monument, the other as mirror. When Abulhawa's Amal finally confronts her long-lost brother, David, she sees him not as an Israeli soldier but as a fellow inheritor of their mother's legacy: "You and I are the remains of an unfulfilled legacy, heirs to a kingdom of stolen identities and ragged confusion" (Abulhawa, *Mornings* 303). It is a recognition of a shared, wounded embodiment. Similarly, Meruane's narrator, contemplating the possibility of return, concludes that her body is the only vessel for a history she cannot otherwise access: "The question of returning home always comes back. No matter where I am: the house and its lack summon me" (Meruane 127). The house, like the homeland, is a phantom limb, felt most acutely in its absence. Together, they demonstrate that to speak of Palestine through women's narratives is to articulate not only political dispossession but the very material texture of being human under exile.

CONCLUSIONS

The comparative analysis of Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* and Lina Meruane's *Volverse Palestina* reveals the multilayered and potent ways in which literature can suture the wounds of displacement, crafting coherence from fragmentation and voice from silence. While rooted in the shared soil of Palestinian loss, these narratives diverge in their aesthetic strategies, linguistic negotiations, and generational perspectives, together mapping a expansive cartography of diasporic consciousness. Abulhawa, writing in English, constructs a sweeping, multi-generational saga that externalizes trauma, transforming it into a collective epic of endurance. Her work insists on the unbroken thread of memory, where the homeland is preserved in the sensory details of olive trees, familial recipes, and the embodied suffering and resilience of women. In stark contrast, Meruane, writing in Spanish, internalizes the quest, offering a fractured, self-reflexive meditation on the very possibility of belonging. Her narrative embraces the uncertainty of postmemory, where the homeland is not a recovered past but a labyrinth of borrowed stories, archival ghosts, and the profound alienation of the returning outsider.

Despite these distinct approaches, both authors achieve a profound decolonial intervention by weaponizing their chosen languages. Abulhawa infuses English with the rhythms and untranslated residues of Arabic, bending the colonial tongue to carry the weight of Palestinian history and demand global witness. Meruane, meanwhile, leverages the colonial history of Spanish in Latin America to forge a critical, ironic voice that provincializes her own gaze and highlights the transnational circuits of dispossession. For both, language is never a neutral medium but a contested homeland, the one territory that cannot be occupied, where identity is continuously authored and reauthored. Furthermore, their gendered lens crucially redefines the political landscape of exile. They relocate agency from the public, masculine sphere of nationalist rhetoric to the intimate, domestic, and corporeal realms. The female body, in their works, becomes the ultimate archive, inscribed with trauma through childbirth, violence, and illness, but also serving as the resilient vessel for cultural transmission and silent protest.

Ultimately, this study underscores that the significance of Abulhawa and Meruane extends beyond the Palestinian context, offering a vital blueprint for understanding diasporic and postcolonial literature at large. They exemplify how narrative can function as a form of epistemological

resistance, challenging hegemonic histories and creating counter-archives from the margins. Their works demonstrate that in the absence of territorial sovereignty, sovereignty of voice becomes paramount. Storytelling is reconceived not as mere recollection but as an ethical and political act, a means of working through trauma, of demanding grievability for lost lives, and of imagining community across chasms of time and space. By navigating the complex intersections of gender, memory, and translingual expression, they articulate a dynamic model of identity that is neither rooted in a romanticized past nor assimilated into a monolithic present, but perpetually forged in the creative, painful, and necessary act of telling. In doing so, they confirm that while the map of Palestine may be scarred by erasure, its most enduring and liberated topography is being drawn, line by line, in the defiant literature of its diaspora.

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AI-Powered Academic Writing: A Comprehensive Review and Conceptual Framework

Redacción Académica Potenciada por IA: Una Revisión Integral y Marco Conceptual

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Abstract: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced a range of new tools and techniques for educators and students. This study critically reviews the literature on AI-powered writing tools, focusing on improving writing outcomes, the limitations of current integration methods, and the ethical issues that have remained largely unaddressed. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is adopted as the framework for this study with its two main variables modified to focus on student engagement and academic writing proficiency and also extended to incorporate ethical issues in the adoption of AI-powered writing tools. The proposed conceptual framework provides a foundation for research in AI-powered tool integration in academic writing, with implications for adaptation into other educational contexts.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; academic writing; ethical issues; technology acceptance model; human-centered AI.
Summary: Introduction. Review Approach. Literature Review. Conceptual Framework. Conclusion and Recommendations.

Resumen: La Inteligencia Artificial (IA) ha introducido una variedad de nuevas herramientas y técnicas para educadores y estudiantes. Este estudio realizó una revisión crítica de la literatura sobre herramientas de escritura impulsadas por IA, enfocándose en la mejora de los resultados de escritura, las limitaciones de los métodos actuales de integración y los problemas éticos que han quedado mayormente sin abordar. Se adoptó el Modelo de Aceptación Tecnológica (TAM), modificando sus dos variables principales para centrarse en el compromiso estudiantil y la competencia en escritura académica, y se amplió para incorporar cuestiones éticas en la adopción de herramientas de escritura impulsadas por IA. El marco conceptual propuesto proporcionó una base para la investigación sobre la integración de herramientas impulsadas por IA en la escritura académica, con implicaciones para su adaptación a otros contextos educativos.
Palabras clave: Inteligencia artificial; escritura académica; cuestiones éticas; modelo de aceptación de la tecnología; IA centrada en el ser humano.
Sumario: Introducción. Enfoque de la revisión. Revisión de la literatura. Marco conceptual. Conclusión y recomendaciones.

INTRODUCTION

Of the technologies that have upended society and the way we live, the advent of AI may have one of the most profound effects, in how it shifts the paradigms on our thinking, our actions, and interactions with others (Chen et al. 4). The focus of this paper is academic writing, where AI-powered writing tools have become key to learners' and educators' processes in academic second-language (L2) writing. These tools can help students and educators with text generation, editing, and suggestions for improvements. However, they generally do little to develop more abstract learning outcomes or teaching methods; these include academic integrity, independent research skills, or social support from peers. While AI tools are proliferating quickly through L2 classrooms, frameworks and guidelines on their correct and ethical use are also spreading at similar rates. This raises questions about both new and traditional methods.

In respect of this, this study employs a narrative and critical review to summarize and synthesize existing literature on the integration of AI tools into academic writing while still considering ethical guidelines. Academic writing is a significant skill for higher education students' scholarly exchange and in the development of critical thinking. Despite educational interventions, students often struggle with writing academically,

maintaining academic integrity, and properly disclosing and attributing the involvement of innovative technological platforms such as AI tools. Understanding the efficacy, ethical issues, and educational values of AI-assisted writing tools is imperative to enhance students' academic writing skills. This review aims to identify the key findings in the use of AI tools in academic writing. The following existing studies, in comparison, focused on the improvements in linguistic performance or the perceptions of the students.

For specific examples, Karyuatry found Grammarly helps reduce errors and boost quality (83). On more general outcomes, Zarei and Fabregas found that the integration of new technological tools in learning strategies could significantly increase students' participation and engagement through strategies like gamification (76–77). Tang (68) and Zhang et al. (2) both found success with using AI-supplemented methods when teaching Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) or L2 learners, boosting their writing quality, efficiency, and sentence variety, among other benefits. Rahim and Gregory found that L2 students who were already familiar with AI tools achieved better writing outcomes in skill progression, writing quality, and proficiency as a result of the feedback they received (350). In a related fashion, regarding feedback, Zarei (56) and Khabib (114) found that AI tools provide learners with new ways to practice, receive criticism, and receive suggestions, acting as a convenient pair of second eyes.

Despite extensive research on their benefits and effectiveness, AI writing tools have also raised several ethical and pedagogical concerns: Barrot (43), Aljabr and Al-Ahdal (1), and Ugwu et al. (30) identified plagiarism, proper disclosure of AI use, and potential over-reliance on AI. Critical thinking skills may not be sufficiently developed if the students leave the proliferation of ideas and their development to the AI tool they are using. Similarly, Zhang et al. found that learners relying purely on AI feedback had very limited improvement in their critical thinking skills, while the hybrid group with traditional feedback did better in comparison through the addition of teacher or peer feedback alongside the automated, AI-powered feedback (4). Moorhouse et al. also found that language learners might lack critical awareness of how the tools function at all, even though they were also aware of the importance of responsible and transparent use (1). There are also more general concerns, such as AI tools producing incorrect citations, biases within the models, authorship rights,

confidentiality, and privacy arguments (Ateriya et al. 1; Barrot 50; Cheng et al. 7; Ersöz and Engin 1190; Rentier 3421).

These problems of plagiarism, bias, and hampered skill development are not insurmountable challenges, as the preceding studies show. Aljabr and Al-Ahdal (6), Wang and Dang (24), and Miao et al. (89) suggest strategies like using AI-powered plagiarism checkers, training students and educators on the proper and ethical use of the technology, and enacting disclosures for AI use in academic writing. Armstrong (102–03) and Ersöz and Engin (1190) advise wider-ranging, more comprehensive solutions such as new ethical frameworks, collaboration with stakeholders, and both institutional and global guidelines for AI use in academic work. In the expansion and integration of new AI-powered tools, the teachers' guidance may be most central. These problems can be solved by students learning and upholding the values of ethics, academic honesty, and transparency.

This study uses a narrative and critical literature review approach focused on investigating the integration of AI-assisted writing tools in academic writing and ethical and educational considerations. This method aims to provide a critical analysis and overview of patterns, key themes, conceptual gaps, and ongoing limitations within the field (Baumeister and Leary 311). The scholarly articles in the critical literature review were included if they tackled academic writing education with AI-assisted writing tools or included students' perceptions of them. They were also considered if they tackled broader concerns like the lack of frameworks or potential problems in student development with ethical concerns as a particular focus; inversely, studies were excluded if they were not relevant to L2 academic writing or were not specifically about technological integration in academic writing. The researchers primarily searched peer-reviewed journal articles via academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. This study's researchers collected and analyzed the findings on AI tools integration in academic writing, their pedagogical concerns, ethical issues, and perceived usefulness in L2 academic writing. The review was guided by a modified version of the TAM (Technology Acceptance Model), an information systems theory that models how users come to adopt a technology through the factors of Perceived Usefulness (U) and Perceived Ease-of-Use (E) (Davis 78). The modified model analyzes how academic writing proficiency, ethical issues, and academic integrity are discussed, framed, and conceptualized in existing literature. As a result of this process, a conceptual framework

was proposed to underpin the responsible and human-centered implementation of AI-assisted writing tools in academic writing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Technology-enhanced Writing for Academic Writing

Much educational research has focused on AI-writing assistance for both L2 teachers and L2 students doing academic writing. The teachers can use the AI tools to paraphrase content in textbooks and create resources for the deconstruction phase in pedagogy (dos Santos et al. 1). Turkish English teachers found AI tools like ChatGPT flexible, engaging, and usable, though they found problems with inaccurate responses and the need for quality prompts (Kurt and Kurt 10). When it came to the students, who were English as a Second Language (ESL) L2 students from Hong Kong, the students already familiar with AI tools had better writing outcomes in both skill progression and writing quality (Rahim and Gregory 350), alongside more advanced abstract values, like time management and content generation skills (Hwang et al. 13). Particular applications included using ChatGPT as a "pseudo-teacher," a translation tool, and as a means of explaining words to students (Kohnke et al. 537). EFL L2 students from China found great success using traditional learning methods alongside AI tools, harnessing the technology to perform literature reviews, improve their grammar, and expand their sentence variety (Tang 74; Zhang et al. 17). Students from Saudi Arabia also ended up with richer vocabulary and learning using the AI tool Wordtune (Al Mahmud 1395). Wang and Dang found similar benefits for adult EFL L2 students, though they also found potential challenges like over-reliance on AI tools by students and also with the tools' cultural biases (1). It has been argued that learners might be using these AI tools without critical awareness of their functions and, more importantly, their limitations (Moorhouse 11). Still, the students did seem to understand the importance of responsible and transparent use, so we cannot say that they are totally blind or unaware of potential pitfalls. Overall, the studies show that AI tools are effective at improving language learning; their outputs have a variety of useful applications, like translations and additional feedback; and the tools may also benefit the students' confidence, critical thinking skills, and motivation.

The findings above do come with a caveat, in that most of the research on AI in language learning is focused on EFL undergraduate students, rather than ESL students (Feng et al. 1), alongside the under-representation of other demographics like younger K-12 students and non-English language learners (Wang and Dang 19). More studies on the subject are necessary, particularly when it comes to ESL students and the alignments and biases of most AI tools. Louro found that most AI models are based in the US, and about 90% of the training data for models is based on American English. This can cause unnecessary hardships for ESL learners, as their country's particular forms of English and their lexicons (such as the Indian English use of "prepone," an antonym of "postpone" that means to move up an appointed date or time) might be tagged as incorrect, causing confusion and friction in the classroom between the learners and their teachers. AI tools may also reduce the diversity of the various forms of English around the world and remove the distinctions between EFL and ESL for the worse, as AI tools push only one form of Western-focused English as the "correct" one. AI tools also have several other readily apparent pitfalls, as will be shown in the next section.

2.2 Ethical Considerations in AI-integrated Academic Writing

Regarding the challenges of AI writing tools in academic writing, this study also focuses on ethical and pedagogical concerns. Some of the studies reviewed mention the need for responsible use, over-reliance on the tools, and the hampering of important skills as a result (Moorhouse et al. 1; Wang and Dang 24). Mwita and Mwilongo specifically examined ethical and unethical practices in the use of AI in academic writing (17). The applications that were identified as ethical uses of AI included brainstorming, applying theories, reading AI-generated concepts, editing, data analysis, and translation. A partial list of issues that could be considered unethical use included the failure to acknowledge AI use as well as potential data manipulation. Ateriya et al. conducted a similar study; they found AI is an effective tool for academic writing, but it still has the previously mentioned problems of transparency and plagiarism. They also added publication problems like authorship rights, potentially inaccurate citations, problems around proper protocol, justice, the question of human control, and research ethics (7). Rentier took a quantitative approach focusing on AI tools as statistical models and found that they are both powerful as well as being a source of ethical concerns (3421),

including risks to validity, accuracy, fairness, transparency, bias, and reflective conversations. Hence, he advised openness about the use of AI tools and constructive debate on such a critical topic.

Inevitably, these debates and studies also discuss possible solutions or approaches to solve these issues. Ugwu et al. found that AI tools are helpful for research writing, but the previously mentioned concerns like plagiarism, transparency, and bias make following ethical guidelines and maintaining academic integrity essential (30). Armstrong focused particularly on that latter point, calling for new ethical frameworks, collaboration with stakeholders, and institutional policies to promote responsible AI use in academic writing (100–01). Ersöz and Engin echoed this pressing need for global guidelines on AI usage in academia, after conducting a case study among 34 researchers who, while believing that AI is a useful tool with much potential, still had questions over ownership and citation accuracy (1190).

Cheng et al. proposed some guidelines and principles for use, centered on the ethical principles of human oversight, meaningful contribution, accountability, fact-checking, and moral evaluation (7–8). AlSamhori and Alnaimat proposed that human authors must be made ultimately responsible for ensuring the originality, honesty, and accuracy of their work (259). Similarly, Jarrah et al. claimed that LLMs such as ChatGPT do not invite plagiarism in academics, so long as human writers attribute the contributions of the model and do their due diligence, checking all citations, rather than just blindly trusting the machine's output (1). However, Sallam discusses how ChatGPT was, as of January 2023, unable to be credited as an author in academic research, barring any major rule shifts (17). The authors cannot predict the future, but the trends around the integration of AI into several aspects of life beyond academic work suggest that serious talks around these changes are likely.

For all the apprehension surrounding this new technology and the many novel problems it brings, a common theme is the traditional, age-old solution: students and academic writers need human educators to teach them about these ethical issues, and to imbue them with the importance of transparency, academic integrity, and proper attribution. Teachers must encourage this by ensuring open communication and honesty, so students do not feel the need to hide potential dishonesty with AI tools (Qasem 30). As much as the fears and the studies center around ChatGPT and other AI tools, and how advanced the technology is, they are not autonomous agents and require a human user to prompt them first.

2.3 Pedagogical Issues and Classroom Implementation

Moving beyond the ethics around AI tools, there are also problems when it comes to classroom implementation. The most significant of these is that, as powerful as AI tools are, they should be used as a ladder to bridge gaps, and not an elevator allowing the users to skip all the work and the implementation of skills they would have developed by climbing. Again, Zhang et al. (17) and Moorhouse et al. (11) find that an unsupervised, supplemented AI tool may lead to students failing to develop critical thinking skills and critical awareness of the tool's capabilities. There are also studies like dos Santos et al. (6), Kim et al. (79), and Yan (13943) which focus on issues surrounding the latter problem, such as the tools' ability to produce incorrect information without citation, their susceptibility to bias, the limits around the depth and scope of the feedback these tools can provide, and even the concern and reluctance of students themselves towards AI tools. Without proper knowledge and training for both students and educators, the many benefits of AI in language learning may be lost or at least severely hampered (Wang and Dang 24; Miao et al. 95–96; Barrot 46–47; Aljabr and Al-Ahdal 5).

On this same level of classroom implementation, there is the need to figure out exactly how AI can fit into classroom lesson plans, especially if students and/or educators are unfamiliar with or ignorant of what AI can do and how it works, exactly. Aljabr and Al-Ahdal argue that there must also be regulated learning environments and revised assessments taking AI-integration into account (5). Educators must assess how much the use of AI is helping the student when they have begun to offload most, if not all of the work, onto the machine beyond thinking of and tweaking the prompts to feed it, and of course, avoiding the other pitfalls of AI-use like plagiarism. With proper ethics, supervision, and always remembering the humans in the center of it all, AI tools can be an effective supplement to, rather than replacement of, conventional writing instruction (Tang 68; Kurt and Kurt 14; Zhang et al. 1). If used with care, AI-powered writing tools can help educators boost students' engagement, help design writing assignments, and improve the quality, specificity, and speed of the feedback and evaluation process of students' work (Sims; Nazari et al. 2). And of course, it bears repeating for how central it is to the findings: AI-assisted tools must remain tools, not replacements to teachers, as the AI tools alone cannot address all the needs and dimensions of L2 education.

With how dramatically the integration of AI-powered writing tools can affect language learning and come with new, innovative problems, a much more specific lens must be taken. To begin with, there is students' digital literacy and familiarity with AI tools. Inevitably, some students will adopt the new tools easily and can effectively make use of them, while others might struggle to even begin to write their first prompt. Combined, these can potentially worsen existing inequities in learning outcomes, giving yet more advantages to technologically savvy students. Educators need to ensure that there is appropriate guidance for students at every competency level, particularly those at the lower end of digital literacy, to ensure equitable distribution of AI tools' benefits.

Yet another set of concerns is the contextual and cultural factors around the creation of AI tools. Most of them are trained on Western English datasets, which can cause problems with underrepresented cultural conventions, local academic norms, and variations in regional dialects. Louro mentions the Indian English word "prepone," used as the antonym of "postpone." She also mentions how Singapore English has mixed elements from Malay, Tamil, and Hokkien, which majority-Western-based models might be unable to recognize. EFL and ESL students may be given suggestions by the AI tools that are considered "incorrect" in US English but are perfectly acceptable within their educational system or cultural expectations. Such misalignment would likely lead to unnecessary doubt, disagreements with their teachers and the AI, and potential overreliance on the AI's suggestions. This could lead students to refrain from or be unfairly penalized for using culturally specific expressions, narrowing English's linguistic diversity. As has been mentioned by studies like Tang (74) and Zhang et al. (17), AI tools are best used as a supplement to traditional language learning rather than a replacement, especially as human beings have much more lexical diversity and contextual understanding than AI tools.

Moving beyond language learning and improved writing, there are also more abstract, general educational goals like the students' cognitive and ethical development, and emotional growth (Tang 74, Zhang et al. 17). AI tools excel at helping students create content, correct their grammar, and tune and improve their structure; however, they cannot help them develop critical thinking, moral judgment, or ethical discernment. Should students become too dependent on taking the AI tools' suggestions, it may result in writing and articles that are technically perfect but lack substance and critical reasoning (Moorhouse 8). In the most catastrophic scenarios,

dependence on AI tools may result in a future where researchers feel they cannot work at all without AI tools, or result in work by academics or researchers that has been entirely or near-entirely AI-generated. To prevent these scenarios, the integration of AI tools must be paired with lessons and practices to strengthen these meta-cognitive skills, encourage reflection and assessment without the AI, and maintain accountability for original writing (Tang 72). Assignments should have students explicitly evaluate AI-generated outputs to see where these tools excel and fall short. Students should also critically think about their revisions and the AI tools' suggested changes to help justify their writing choices beyond trusting the AI tools' output. Should the AI tools be unavailable, explicitly banned by a publication, or just unfit for a task, the students should ideally rely on their own skills (Dolba et al. 2). The denial or inaccessibility of AI tools should not put students at a severe disadvantage.

Finally, moving to a larger scale than the teachers and the students in the classrooms, institutions must also provide support for sustainable and responsible AI tool integration (Dolba et al. 6). There must be clear and well-crafted frameworks and policies for acceptable use, attribution, and transparency of use. Without rules, guidance, and guardrails, students may accidentally engage in unethical practices like plagiarism and misattribution of sources; meanwhile, educators may struggle to assess their outputs, as it is unclear how much of any given work is the work of the student versus AI tools (Braganza-Valera 69–70). Blanket assumptions that AI is always used might damage students who choose not to or are unable to use AI tools. Those students may feel pressured that they must find a way to use AI tools in order to keep up, or that the personal efforts and struggles to avoid using AI are ultimately worthless. Professional educators must also be able to use the AI tools themselves, competently advise the students in their use, and balance the benefits of new technological assistance and the timeless need for honesty, transparency, and attribution (Moorhouse 11).

As powerful and simple to use as AI tools can be, they are clearly not a swift or uncomplicated solution to improving language learning. There are many interlocking factors—digital literacy, cultural and contextual alignment, cognitive and ethical development, and institutional support—that must be thoroughly and responsibly addressed to maximize benefits while minimizing harms (Moorhouse 11; Zhang et al. 13). As has been mentioned before, AI tools are best as a supplement, not a replacement for traditional learning; on the same note, students must learn to use them as a

tool to enhance their writing and education, rather than a shortcut that does all the work for them. If the point was to produce reams of elegantly written and extensive writing, the AI tools could have already produced such text. However, this study's researchers believe that the goal is to produce well-rounded, competent, and ethical professionals.

3. THE TAM MODEL FOR AI-POWERED WRITING

Davis first developed the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to help understand why users would choose to integrate new technology into their lives (2). He found that integration is chiefly based on the technology's utility, a factor directly shaped by various influences, and which also indirectly affects the user's attitude and willingness to use it (78). The first of the TAM's two concepts is perceived usefulness, where the users believe using the technology will enhance their performance. The second is ease of use, involving factors like how understandable and/or flexible the technology is. The original TAM model has seen many changes and evolutions over the years, as documented by Tang and Chen (588). After the original TAM, there was the Extension of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM2) by Venkatesh and Davis (qtd. in Chen 589), the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) by Venkatesh et al. (qtd. in Chen 589), and the Technology Acceptance Model 3 (TAM 3) by Venkatesh and Bala (qtd. in Chen 590). These evolutions tended to explore and add more factors around use, and to make them more adaptable to other contexts (589), including social influences, cognitive instrumental processes, facilitating conditions, individual differences, and system characteristics (589–90). Venkatesh has already done research on the adoption of AI tools; however, it was using his UTAUT rather than the original TAM, and in the context of operations management rather than education (2). However, the TAM variants/successors have been applied in studies; Xiao et al. used the TAM3 to study Chinese students' adoption of AI (15–16); and Acosta-Enriquez et al. used another variant, UTAUT2, to study AI tools' acceptance in universities across the globe (10-11). Like in sections 2.2 and 2.3 above, they find AI tools have potential ethical issues, privacy concerns, and a lack of linguistic support for students' native languages, which tended to be categorized under the TAM variants' social influence factor or the facilitating conditions.

Despite these variants and expansions of studied factors, however, the original TAM still has relevance. Rahim and Gregory used it in their 2025

study of L2 students, particularly when understanding the students' eagerness to integrate it into their workflows because of how useful it seems to them (354). Thus, the researchers believe that a modification of the original model can still be useful as a conceptual framework to understand the key metrics and methods for assessing L2 students' writing skills and other learning outcomes.

3.1 Key Aspects of the TAM Model for AI-Powered Writing

3.1.1 Student engagement

Several studies have already found that students themselves have a positive engagement and strong desire to continue using AI-powered writing tools, even without educational institutions and educators encouraging them (Rahim and Gregory 350; Hwang et al. 13). Furthermore, Moorhouse et al. showed that they may lack critical knowledge about AI tools' uses, leading to potential negative outcomes (1). Many students are already leaning towards using AI-assisted writing tools, so the authors of this paper believe it is imperative to understand their use. Specific metrics can include the frequency of AI use, for how long it is used for each given time, and students' perception of how much it improves their writing—that is, the perceived usefulness.

3.1.2 Writing Proficiency

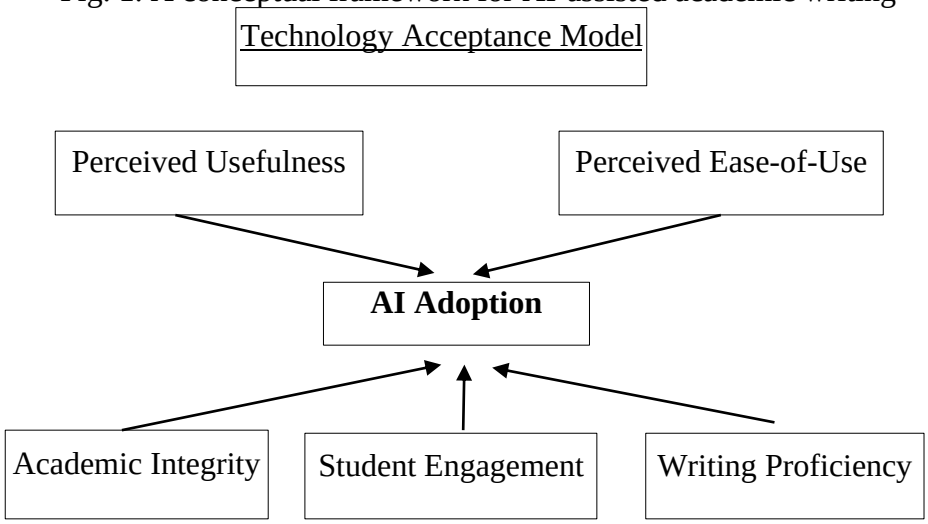
The review has also shown that the usefulness is not just in the eyes of the students; educators and researchers are finding that AI-powered writing tools have measurable positive effects on the students' writing skills and confidence (Rahim and Gregory 350; Tang 69; Wang and Dang 24; Zhang et al. 17). The researchers believe this cannot be overlooked, as with the first key variable alone, the integration of AI-powered writing tools may just seem like acquiescing to the desires of students to make their learning easier for no other benefits. Even educators can benefit greatly from AI tools by covering the blind spots of AI tools' automated feedback and proving their continued relevance in education (Kurt and Kurt 10).

3.1.3 Academic integrity

For all the notable effectiveness and widespread eagerness to adopt AI-assisted writing tools in academic writing, their ethical and pedagogical pitfalls must be addressed. As mentioned in 2.2 and 2.3 of the literature review, even those studies that speak positively about the benefits and effectiveness of AI tools in academic writing, mention myriad potential problems (Moorhouse 11; Mwita and Mwilonogo 17; Wang and Dang 14; Zhang et al. 1). Hence, as Armstrong (100-1) and Xiao et al. (15) call for, the TAM Model for AI Writing framework helps guide students, learners, and researchers around these ethical issues (15).

With all key factors explained, Fig. 1 presents a revised Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) that integrates and highlights these three core pillars. Previous research on AI writing tools often concentrated on one or two aspects, such as student engagement or writing proficiency, creating gaps in how these tools are understood beyond experimental settings and into everyday classrooms. In contrast, our approach offers a holistic framework for evaluating AI writing tools in education, assessing them not only in terms of practical use but also in their impact on essential human dimensions—such as ethical reasoning and academic integrity. If the aim were merely to produce voluminous and polished texts, modern LLMs like ChatGPT might suffice, relegating students to mere prompt creators. Yet, academic writing must cultivate generations of scholars who express themselves effectively and ethically. In this light, AI tools alone cannot achieve these goals; they fall short in nurturing critical thinking and moral judgment.

Fig. 1. A conceptual framework for AI-assisted academic writing



Source: Prepared by the author

3.2 Contribution of the Study and the TAM Model for AI-Powered Writing Framework

Most studies have focused on AI after it has already been adopted, on studying the consequences of its adoption, or measuring the acceptance of AI tools by the students and teachers (Acosta-Enriquez et al. 10–11; Al Mahmud 1395; Kurt and Kurt 14; Moorhouse et al. 11; Tang 68; Xiao et al. 15-16; Zhang et al. 17). Scholars rarely focused on the adoption and integration process, particularly when there are infrastructure or cultural concerns like lack of native linguistic support (Acosta-Enriquez et al. 10–11; Xiao et al. 15–16). Few studies have focused on the integration process of AI-tools; within this review, there are four: Na et al. focused on its use in the construction industry (2); Cui studied the emotional motivations for students' adoption of AI tools (10); Nugroho and Wulandari used the TAM to understand EFL students' willingness to adopt AI-powered writing tools (ChatGPT particularly) into their workflow (82); and Du et al. studied AI-powered writing tools' adoption in education systems, specifically in Vietnam (13). Another trend this study finds is that few studies focus on the potential academic integrity concerns with AI-powered tool adoption in academic writing, and what unfolds following the implementation of AI. Writing outcomes and student engagement/enthusiasm are often measured, but few have tackled the potential ethical issues, privacy

concerns, and possible negative effects to abstract learning outcomes, such as developing academic integrity (Moorhouse et al. 9; Xiao et al. 15-16; Zhang et al. 17). Thus, the researchers proposed this expanded version of the original TAM as a framework to measure student engagement, writing proficiency, and academic integrity as a framework to study AI tool implementation and its aftereffects. Initial promising results, student enthusiasm, and improved writing outputs cannot be the only basis for adoption. Elements of traditional education must also be considered and integrated with them rather than replaced. This is especially so as Tang (74) and Zhang et al. (11–12) found that AI-assisted writing tools are best used as a complement to traditional education, not a replacement, and both teachers and students should have the prerequisite skills to use them to their full potential.

This framework primarily reduces complex relationships between AI technology and its effects on L2 language learners' outcomes to the three key points mentioned: student engagement, writing proficiency, and academic integrity. External factors, such as the material costs of integrating AI into the curriculum and broader factors like political will and support, are left unaddressed. The intersection is only intended to help analyze AI-assisted writing tools in academic learning and may have limited application to other fields outside of this. Should these broader factors, like facilitating conditions or social factors, be necessary, frameworks based on variants like the UTAUT, TAM2, or TAM3 may be used instead (Tang and Chen 590; Venkatesh 2).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study discussed how AI-assisted writing tools appear to generally improve students' writing skills while also posing risks if utilized irresponsibly. It highlights the need for a well-rounded approach beyond writing skill metrics. This research contributes to the education field by putting forward a conceptual framework to understand the key concepts influencing the adoption of AI-powered writing tools in academic writing. Previous studies had only spotlighted AI's usability or limited their scope to merely academic writing outcomes. With the novel pillar of addressing ethical issues, the present study shines a light on an understudied aspect of the present literature. The framework provides a conceptual understanding of AI-assisted tools for integration into academic writing, with humans and machines working seamlessly together.

Many of the recent shifts in academic writing education attempt to incorporate AI tools into lessons to improve teaching techniques and make students' learning more efficient. Like with any new technology, especially one as generalized as AI, educators need to be aware of the potential pitfalls and downsides, like intentional and accidental breaches of academic integrity or the biases in AI tools. Teachers can use such technologies to craft creative learning plans, better address students' personal needs, and help mitigate systemic problems. They can learn how to help students with special needs. Students themselves can use AI tools to enhance editing and proofreading, exploring ideas and directions, and developing skills like grammar, syntax, and style, if used alongside traditional schooling and their teachers' guidance. There are also broad implications stemming from AI tools' flexibility and success in non-Western cultures such as China, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, despite the current US dominance in models and training data. As potentially massive and enticing as the benefits are, however, ethical application is key. Thus, AI writing tools should be applied surgically, with much thought and even more planning. Continuous research and review will help improve understanding of how AI tools affect students' academic writing, and future research can find more specific, actionable plans for such integration. Focuses might be on adapting Western models to non-Western contexts to reduce bias, specific training for educators to understand what sort of biases AI tools tend to have, or even the development of AI tool branches better suited for forms of education, like L2 language learning in Non-Western countries. Collaboration opportunities between researchers, technology developers, educators, and other stakeholders also abound, as AI has touched so many aspects of society beyond academic writing.

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"The leaves touch me on the cheek": Woman and Embodiment in the Poetry of Elizabeth Siddall

"Las hojas tocan mi mejilla": Mujer y Corporeidad en la Poesía de Elizabeth Siddall

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Abstract: This article examines the poetry of Elizabeth Siddall, addressing its long exclusion from the canon and building on recent efforts to remedy that exclusion. For over a century, the Pre-Raphaelite portraits of Siddall have taken precedence over her own work, but the tide is changing. This paper focuses on her poetry, arguing that it questions the tradition of Victorian verse it is embedded in. While Siddall's rejection of the body as an aestheticized object has been noted by many scholars as part of this questioning, this article argues that her reevaluation of that body as a subject has not been explored in enough detail. I propose that Siddall's verse, while emphasising spirituality, does not imply a rejection of nature or the senses.
Keywords: Victorian poetry; Pre-Raphaelitism; feminist poetics; embodiment; Elizabeth Siddall.
Summary: Introduction. The context of the poems. Rejecting the body as an image. Reclaiming death. Embracing materiality. Conclusion.

Resumen: Este artículo examina la poesía de Elizabeth Siddall, a pesar de su larga exclusión del canon, apoyándose en algunos esfuerzos recientes por remediarla. Desde hace más de un siglo, los retratos prerrafaelitas de Siddall han tenido precedencia sobre su propia obra, pero ahora ésta se está recuperando. Mi artículo se centra en su poesía, proponiendo que cuestiona la tradición poética victoriana a la que pertenece. La crítica ya ha subrayado el rechazo de Siddall hacia el cuerpo como objeto estético, pero su revaloración del cuerpo como sujeto no ha sido muy explorada. En este artículo, propongo que la poesía de Siddall, si bien enfatiza la espiritualidad, no implica un rechazo de la naturaleza ni de la experiencia sensorial.
Palabras clave: Poesía victoriana; prerrafaelismo; poética feminista; corporeidad; Elizabeth Siddall.

Sumario: Introducción. Contexto de los poemas. Rechazo el cuerpo como imagen. Reapropiación de la muerte. Aceptación de la materialidad. Conclusión.

INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Siddall is not as resounding a name in the history of English culture as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti or John Ruskin. Yet her presence in Victorian art becomes undeniable as soon as that name is linked to a face. Even those who have never heard of Siddall will no doubt have seen her: she is the model in the celebrated *Ophelia* painted by John Everett Millais, and the face of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*. For anyone familiar with the Victorian period, these works will be immediately recognisable. However, Siddall herself has scarcely been discussed until very recently.

Only recently has Siddall's voice begun to be heard alongside her image. This is in great part thanks to the work of Serena Trowbridge, who in 2018, edited the first full collection of Siddall's poetry. In that edition, her last name is spelled as "Siddall," in contrast to her husband's spelling "Siddal," in an attempt to separate her writing from her role as his muse (Trowbridge, *My Ladys* 8). I will follow the same logic in this paper, which aims to study Siddall as a creative subject, specifically a poet, building upon the work of scholars who have spearheaded a reappraisal and revival of Siddall's writing in the years following Trowbridge's edition. As I will attempt to show, however, a lot of their work has been focused on her poems' rejection of the body in favour of spiritual transcendence.

While Siddall's insistence on the spirit in her writing is certainly a striking feature, which I too intend to examine, it does not necessarily amount to a rejection of materiality, but a transformed relationship with it. This article seeks to demonstrate how Siddall rejects not the body itself, but the body as an image and symbolic object which allows her to simultaneously celebrate the body as a sensing subject. I hope my reading may change our understanding of Siddall's fascination with death, which has always coloured readings of her work, as I will explore in the following sections. Although it remains a haunting feature, it is not always as despairing or morbid as many readers have assumed in the past. Siddall's depiction of death does not present it as an escape from the world and from the body, but as a reconciliation between world, body and spirit.

1. THE CONTEXT OF SIDDALL'S POEMS

In 1865 there was an early attempt, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, to publish a small selection of Siddall's poems. He wrote to his sister, asking her to include said pieces in her upcoming book, *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems*. Christina refused, alleging that they were beautiful, but "almost too hopelessly sad for publication *en masse*" (Rossetti and Hartley 292). This was not necessarily an aesthetic judgment but, as Jan Marsh has pointed out, was probably motivated by social unease surrounding Siddall's "unnatural death" (*The Legend* 13). She had become deeply depressed after giving birth to a still-born child, which only added to her sorrows during a period when she felt emotionally distant from her husband. Some months later, she died from an laudanum overdose. Although her death was cast as accidental, the circumstances might also suggest suicide (Marsh, *Elizabeth Siddal* 137–39). This would have been incredibly damning in the mid-19th century, when suicide was criminalised, depriving the deceased of a religious funeral and their descendants of an inheritance (Golden 108). Despite Siddall not having many material goods, it would have been important to her loved ones that her reputation remain unsullied. Besides, the women in Rossetti's family were extremely pious (Marsh, *The Legend* 10) and would have tried by all means to give his wife a Christian burial, rather than the shameful one reserved for suicides. In order to ensure that their narrative about Siddall's "accident" was not called into question, the family had to avoid anything that made her seem overly melancholy, which her verse sometimes does. The fact that it has been used, in later biographies, to illustrate Siddall's unhappy marriage is proof that the Rossettis' worries were not unfounded.

Under different circumstances, themes of despair and sadness would not have been reasons to reject a poem. The Rossettis themselves published rather gloomy work throughout their lives, and in fact, "The Prince's Progress" is a text full of hopelessness, where the hero arrives too late to save his beloved. Melancholy was a common mode in Victorian poetry, but when linked to real-life discussions of suicide, it became taboo. Catherine J. Golden has pointed out how these depictions were always scandalous and tended to be either mocking or melodramatic (111, 114–15). When the suicidal person's state of mind was instead taken seriously, the scandal became more disturbing than interesting for the general public. This was proven about a decade after Siddall's death, with the backlash to Tennyson's poem "Despair," which was inspired by a newspaper report

about a couple trying to drown themselves. The author, then Poet Laureate, faced harsh criticism for portraying the emotions and thought process of a suicidal man (Gates 102). The response could only have been worse to work that instead of imitating a suicidal speaker, possibly revealed one. Not only would Siddall's reputation as a lady have suffered, but her poems would have received rebukes as well.

Concerns about the conditions of Siddall's death would only last as long as its tragedy remained fresh in the public consciousness. However, by the time it was forgotten, her poems were being held back for an entirely different reason. In 1869, Dante Gabriel's friends, with his express authorisation, exhumed Siddall's coffin to retrieve a manuscript of his poetry. This had been placed there by Rossetti himself, who had insisted his work must go to the ground with his wife (Marsh, *Elizabeth Siddal* 140–44). The poems, many of which were about love, were published in 1870 and were generally well-received (Marsh, *The Legend* 15). That same year, Rossetti also completed his famous painting *Beata Beatrix*, which depicted Siddall as Dante's lover in spiritual ecstasy—or near death (Fowle). The legacy of both Rossetti's poems and this masterpiece were tied to the public's idea of his relationship with Siddall. As Marsh has observed, an artist's reputation and the sentimental value of his work were very important in the Victorian art market (*The Legend* 33–34). There was, therefore, considerable incentive for the Rossettis and their patrons to cultivate a romanticized image of Dante Gabriel's marriage.

Publishing Siddall's body of poetry, which often reflects on the perils of love, would have been detrimental to Rossetti's market value. Besides, at the end of his life, the artist himself was threatening to throw his reputation out the window. His mental health was extremely delicate and he suffered a nervous collapse, which Marsh suggests might have been caused by a critic's questioning of his love for Siddall (*The Legend* 15–16). His condition was concealed from the art world, so as to preserve his image and buyers' interest. In order not to destabilize him further, it was important not to reopen any wounds connected to his complicated marriage. Apparently, Rossetti had mentioned seeing his wife's ghost and had often tried to communicate with it (Marsh, *The Legend* 10). His mental illness was such that he suffered from auditory hallucinations and delusions of persecution, which his friends interpreted as being linked to Siddall's death (Marsh, *The Legend* 15–16). It seems that not only would his reputation have been harmed, but his mental health also, had her poetry been submitted to public scrutiny. As Rossetti's paintings continued

selling dearly after his passing in 1882, it was still important for his family and supporters to protect his image from rumours about his infidelities and mental illness (Marsh, *The Legend* 34). Thus, Siddall's writing remained unpublished for a few more years. Her fame as the "muse and wife of Rossetti," as an early biography called her (Hunt), prevented her from gaining any repute as a poet herself.

Some of her poems finally saw the light in 1895, when William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel's brother, began publishing selections of the family documents. However, he still followed Christina's advice and refrained from publishing Siddall's poetry *en masse*, scattering it instead across various books throughout eight years (Marsh, *The Legend* 199). As Trowbridge has noted, William Michael framed these writings within the context of Siddall's life, beauty and virtue, presenting his selections more as illustrations of these characteristics than as literary productions in their own right (*My Ladys* 17–18). He also edited Siddall's texts rather heavily, regularizing her spelling, meter and rhyme, and adding his own titles. In some cases, he even deleted several lines from the manuscripts and switched stanzas around (see Trowbridge, *My Ladys* 64, 73). He published all but one of the poems that are commonly considered complete (Trowbridge, *My Ladys* 18). However, there are extensive fragments of Siddall's writing that did not see print until 2018. Since none of the poems were published by their author, it is difficult to tell whether or not they were regarded by her as finished. Thus, what separates a complete piece from a fragment, besides William Michael's judgment, is hard to determine. Several of the so-called "full pieces" contain a couple of illegible or displaced words in their manuscript form. In light of this, it would be possible to place some of the fragments on the same level of importance, especially the fifth one that appears in Trowbridge's book ("Now I see you dying"), which may be seen to offer closure in its last line—the verbal phrase "shading all my tears" (l.14), which follows an enumeration of "shadow" images (ll.11-13), that are presumably the "shading" subjects. The long unavailability of these illuminating fragments has impacted the reception of Siddall's already slim body of work. It is only now, armed with Trowbridge's ground-breaking edition, that we can fully appreciate her literary skill, as several scholars have already begun to do. Her intuitive line breaks and slanted rhymes, which were smoothed out by William Michael Rossetti, show a deep curiosity for the ambiguities of language. Moreover, the considerable fragments that Trowbridge has transcribed help us better understand Siddall's themes and

creative process. Her treatment of nature and female death, I believe, makes her a particularly interesting poet among the Victorians. Finally, this quality and her work as a whole are readily available for interpretation.

2. REJECTING THE BODY AS AN IMAGE

Many of the critics that have so far engaged with Siddall's work have noted her insistence on the soul and her rejection of the body. Some of her poems have a speaker that is dying or already in the grave, whose soul speaks while their body fades or decomposes. For instance, "O mother open the window wide" records the speaker's final words in its last stanza:

> And mother dear when the sun has set
> and the pale kirk grass waves
> Then carry me through the dim twilight
> and hide among the graves (ll.29-32)

In one version of "It is not now a longing year," the speaker seems to be a corpse already:

> I lie among the tall green grass
> That bends above my head
> And covers up my wasted face
> And folds me in its bed (in Trowbridge, *My Ladys* 44)

Other poems, like "Life and night are falling from me," highlight the transient and false nature of our outward appearance, describing "life's stony way" as filled with "hollow hearts" and "soulless eyes" (ll. 9–8, 15). Jill R. Ehnenn suggests that this focus on spirituality is a reaction against the physical limits set on Victorian women, whose work in the material world was merely to exist in relation to their husbands (261–62). Sylvie Thode, on the other hand, has argued that Siddall's insistence on the immaterial is an attempt to forge a mystic union with God, beyond corporeality. In a detailed book about the poet, Anne Woolley has interpreted this attitude of hers as a desire to communicate beyond the limits represented by the body. Serena Trowbridge herself, in a paper examining Siddall's poetics, has insisted on her apparent resistance to the "passive and embodied position" of female voices ("Elizabeth Siddall" 213). I believe that Siddall's work definitely shows a resistance to the body

as a mere object and an intense focus on the spiritual realities that its image obscures. However, I do not think her poetry is quite as dualistic as the critical consensus seems to suggest. What it rejects, as I have hinted, is not the body itself, but its presentation as an image or symbol: the body as it has so often been seen by traditional, often male, art.

One of the poems where Siddall contrasts the physical and the spiritual is "I care not for my Ladys soul." Its speaker, who seems to be a courtly knight, praises his beloved's body, but disregards her soul:

> I care not for my Ladys soul
> Though I worship before her smile
> I care not wheres my Ladys goal
> When her beauty shall [lose its wile] (ll.1–4)

Later on, he describes her in beautiful fragments—her "smile" (l.2), her "feet" (l.5), her "wild eyes" (l.6)—in a way that recalls similar descriptions in male-authored poetry. Keats's knight in "La Belle Dame sans Merci", for instance, describes his lady by saying: "Her hair was long, her foot was light, / And her eyes were wild" (ll.14–16). Such descriptions exemplify objectification, where body parts or functions are separated from the person as a whole. The lady's "person" seems more identified in Siddall's poem with her soul, which is linked to and rhymes with her "goal" (l.3), that is, her private hopes and desires. These are overlooked by the male speaker in favour of her physical beauty, which he knows will fade, prompting him to find a new object of adoration (ll.7–8). Siddall inhabits this knight's perspective with great irony, exposing how superficial his "worship" (l.2) of love truly is. Throughout the poem he consumes his lady's looks and young body, alienating them from her and highlighting how she must eventually lose them.

The lady's response to her lover's attitude is to fully identify with the soul instead. Her only actions in the poem are to pray (l.9) and to cry "up to the unknown lands" of heaven (l.16). Although this might seem passive at a first glance, there is a secret triumph in it: while the object of the male speaker's worship—physical beauty—must die, the soul that she cherishes will presumably live on. Furthermore, by identifying with something that the knight does not understand or care for, she reclaims her identity and escapes his limiting view of her. He might consume her beauty by "gazing" (l.6), but the soul within it remains only hers and lasts far longer. In fact, the question in the second stanza of "who shall close my Lady's eyes"

(l.13) suggests, as Trowbridge has noted, that the triumphant gaze, which remains aware after death, is not male but female ("Elizabeth Siddall" 211). What is particularly interesting about this observation though is that the lady's eyes, while no longer "starlike," are still a physical attribute that's connected to her after death. We will return to Siddall's treatment of dead bodies as still-perceiving subjects in the following sections, but it is worth noting that even in Trowbridge's reading, which emphasises the body-soul dychotomy, we see glimpses of the importance that Siddall grants to her characters' physical senses. The reading, after all, depends on us believing that her lady's eyes can *see* after death.

"I care not for my Ladys soul" hints at the reason why women might identify with the spiritual. Their bodies are constantly framed as objects of male desire, separated from their own wills. This objectification affects how women view themselves too. As John Berger has pointed out, men's normalised surveillance makes a woman "continually watch herself," as though "accompanied by her own image" (46). Siddall's identification with the soul is an attempt to detach herself from that image. In many of her poems the female speakers seem to be literally beside themselves, escaping from their visible bodies. In "O grieve not with thy bitter tears," the poem is framed by the voice's transformation from a "life that passes so fast" (l.2) into a "spirit floating" (l.10). In other cases, the woman detaches from her body by becoming completely static, living and speaking to us in the poem, while her form stays motionless. The voice of "Ope not thy lips thou foolish one," for example, states that "all changes pass me like a dream / I neither sing nor pray" (ll.17–18); while in "O silent wood I enter thee," the woman is "frozen like a thing of stone" (l.11). Sylvie Thode has noted how some of Siddall's speakers become transparent, not merely leaving their visible bodies, but effectively erasing them (467). She points specifically to one of the fragments ("The sun is setting"), where the poetic voice declares: "the starry / sun floods through / me the space of / heaven" (ll.10–13).

A similar erasure of the body's image is also seen in poems where the speaker addresses us from beyond the grave. We have already mentioned a version of "It is not now a longing year" that describes the grass covering the speaker's "wasted" face (in Trowbridge, *My Ladys* 44). Her body may be static and its beauty "wasted," but the woman lives on and composes poetry. This idea of death not as an end, but as a triumph, is echoed in the last lines of "To touch the glove upon her tender hand." The speaker in that poem is male and alive, locked away from the experiences of those female

ghosts I have referred to. Yet, as he mourns his dead beloved, he turns to a curiously evocative simile, saying that she is "gone forever like the tender Dove / that left the Ark alone" (ll.12–13). This Biblical image, as Constance Hassett has shown, suggests earthly death, but also a higher immortality, with the ark, like the visible human body, being left behind, while the dove-soul transcends it (460). Besides, a flying bird is a symbol of freedom: the woman in the poem has risen above her previous existence and flown away from her visible body, on the wings of her soul.

It is unclear if the speaker of "To touch the glove . . ." understands the full implications of his final simile. Nonetheless, there is a sense that it both grieves and consoles him. Unlike the knight in "I care not for my Ladys soul," this man is concerned with his beloved's afterlife. That is indeed a possibility in Siddall's poetic work. Although most of her lovers are doomed, some of them are allowed a glimpse of future happiness, if they are able to recognise their immortal souls. As opposed to the false knight of the other poem, the speaker of "To touch the glove . . ." does not fixate on his beloved's body. He does not even touch her, instead cherishing her glove. In the second stanza, he comes into contact not with her frame, but with "her shadow on the sunny grass" (l.5). Shadows are a recurring image in Siddall's work and are often connected to memories and spirits, both of which persist after the visible body is gone. Thus, in "It is not now a longing year," "a shadow falls along the grass / and lingers at [the speaker's] feet" (ll.7–8). This could be her own shadow, appearing though the body is buried, or "the shadow of [her] dear love's face", whose memory she conjures up in line 17. The lover's ability to see and touch his beloved's shadow in "To touch the glove . . ." therefore becomes a metaphor for his ability to recognise her beyond just her former body. This sort of love stands in contrast to the superficial and fleeting adoration of "I care not for my Ladys soul." Yet, Siddall reminds us throughout her work that even these deeper attachments only prosper in the afterlife. In "Oh never weep for love that is dead," she writes: "this is only earth my love / where true love is not given" (ll.16–17). Similarly, the dying woman of "O grieve not with thy bitter tears," reminds her lover that only after they both die and find each other's spirits, will their love be fully verified:

> But true love seek me in the throng
> of spirits floating past
> and I will take thee by the hands
> and know thee mine at last. (ll.9–12)

"True love" is, in fact, a theme in many of Siddall's poems, as well as the only title she herself gave to a text.[1] In that piece, a woman sits by her lover's grave and waits to join him, implying that "True love" is an afterlife affair. All of this suggests that love, for Siddall, must be detached from the beauty of our visible bodies and must be connected to our souls, escaping the relationship of gazer versus gazed-upon that is established in "I care not for my Ladys soul."

3. RECLAIMING DEATH

Siddall is not the only Victorian artist who repeatedly depicted dead and dying women. There are numerous examples of such portrayals in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, some of which Siddall herself was the muse for: Millais' *Ophelia* is the clearest example, but Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*, as I have mentioned, also depicts a seemingly departing woman, as does Burne-Jones's *Sleeping Beauty*. In poetry, Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott" became an undeniable icon, the muse of many illustrations, including one by Siddall herself, which I will later examine. As Bram Dijkstra has noted, the nineteenth century "generally liked to paint their paragons of [female] virtue in an advanced state of physical debility and illness" (23). Elizabeth Bronfen argues that this connection between femininity and death was a consequence of men's objectifying view of women. Male admirers, she claims, made their ladies "non-reciprocal 'dead' figure[s] of imaginary projection, given that, in Lacan's terms, 'the whole of [man's] realization in the sexual relation comes down to fantasy'" (63). Indeed, the dying women in most of the aforementioned works are presented as beautiful objects, bodies for us to look at. Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott" lingers on descriptions of her appearance: "lying robed in snowy white / that loosely flew to left and right" (ll.136–37), "a gleaming shape she floated by, / dead-pale between the houses high" (ll.156–57). In fact, the poem charts the Lady's transformation from living and hidden artist into gazed-at and dead artwork. The final lines are spoken neither by the Lady nor the narrator, but by the male onlooker, Sir Lancelot, who tells us: "she has a lovely face" (l.169). Similarly, Millais's painstakingly detailed *Ophelia* conveys an image of beautiful passivity. We observe the heroine as a

[1] See Siddall's "True love," and Serena Trowbridge's commentary on page 93 of her edition, which clarifies how this manuscript was found with the title already written.

luxuriously dressed body, while her consciousness drifts away and her eyes remain fixed on the sky.

Despite their common subject, these images stand in stark contrast to Siddall's depictions of dying women. This has been observed by other scholars in relation to her sketches, particularly the one portraying the Lady of Shalott (Athmanathan 40). In said drawing (Fig.1), the mirror is cracked, and so "the curse has come upon [the Lady]" ("The Lady of Shalott" l.116) already, and she is bound to lose her life. However, Siddall shows her in a moment of full awareness. Still perfectly conscious, she looks down to Camelot, sealing her fate, as the poem tells us, and greeting death. The focus here is not on the Lady's frail body, which is almost completely hidden by a loose dress, but on her mysterious acceptance of destiny. Like the sketches, Siddall's poems also refuse to fetishise dying women's bodies, offering very few physical descriptions of her heroines. Instead, we often hear their own voices, rising from their deathbeds or graves. The speaker in "O mother open the window wide," for instance, is able to chart her own feelings and sensations while dying, but makes no reference to her appearance, except when she mentions her hands and feet, in order to give directions for her funerary rites (ll.9–10). In "It is not now a longing year," the only mentions of physicality are: "the green leaves touch me on the cheek" (l.3) and, in the alternative version, the speaker's "wasted face" that feels the grass bending over it. The focus here is on the speaker's sensory experience, not the appearance of her face or cheek – which might have been the subject of a line by Tennyson, such as: "then her cheek was pale and thinner than should be for one so young" ("Locksley Hall" l.21). The image of the dove-soul flying from the body, which I have analyzed earlier in my discussion of "To touch the glove . . .," also points to Siddall's focus on the dying soul, aware and free, rather than the dying body, objectified and unconscious. "Ruthless hands have torn her" describes the dying woman as being "up born" by angels (l.3). From her seat in heaven, she is an active subject: not just listening (l.5), but also singing and praying (ll.6 and 11). At no point in that poem is her dead body described, as Siddall does not consider the unconscious corpse a thing of poetry. As opposed to writers like her husband, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, she saw the dead woman as fundamentally a spiritual subject. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have pointed out how in Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel," the lady's afterlife is "in some sense physical," emphasizing "the impossibility of complete spirituality for any woman" (Gilbert and Gubar 27). Indeed, Rossetti describes his damozel, already

dead and ascended, with meticulous physical detail: her deep eyes (l.3), her long blond hair (ll.11–12), her ungirt robe (l.7), and her bosom, which is imagined as still warm even after death (ll.45–46). These are not details describing her body's sensations as a subject, but its qualities as a visible and tangible object. On the other hand, Siddall rebels against this insistence on the body as an object, suggesting that the real woman, behind man's superficial "worship" of her, is a transcending subject. She reappropriates the image of the dead lady by identifying her with her parting spirit, which forever escapes men's desire, and even their perception. Whenever she does mention the body, it is as the subject of the speaker's sensations, rather than the object of other people's.

Fig. 1. Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall, The Lady of Shalott, 1853. Maas Gallery



Over a century after Siddall's lifetime, feminist thinker Iris Marion Young claimed that "women experience the body as a burden" (239). She wrote that the objectification of their bodies, which women are forced to accept and internalize, limits their ability to thrive in the physical world. "As human, [woman] is transcendence and subjectivity, and cannot live herself as mere bodily object. Thus, to the degree that she does live herself as mere body, she cannot be in unity with herself, but must take a distance from and exist in discontinuity with her body" (Young 154). Siddall exemplified this already in the 1800s, not only distancing herself from her body as an object, but fully detaching herself—and her poetic speakers—from it. She leaned on the conventions of Victorian Christianity to identify humanity, but specifically women's humanity, with the soul, shedding their image

and its limitations. In discussing "I care not for my Ladys soul," Serena Trowbridge observes that the lady's appeal to God in line 15 appears after the images of funerary rites. "The structure of the poem means that it is even possible that her cry for help comes after death, permitting the Lady, like several of [Christina Rossetti's] narrators, to speak and act after death, though silenced by convention in life" (Trowbridge, *My Ladys* 38). Not only is Siddall correcting the poetic complex of the "dead woman," refusing to reduce her to a corpse, but she is in fact turning it around. Death, which once made woman the ultimate *object*, taking the soul from her visible body, now makes her at last a free *subject*, taking the visible body from her soul. Millais might paint Ophelia's drowning form, but her true self, in Siddall's poetics, would be rising beyond it, unnoticed by him. This is precisely the imagery of one of Siddall's sketches, which after her death was titled *A Woman and a Spectre* (Fig. 2). I believe it might be more aptly called *A Woman's Soul.* The body that lies at the bottom of the paper assumes the same passive and peaceful posture as Millais's Ophelia (Fig. 3), but from her rises a double, one with a clearly seeing face but no further figure to be seen. Unlike the body below and unlike Ophelia, this phantom looks directly at us. She is a perceiving subject, even though we ourselves cannot perceive her whole silhouette in the objectifying way we are used to. Her expression is one of fright or anger, perhaps at being tethered still to that other prostrate image. To her, Siddall's poetry promises freedom, on the other side of death. This is best conveyed by one of her "fragments," which opens with the rhyme: "Now I see you dying / Now I see you flying" (ll. 1–2).

Fig. 2. Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall, *A Woman and a Spectre*, 1850–1862. Ashmolean Museum



Fig. 3. John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851–1852. Tate Gallery



4. EMBRACING MATERIALITY

Despite this idea of death as freeing, Siddall's poetics do not fully reject the body. Her poems are not purely abstract, but are in fact strikingly sensual. Although they are no longer linked to their old appearance, Siddall's dying and entranced heroines do not usually transcend into a world of immaterial existence. A perfect example is "It is not now a

longing year," where the speaker feels the spring leaves brushing her cheek (l.3). This complicates our reading of the poems as rejecting the body and reclaiming death, but it also enriches it. I would like to propose that here, death and the loss of the visible body do not entail abandoning the material world or the lived body, as a series of sensations. Instead of consuming Millais's Ophelia, with its intricate view over woman and nature, Siddall's lyrics encourage readers to open their eyes within it, as woman, as nature. "It is not now a longing year" reads as if the Lady of Shalott, "lying robed in snowy white" with "the leaves upon her falling light" (ll.136–38) were to finally transcend not her senses, but her own image, and make us *feel*, rather than watch, the leaves "touch me on the cheek" ("It is not now a longing year" l.3). In her exploration of women's experiences, Iris Marion Young observed that all human bodies are both objects in space and subjects intentionally affecting it. She goes on to argue that women are taught by society to see their bodies as objects at all times (145), constantly aware that they may be looked at or acted upon. This inhibits, Young argues, women's ability to act upon the world freely, for they never experience themselves purely as subjects (148). In Siddall's poems, the detachment from the body as an image coincides with an awakening of the senses, whereby the body becomes an unambiguous subject. Interestingly, most of Siddall's speakers are not moving, however, to act upon other objects around them. They are perceiving subjects, intentionally perceiving the world, but they seem to objectify nothing in it. In these poems, the awakening of the female speaker is often accompanied by an awakening of nature. That is to say, other entities we usually think of as mere objects suddenly become sensing subjects alongside her. It is hardly a coincidence that the woman in "To touch the glove . . ." is compared to a dove. There is a continuity between women and nature in many of Siddall's death-poems. The previously cited fragment, where the speaker "see[s] the starry sun flood through [her]" (ll.10–12), represents not only the loss of her solid image, but also a new unity with the natural "sun," as well as an intensification of her sensory experience ("seeing"), which seems enhanced by the verb "flooded."

Nature in Siddall's poetry is an entity that feels the speakers' souls and engages their senses, away from any eyes scrutinising their bodies. In "O silent wood I enter thee," the wood itself has a symbolically spiritual "shadow" (l.12), under which the speaker is able to leave her body "frozen" (l.11) and indulge her mind, her faith, her memories. The fact that she feels another presence in this shadow (see l.12) could be read as a vivid

memory of past love, but it could also be a reference to nature's own spirit or to God, who is secretly present in it. Thode has convincingly argued that the speaker in this poem turns to the wood in order to connect with divinity (463). But my point is that, regardless of its origin, there is a perceiving sensibility in the wood itself, which gives life to the landscape. This idea of connection with nature is present in many more of Siddall's poems. Society might regard her speakers with "soulless eyes" ("Life and night are falling from me" l.9) and refuse to listen to them, like the knight in "I care not for my Ladys soul;" but nature receives their spirits with sympathy. In "Autumnal leaves are falling," "the tall grass bends" (l.3) protectively over the woman in the grave. It seems alive, "listening" (l.3) to the roaring sea, but perhaps also to her and her still-present consciousness.

Serena Trowbridge has noted how often nature reflects Siddall's speakers. While she reads this as a sorrowful silence on the part of the environment ("Elizabeth Siddall" 220), I believe that it marks instead a certain solidarity and identification between the poetic voice and the world around it. Siddall knows that the beauties of nature are ephemeral and false, like everything outside of heaven; but she recognises the environment's more spiritual aspect, as she recognises her own. She moves nature beyond the status of mere object, into that of perceiving and acting subject. Although it cannot move or dramatically act upon others, it quietly listens, sees, and even protects the poems' speakers. "Life and night are fading from me" equates "life and youth" to "summer weather" (ll.12–13), which is the sort of fleeting quality most people love in the natural world. Like Siddall's speakers, nature is also valued for its changing beauty rather than its depth. Perhaps for this reason, there is a sense of identification between it and her women. In her poems about death, specifically, the prospect of being buried in a patch of earth is not frightening. Instead, there is a sense that nature will embrace the dying speaker and help her leave her previous image behind:

> The river ever running down
> between its grassy bed
> The voices of a thousand birds
> That clang above my head
> Shall bring to me another dream
> When this sad dream is dead ("It is not now a longing year," ll. 19–24)

This attitude to the material world makes Siddall's poetry unique, even within a Victorian tradition of women reclaiming death and spirituality. Her sister-in-law, Christina Rossetti, wrote many celebrated lyrics about death. However, death in her work always implies a separation from nature, as in "When I am dead, my dearest," where the speaker "shall not feel the rain" nor "hear the nightingale" (ll.10–11). Birdsong, which in Siddall's work was part of the spell of death, is locked out by it in Rossetti's. Even when her poetry relishes in natural imagery, as in "Dreamland," Rossetti highlights how her dying speakers lie apart from it: "She cannot see the grain / Ripening on hill and plain" (ll.21–23). In the lyric "After Death," the speaker passes inside a room with a "half-drawn" curtain, mentioning some rushes in the room only briefly (ll.1–2). Conversely, in a similar text about the speaker's deathbed, Siddall has her asking for an open window, through which to see the hills ("O Mother open the window wide" ll.1–4). At the end, even as her sight fails, she conjures the image of her grave in the "waving" "pale kirk grass" (ll.30–32).

Other well-known female poets of the same period, such as Emily Dickinson, also wrote about death and tended to align with Christina Rossetti's representation of it. In "Because I could not stop for death," Dickinson's speaker leaves the world behind to sink into a grave which she describes as a house. Even though it is in the ground, she uses imagery from the Victorian indoors, with its roofs and cornices (ll.17-20). This stands in stark contrast to Siddall's "Now Christ ye save yon bonny shepherd," where imagery of the grave is intimately linked to nature: "My love should have a grey headstone / And green moss at his feet / And clinging grass above his breast / Whereon his lambs could bleat" (ll.7–10). While Siddall insists on her subjects shedding their visible bodies, she keeps them tethered to their lived bodies, their senses and the living earth. Thus, the subject of this poem, for example, will feel the grass cling to his breast from the grave, linking him to the cycle of nature, whereby grass grows on bodies and lambs feed on grass. This experience is imagined not just for her "love," but for the speaker herself, as she hopes they will be buried together: "and I should know the span of earth / where some day I might sleep" (ll.11–12). The effect of these lines is to reconcile the speaker not just with love —which, as we have seen, is truer after death—, but also with nature and her spirit. The two lovers are imagined resting together, embraced by the grass. A similar conclusion can be gleaned, I believe, from the final stanzas of "Many a mile over land and sea:"

> . . . And he came ready to take and bear
> The cross I had carried for many a year
> . . .
> I felt the wind strike chill and cold
> and vapours rise from the red brown mould
> I felt the spell that held my breath
> Bending me down to a living death
> As if hope lie bruised when he had come
> who knew my sorrows one by one
> and until comfort and pity [two illegible words]
> and give me the help of his own right hand (ll.5-6, 17–24)

Trowbridge has pointed out that the imagery used is Gothic ("Elizabeth Siddall" 222), but despite this tone, the poem's vision of death is not necessarily frightening. Instead, I believe that it brings forth a new state of being, where the speaker's troubles are eased and shared with her beloved and the earth. The phrase "a living death," which might have sounded terrifying in a different context, has become almost eye-opening in the midst of Siddall's other work and being connected to the religious, redemptive imagery of the rest of the poem (which as we have seen, invokes the "cross" and speaks of "comfort and pity" in line 23).

There is a precedent for this sympathetic treatment of nature in the ballad genre, which Siddall draws heavily from. In folk ballads, nature is often cast as a witness of human emotion. For instance, Trowbridge has noted that the ballad "Barbara Allen" uses "when the green leaves were a-falling" as a refrain in between the characters' displays of feeling (*My Ladys* 41). A similar phenomenon occurs in the ballad "Erlinton," recorded by Sir Walter Scott, whose collection Siddall herself read (Marsh, *Elizabeth Siddal* 100). In that poem, a young woman is kept from her lover, but escapes to meet him in "the green-wood," which is repeatedly invoked as a guardian of their love and of her active decision. In such ballads, both women and the environment around them become subjects in a way that is unusual in other mainstream poetry, where they are more often described than understood. Siddall's imitation of oral poetry and ballad-rhythms is therefore linked to her connection with nature. I believe that at least seven of her fifteen "complete" poems draw from folk ballads in either their theme, their form, or both. She nonetheless introduces innovations. For instance, "O mother open the window wide" alternates between regular balladic stanzas and irregular ones, imitating the instability of the speaker's voice, while her breath falters and dies. As Wooley has

highlighted, Siddall also breaks with the ballad tradition by having most of her songs be spoken in the first person by a woman, rather than letting their stories be told by a distanced narrator (129), as is the case in "Barbara Allen" and "Erlinton." Siddall thus bends the genre to serve her themes. Not only are her ballads close to nature and far from society, but they also enhance the voices of women and allow them to transcend their objectified bodies.

CONCLUSIONS

When I began this paper, I reminded the reader of Siddall's continuous presence as an image in Victorian art. Had her words been allowed in print, with their original form and content in her own time, they may have combated that objectified version of her. Unfortunately, the circumstances of her death and the popularity of her husband's portraits of her hindered the publication of her own work and allowed her image to take precedence in our cultural consciousness. Accounts of her controversial exhumation, which claimed that her corpse was miraculously preserved, provide a twisted metaphor for our culture's view of her. However, her own poems challenge this sort of objectification and focus on women's voices, their souls and their sensory experiences of the world. By publishing them under the title "My Ladys Soul" Serena Trowbridge has challenged us to correct our collective view of Siddall and begin to look beyond her image, into her soul. This soul, as she presents it in poetry, is the subject of material experiences and can see the world, even when its body is invisible or frozen. Thus, Siddall and her speakers escape their objectified bodies, without devaluing their lived-in bodies or materiality itself.

I believe that Siddall's poetry aligns with current ecofeminist concerns, which reject nature-culture binaries. Patricia Murphy recently contributed to this line of criticism by suggesting an ecofeminist reading of several Victorian women's verse. She convincingly argued that the roots of ecofeminist thought may be traced at least to the late nineteenth century. This could be taken further, drawing a line between the authors Murphy studied and earlier writers like Siddal, whose verse also rejected "the assumed fissure between spirituality and materiality" (Murphy 16). Reading Siddall in these terms is a task finally made possible now, with her full body of poetry in hand. Furthermore, a deeper look at her work from the phenomenological perspective of work like Iris Marion Young's would also be a task worth embarking on in the future. In short, I believe

that Siddall's view of women and the world around them has not yet been exhausted and must be considered from a less dualistic perspective than we have so far assumed. I hope that by arguing this point, my paper may have opened the door to future research along these lines.

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"All Made Miserable by One Cracked Bell:" Posthuman Monstrosity in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*

"All Made Miserable by One Cracked Bell": Monstruosidad posthumana en *Poor Things* de Alasdair Gray

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Abstract: By analysing Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* through the interrelated lenses of monster literature, neo-Victorian fiction, and posthumanism, this paper argues that the character of Bella Baxter reconfigures female subjectivity and sexuality, embodying a hybrid, posthuman identity that subverts patriarchal constructions of femininity and humanity. Through its use of intertextuality and a patchwork narrative, *Poor Things* transforms monstrosity from an othered category of abjection into a strategy for emancipation, thus situating the monstrous female body as a site of resistance rather than of threat and fear, and deconstructing humanist binaries and redefining what it means to be human.

Keywords: monster studies; neo-Victorianism; posthumanism; *femme fatale*; feminism; alterity; Alasdair Gray; *Poor Things*.

Summary: Introduction. Neo-Victorian Monstrosity. A Posthumanist Reading of the "Gorgeous Monster" Bella Baxter. Conclusions.

Resumen: Mediante el análisis de *Poor Things*, de Alasdair Gray, desde las perspectivas interconectadas de la literatura de lo monstruoso, la novela neo-victoriana y el poshumanismo, este artículo sostiene que Bella Baxter reconfigura la subjetividad femenina, encarnando una identidad híbrida y poshumana que subvierte constructos patriarcales de feminidad y humanidad. A través de su intertextualidad y narrativa fragmentada, *Poor Things* transforma la monstruosidad como categoría de otredad y abyección en una estrategia de emancipación. Así, se sitúa el cuerpo

femenino monstruoso como un lugar de resistencia en vez de amenaza, deconstruyendo los binarismos humanistas y redefiniendo la categoría de humano.
Palabras clave: monstruosidad; neo-victorianismo; poshumanismo; *femme fatale*; feminismo; alteridad; Alasdair Gray; *Poor Things*.
Sumario: Introducción. Monstruosidad neo-victoriana. Una lectura posthumanista del "hermoso monstruo" Bella Baxter. Conclusiones.

INTRODUCTION

Neo-Victorian literature is characterised by a redefinition of universalistic attributions regarding the subject and the "other" by means of revisiting and reconstructing the past, thus attempting against said past's alleged objectivity. Since Dana Shiller's groundbreaking essay on the genre (1997)—in which she claims that neo-Victorian fiction's main aim is to "question the certitude of our historical knowledge" (541)—many scholars have approached neo-Victorian literature as a method to shed light on the marginalised minorities that never had a voice in Victorian literature. Scholars, such as Mark Llewellyn, agree on neo-Victorian fiction's characteristic "historical pull of the past" in order to reconfigure our present reality, which we perceive as "fragile" and "transient," thus re-visioning the past through fiction (23). Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham claim that "the spectral presence of the Victorian past is all around us" (xi). This idea establishes the genre as a type of historiographical metafiction, a term coined by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988).

On the other hand, monster literature makes use of a patchwork narrative transversed by intertextuality and multilamination, as well as the confluence of different narrative styles in order to defy traditional perceptions of the monster. In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen attempts to read "cultures from the monsters they engender" (3), which evidences its close relation with otherness. Cohen also claims to challenge historical certitude in his theory of the monstrous:

> I will partially violate two of the sacred dicta of recent cultural studies: the compulsion to historical specificity and the insistence that all knowledge . . . is local . . . One must bear in mind that history is just another text in a procession of texts, and not a guarantor of any singular signification. (Cohen 3)

The reconfiguration of historical fact and revisitation of the past is, thus, crucial because it allows for a comparison between the monster and the neo-Victorian other, as well as a reconfiguration of the two in posthuman terms, which I will address by drawing on the work of Rosi Braidotti regarding posthumanism and posthuman subjectivity. This is possible because "monster" is an othered category, and therefore its subjectification supposes the deconstruction of said category. Consequently, both the monster and the posthuman inherently question the limits of what it means to be human and, naturally, what it means to be monstrous, by decentring the human subject and placing its focus on othered bodies that transgress traditional social conventions.

In order to exemplify the redefinition of monstrosity through a posthuman lens, I will analyse Alasdair Gray's novel *Poor Things* (1992) and its main character, Bella Baxter, a pregnant woman who, after attempting suicide, is resurrected by Godwin Baxter, a scientist who replaces her brain with the brain of her own foetus so as to be able to educate Bella as if she were a child. This article argues that *Poor Things* reconfigures monstrosity as a posthuman form of female subjectivity. Through Bella Baxter's hybrid existence, the novel destabilises the binary structures—human/monster, man/woman, object/subject—upon which Victorian humanism and patriarchal authority depend. By analysing the character of Bella Baxter as both a neo-Victorian and posthuman figure, I examine how the novel subverts patriarchal narratives that confine women to the category of less-than-human (Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 15) and monstrous. Focusing on the work of theorists such as Rosi Braidotti, Anya Heise-von der Lippe, and Dana Shiller, I approach the novel as both a posthumanist and a neo-Victorian text through a series of steps: the first section justifies my contextualisation of the novel as both neo-Victorian and monster literature through its intertextual and hypertextual relationship with *Frankenstein;* following this, I focus on the intersections between monstrosity and posthumanism, analysing how the figure of the monster challenges humanist hierarchies and binary power relations; lastly, I interpret Bella Baxter as a hybrid figure who reclaims agency and sexual autonomy through her "monstrous" difference, thus reconfiguring the archetype of the *femme fatale*. Finally, in my conclusions, I argue that monstrosity in *Poor Things* operates as a deconstructive strategy for female emancipation and a redefinition of the human.

1. NEO-VICTORIAN MONSTROSITY: HOW THE MONSTER IS ARTICULATED

1.1 Contextualization of *Poor Things* as a Neo-Victorian Text

Neo-Victorian literature is characterised by its unique way of looking at the Victorian past in order to examine it from a perspective that usually draws from postmodernism since, as Dana Shiller contends in "The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel" (1997), "neo-Victorian novels are acutely aware of both history and literature as human constructs, and use this awareness to rethink the forms and contents of the past" (540). That is, history is constructed, as well as deeply intertwined with binary relations of power and exclusion based on gender, race, class, sexuality, and other axes of difference, ultimately privileging the normative subject. Samatha J. Carroll argues that, through non-normative protagonists, neo-Victorian literature aims to deconstruct, decentre, and challenge categories in order to reveal their 'origins' as narratively constructed (182). By deconstructing history, the neo-Victorian novel completely rejects the usual universalistic notions of subjectivity because it denies the existence of persisting truths, which in turn argues for a tangible past that can indeed be retrieved through revisitation in spite of the biased construction of history based on power relations (Shiller 541). Moreover, scholars such as Rosario Arias classify neo-Victorian fiction as a double-edged tool for the reconstruction of subjectivity, since it does not only look back to the Victorian past, but it also turns itself to the future (45). Thus, neo-Victorian fiction challenges literary norms both in content and in form: on the one hand, it centres characters historically marginalised in Victorian narratives; on the other, it employs techniques such as parody, pastiche, and self-reflexive metafiction in order to question both the traditional literary canon and the conventions of Victorian literature.

Dana Shiller argues that the academic and literary use of present knowledge in order to revisit the past and consider its alternative possibilities might contradict the traditional and static academic idea of historical record (541). However, because said record lacks the objectivity it has been traditionally assigned, the revisionist tendency of neo-Victorian fiction is not too far off in its questioning the "certitude of our historical knowledge," since these novels "emphasize events that are usually left out of histories" (541). In this way, the historical record that the neo-Victorian novel deals with is fluid and, thus, "open to reinterpretation and therefore

constantly assuming different permutations" (540). Neo-Victorian literature is not preoccupied with presenting an accurate depiction of Victorian Britain but with examining "Victorian literary conventions and social ideologies" (Horrocks 164). These literary techniques used in neo-Victorian literature seem inherently monstrous in the way they employ intertextuality so as to build present interpretations of the past. This is why it is crucial to also consider the definition and representation of the neo-Victorian monster within the framework of posthumanism, as it questions the intellectual movement of humanism in a time of fascination for the othered body and scientific progress that inherently defies the limits of humanity. Neo-Victorian fiction therefore used, as the literary mode through which Gray revisits and destabilizes, Victorian constructions of femininity and monstrosity.

1.2 Monstrous Textuality and Intertextuality

Through the tendency to reengage with Victorian fascination with othered bodies, often considered monstrous at the time, the neo-Victorian monster acquires a special relevance. According to Jamie Horrocks, intertextuality, is a crucial characteristic of monster literature because, similarly to neo-Victorian fiction, it immediately supposes a patchwork narrative that combines not only elements of different literary works, but also diverse narrative styles. The literary work is also a patchwork creation similar to Frankenstein's monster itself. Linda Hutcheon claims that adaptations are "'multilaminated works' . . . and are inherently 'palimpsestuous' in that adaptations are texts through which other texts are always visible" (qtd. in Horrocks 163). *Poor Things* is an adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which becomes evident in the names chosen for the characters, some of which pay homage to Mary Shelley's life—like her maiden name, Godwin, among others—but, more importantly, in the plot itself, in which a scientist resurrects a woman by substituting her brain with that of her unborn child. Moreover, *Poor Things* presents, narratively, a patchwork creation that can be situated within a monster literature framework because, though mostly linear, the narrative style varies within the novel, including letters, illustrations, and the entire story being in itself the fictional memoir of one of its main characters and narrators, McCandless. Therefore, the novel consists of a Russian doll structure and, in its hybridity, it reflects Bella's as well. The importance of incorporating letters must not be overlooked because it allows for Bella's perspective to

be included in the novel in order to oppose the assumptions and perception of the men that surround and try to manipulate her, thus becoming an element of resistance within McCandless' narrative.

The fact that Alasdair Gray as an author designates himself as the editor of his novel in order to present it as a pre-existent memoir written by one of the characters is a highly self-reflective gesture. This self-reflexivity is also a key feature of Gothic and, its sub-set, monster literature, which, according to Anya Heise-von der Lippe's *Monstrous Textualities*, tends to "comment on the circumstances of its own production and (potential) reception, the form of its medialization, as well as the possibilities of non-hierarchical epistemologies and the creation of narrative in general" (5). Moreover, as a neo-Victorian text, *Poor Things* also reflects on the blurred lines that separate fact from fiction, as Editor Gray himself mentions at the beginning of the novel, when talking about the individual from whom he obtained the memoir: "I have written enough fiction to know history when I read it. He said he had written enough history to recognize fiction" (xiii). This ambiguity prevails throughout the novel and contributes not only to its placement within monster literature but also within the framework of historiographic metafiction. *Poor Things* is a self-reflective novel that both takes place in the past and questions the validity of the historical record and its supposed objectivity. This can also be appreciated in the way its multiple narrators each claim truth and authority, turning the narrative into a hierarchical struggle for control of the narrative, mirroring the very processes involved in the construction of history.

Monster literature and its characteristic intertextuality also gives way to questioning themes revolving around identity, agency and subjectivity. Heise-von der Lippe argues that "*Frankenstein*'s open structure presents a model of monstrous textuality that specifically lends itself to [feminist] adaptations . . . creating openings for feminist explorations of authority and narratives of resistance against being framed as Other by a dominant epistemological system" (28). Lille Haase agrees with Heise-von der Lippe in how *Poor Things* draws on Shelley's work in order to "explore themes such as human identity, scientific progress, or processes of Othering" (135). *Frankenstein* questions industrialization and scientific progress, as well as the perception of the disabled—and, therefore, monstrous—Other and its numerous adaptations are often prone to question gender binaries and sexual impositions, which will be the main focus of my analysis of *Poor Things'*s Bella Baxter. Therefore, monster

literature defies the conventional literary canons, not only in their formal aspects but also in their content, since monstrous literary works, as contended by Chris Koenig-Woodyard et al. seem to prefer "re-inventions and innovations" and "the fluid and flexible parameters of post-modernity's deconstructive and incessantly slipping discourses of meaning" (3). Thus, the monstrous is a theoretical field that is inherently deconstructive, since the monster supposes a redefinition of subjectivity and otherness in terms of the disruption of previously established categories.

Koenig-Woodyard et al. further argue that the textual redefinition or "re-composition of monsters" results in "interrogating, and trans-mogrifying," as it presents re-incarnations in literature that establish the figure of the monster as "trans-corporeal, trans-generic and transhistorical" (5). Indeed, Cohen claims that the monster is "pure culture" (4), that is, completely constructed by the popular, historical imaginary: "the monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" (4), which may contradict the previously mentioned argument regarding the monster's transhistorical ability. While the monster might be the corporeal result of the anxieties surrounding a particular historical moment, it does so through the incorporation of "fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" (Cohen 4). Therefore, since the narratives surrounding the monstrous body are cultural products conditioned by fear, fantasy, and the popular imaginary, they possess the ability to, when reconfigured, transcend said narratives in order to redefine the monstrous category in itself. In fact, Donna McCormack argues that "monsters and the monstrous encapsulate a vast array of possibilities that defy strict categorization or easy definitions," including the category of the human (250). In this way, monstrous bodies and their representation in popular culture constitute relevant commentaries on the lack of historical accuracy when constructing said bodies. Thus, given the definition of the monster as transcorporeal, it supposes a blurring of the boundaries between the human and the non-human, as the traditional humanist discourse has typically identified the monstrous with marginalised minorities, typically categorised as inhuman and, therefore, transgressive and monstrous. Consequently, in popular culture, the post-modern Gothic positions the monster as "made, remade, and post-(re)made in a reconstitutively historical, narrative, and culture aesthetic" (Koenig-Woodyard et al. 5), but never placed as subjects, only as othered entities. Thus, when revisited through a posthuman lens, the

monster travels from object to subject, from margins to centre and, consequently, the monster category is redefined.

In the novel, Bella Baxter's categorisation as a monster—a "gorgeous monster" (91)—originates in the discourses of the men who encounter her, whose perspectives are provided through letters and the memoir itself. Yet, owing to the novel's hybridity, readers are also granted access to Bella's own letters—titled "Making a Conscience" (103)—through which she gradually becomes the focal point of the narrative: first through her creation in the hands of Godwin Baxter, then through her process of self-subjectification by her own means. As a result, she can no longer be apprehended as a monster, for she no longer occupies the margins of the novel's discursive space; rather, posthumanism allows for her redefinition as a cyborg as coined by Haraway: "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (*Cyborg Manifesto* 5). As mentioned before, for Cohen, the monster operates as a reflective cultural "construct" and "projection" (4). Therefore, monstrosity is a "man-made" social construct that appears as a tool to categorise social anxieties revolving mostly around fear and abjection, especially regarding non-normative bodies mediated by the implementation of technology in all aspects of life. As defended by Haraway, these monstrous bodies, which she defines as "inappropriate/d," are characterised by their being "dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives" ("Promises" 69), thus marked by a difference imposed on them by said narratives. In this respect, the power of the monstrous lies in the fact that, as claimed by Cristie March, "the grotesque can flood the social structures that threaten it" (329). In this way, the monstrous category as a signifier of difference can be deconstructed through the emergence of new non-normative subjectivities and thus configured and framed within posthumanism.

2. The "Gorgeous Monster," Bella Baxter, and Posthuman Subjectivity

Monstrous others are crucial figures in Victorian and Neo-Victorian literature because they represent or embody cultural anxieties. Not only that, but, as stated by Megen J. de Bruin-Molé, "fictional Victorian monsters such as the vampire or the laboratory construct easily become placeholders for the contemporary self" (5). Monsters are, therefore, inherently posthuman because they fundamentally correspond to, as

Braidotti contends, the sexualised, racialised, or naturalised others of society. That is, any individual that challenges the human, white, cis-heteronormative male subject as the centre of life and measure of all things. Braidotti claims that traditional "dualistic schemes of thought" position "Man/reason/culture on the one side and Woman/matter/nature on the other" ("Yes" 9). She also contends that Man is, therefore, "the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet" (*The Posthuman* 2). Thus, posthumanism is crucial in order to consider the monstrous category because it supposes a shift in the way we establish relationships with those human others that have been historically and culturally devalued to the less-than-human category, who can be identified with the monstrous.

It is particularly relevant for my posthumanist reading of *Poor Things* how Braidotti introduces the term of the 'Anthropocene'—that is, the age in which the human has acquired the power to affect all form of life on Earth, thus challenging the way we create relationships with both human and non-human entities in the planet (*The Posthuman* 5)—because one of the main themes in Gothic and Victorian literature is Man's substitution of God as a creator and giver of life. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is the famous pioneer of this trope. However, as de Bruin-Molé argues, the monster is no longer an exception: rather, it has moved from the margins to the centre in contemporary culture (5). According to Kohlke and Gutleben, the monster has become a "veritable paradigm of modern subjectivity" (3). Many of the characters in the novel are at first not knowledgeable about Bella's origin, but she is still considered monstrous, especially by the male characters, because of her distinctive subversive attitude, which comes across almost as nonchalant: "I am a very romantic woman who needs a lot of sex but not from you because you cannot help treating me like a child" (53). According to Braidotti, posthumanism is fundamentally concerned with the reconfiguration of subjectivity and the relation to otherness, meaning that posthumanism does not only decentre "Man" as the "measure of all things," but also as the default subject of the Anthropocene: "subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, whereas otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart" (*The Posthuman* 15). That is, Man is considered rational and able of ethical behaviour; the other is not and, thus, not worthy of being included in the human category. Bella Baxter is not only a sexualised, objectified other—already a traditional inhabitant of the margins and not the centre—but also a transgressor of

that which is traditionally considered rational and ethical in a profoundly humanist Victorian society, thus becoming monstrous.

In this way, in *Poor Things*, the creation—the monster—becomes the subject, which is fundamentally posthuman, because Bella Baxter as a technologically mediated body attempts not only against the laws of nature but also against "human law," that is, traditional sexual roles and imposed gender expectations. When analysing "Frankenstein's Problem," Lucy Suchman defines "loss of control over one's desires" as one of the main themes of the fascination with technoscience (2). Bella is, therefore, the representation of this loss of control over technology, but also over women's agency. When analysed through the posthuman lens, the technological other and the sexualised other are equivalent insofar as control over them, or lack thereof, is exercised by their male human counterparts. Bella is the result of the intersection of technological and sexualised alterity: she represents both the male desire for control over technology and over the feminised body. In her letters—appropriately titled "Making a Conscience"—she resonates with the concept of "half person," of hybridity through her historiographical commentary on historical blindness: "'people who care nothing for their country's stories and songs, he said, are like people without a past—without a memory—they are half people.' Imagine how that made me feel!" (Gray 116). Consequently, Bella indirectly acknowledges herself as *half* an identity instead of a *double* identity, even though she is clearly defined by her posthuman doubleness: both human and non-human, both nature and technology.

According to Braidotti, the sexualised, racialised, and naturalised others are reduced to the aforementioned less-than-human category and, therefore, deemed disposable bodies (*The Posthuman* 15). This is relevant because Bella is initially a woman who, in her previous life, was forced to adhere to those traditional social values by her being educated solely to become a "good" wife (Gray 215) but who was unhappy to the point of committing suicide. It is then when her body is picked up by Godwin Baxter and, after replacing her brain with that of her also dead, unborn baby, is resurrected. Consequently, it is somewhat contradictory how her body is disposable until a man, a hegemonic subject, decides it is not. Bella's previous identity as Victoria is what is deemed disposable by Godwin, who completely erases that identity by replacing it with a new one he has created by educating Bella according to his own values and opinions. Godwin himself mentions, at the beginning of the novel, how

"morbid anatomy is essential for training and research, but leads doctors into thinking that life is an agitation in something that is essentially dead. They treat patients' bodies as if the minds, the *lives*, were of no account" (17). Baxter contradicts himself because he never actually considers or takes into account Bella's previous life as Victoria. She is, to him, first a body, then an experiment, then a "daughter." Moreover, this clashes with McCandless's wife's addendum at the end of the novel, which contradicts everything stated by her husband and deems it a patchwork of morbid Victorian fantasies (272). In this way, Victoria's offense comes from, according to Carol Margaret Davison, "a more apt emblem of the 'monstrous' ideal of Victorian womanhood—the infantilised woman" (207). Thus, McCandless fetishises the infantilisation of women through the false portrayal of his wife as a monstrous child that must be taught by men how to be a "proper" Victorian woman.

The question of whether Baxter would have had the urge to carry out the experiment had the corpse belonged to a man remains unanswered throughout the novel. However, it is significantly telling insofar as it displays the profoundly gendered logic behind the creation of Bella. Consequently, it reproduces Victorian patriarchal assumptions that position women as intellectually inferior or incomplete, which, again, corresponds to the trope of the aforementioned infantilised woman, at times considered a source of monstrosity. In the assumption that Bella is a childlike being that requires male guidance and education in order to become a socially intelligible subject, her "rebirth" represents a symbolic reconstruction of femininity in the terms of masculine, phallocentric authority. Therefore, Bella exists as the inferior term within a hierarchical binary: she is constructed by a man, educated by a man and narrated by men, thus continuously articulated through male desire. As argued by Laura Mulvey, "the determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (11). Moreover, Baxter's description of Bella as a "skilfully manipulated resurrection," a "fine, fine woman" who "owes her life to these fingers of mine" (27), reveals how her body is conceived as a product to be shaped rather than an autonomous entity. Through this language of manipulation, the posthuman tension is revealed: her scientifically mediated existence destabilises conventional gender standards and definitions of humanity. In fact, throughout the novel, Bella actually destabilises this dynamic as she increasingly resists the role assigned to her through the development of her intellectual, sexual, and political autonomy, thus defying, as Zanjani Surena et al. claim, "his

attempts to impose his scientific rationality on her, often questioning the very foundations of his authority" (3130). Therefore, it is crucial to identify, according to de Bruin Molé, the "link" that exists between "Bella's metaphorical construction as a subject and her literal construction by Godwin Baxter" (25). That is, the tension between the *Frankenstein* of it all—the science fiction in the experimentation and physical construction of Bella alleged by McCandless—and the construction of Victoria McCandless's education carried out by the Godwin Baxter she describes in her addendum (252).

Although Godwin Baxter occupies a marginal position in society which stems from fear and abjection regarding his appearance, his monstrosity remains socially negotiable while Bella's does not. Gray frames Baxter through Gothic imagery surrounding the grotesque, as he is described as having a big "ogreish body," "shaggy," "coarse" hair, a "mournful mouth," and a "brow corrugated by three deep, permanent wrinkles" (12), which in turn aligns him with Frankenstein's creature itself. in spite of his feared and rejected place in society, is still an active participant of the traditional binary power relations between men and women. Yet, this corporeal otherness never fully excludes him from masculine power structures and phallocentric authority. His class privilege, education and professional status grant him the privilege of social legitimacy: "he was allowed to come and go as he pleased because he paid his fees regularly, inconvenienced nobody, and had a famous father" (Gray 15). Consequently, Baxter's monstrosity is compatible with patriarchal power, highlighting the asymmetry of monstrosity when embedded in hierarchical gender schemes. Bella, on the other hand, is "physically perfect, but her mind is still forming" (27) and, simultaneously, she is described as a "gorgeous monster" (91) that causes suffering upon the men she encounters. In this way, this contradiction implies that, in Bella's case, the grotesque or monstrous lies not on her physical appearance or any kind of bodily deformity, but on behavioural and sexual transgression. She becomes monstrous because she refuses passive femininity and sexual submission and exercises intellectual curiosity and sexual agency instead. The phrase "all made miserable by one cracked Bell" (Gray 153) refers to the male narrators' anxiety regarding her autonomy: Bella is represented as dangerous and deviant not because she harms men directly or because her corporeity induces fear, but because her refusal to conform defies the gendered hierarchies through which male subjectivity comes to be. Her monstrosity is therefore not a

tangible, inner condition, but a projection imposed upon Bella for challenging normative structures of femininity.

Moreover, scholars like Sidia Fiorato take into consideration the juridical implications of the creation of a new being (287). It is significant to analyse the way, despite his initial objectification of Bella —whether it is as a sexual partner, as McCandless seems to believe, or as something to be studied and educated—Godwin Baxter is the only man in the novel who does not object to Bella's education in a male dominated field—medicine—or to her exercise of free will as a subject. Fiorato claims that, "by making her his heir, Baxter confers upon Bella the status of legal person and the possibility to engage in economic transactions" (288). Therefore, *Poor Things* allows Bella to exercise autonomy and independence both through the choice of her marital partner and by providing medical care to other women (Haase 143). Bella does all this while maintaining her status and Godwin's respect, which culminates with her inheritance of Godwin's fortune. It is, therefore, crucial how *Poor Things*, rather than vanquishing the monstrous protagonist to the margins of society—as many other Gothic narratives, such as *Dracula* (1897) or *Frankenstein* itself, do—ends with Bella's integration into legal, social and economic relationships when Godwin names her his heir, thus "classifying Bella as a legal person and, consequently, integrating her into society" (Haase 141). Instead of adhering to the Gothic trope of the monster that must be destroyed or isolated in order to restore social order, *Poor Things* allows Bella to occupy positions traditionally reserved for normative human subjects: professional authority, economic independence, and institutional legitimacy. Yet, this integration is partially enabled by Baxter's own status as a social other. Although he possesses masculine privilege and scientific authority, Baxter himself exists at the limits of Victorian respectability due to his grotesque appearance, isolation, and controversial medical practices. In this sense, he resembles a Frankenstein's creature as much as a Frankenstein himself, thus occupying an ambiguous position between exclusion and power. Because Baxter is himself marked as abnormal, he is able to recognise in Bella a form of difference that Victorian society would otherwise try to condemn. In this way, *Poor Things* uses the relationship between creator and creation to expose the instability of the monstrous category. Baxter's partial identification with Bella ultimately leads to the emergence of a posthuman subjectivity that challenges the hierarchical binaries—human/monster,

man/woman, creator/creature—upon which traditional systems of power depend.

2.1 The Reconstruction of the *Femme Fatale* as Posthuman

Bella's reconstruction as a femme fatale constitutes one of the novel's central strategies for reimagining posthuman monstrosity. As mentioned before, *Poor Things* and the characterisation of Bella Baxter exhibit an intertextual relationship with texts like *Frankenstein*, but there is also an interplay with biblical and mythological elements. Not only does Bella refer to her creator, Godwin Baxter, with the abbreviation "God"—as I mentioned earlier—but Bella herself is referred to as "Eve" or "Delilah" by one of her lovers, Mr Wedderburn (94). She is said to use her beauty to seduce men and turn them into her "helpless playthings" (87). The monster that adopts the anthropomorphic form of a beautiful woman, that is, the biblical *femme fatale*, is an archetype supported by a patriarchal society and male anxiety surrounding the "dangerous" female figure (Rodríguez Fernández 14). Thus, the *femme fatale* is significantly telling regarding operations of dehumanisation in the techno-mediated world (Suchman 4). Bella is, indeed, classified within the archetype, defined by Marie Mulvey-Roberts as a figure "who encodes the perils of sexual autonomy and aberration" (106), and who serves as a tool to demonise femininity (108). However, she is only classified as such by the men surrounding her, such as Wedderburn, once they are not able to take sexual advantage of her anymore because she will not allow it. As March claims, Bella's body becomes a site for the grotesque insofar as she unsettles the "cultural perceptions of those men with whom she interacts and who have come to expect and rely on naive and socially nonresistant women" (338). That said, Bella is benefitting sexually from him in the exact same way he is, which underlines not only the hypocrisy of the archetype itself, but also its potential to deconstruct the boundaries between male and female roles.

In her PhD thesis "Bringing the Body to Bear on Neo-Victorian Fiction," Ashley Maree Orr claims that, "in contrast to Victorian culture's wilful denial of the existence of female sexuality – and, where denial was impractical, such as in the case of prostitution – its construction as an aberration – these [neo-Victorian] texts frequently engage in explicit and overt portrayals of female sexuality" (25). Godwin Baxter claims that Bella's "menstrual cycle was in full flood from the day she opened her eyes, so she has never been taught to feel her body is disgusting or to dread

what she desires" (69). Thus, the woman that exercises her sexuality outside of the accepted social conventions of marriage, female submission and, crucially, shame is deemed "an aberration," monstrous, because the category arises from social and cultural anxieties regarding sexual transgression of, in this case, Victorian gender roles. As suggested by Anne Williams, the 'female' is "constructed by patriarchy as instability, materiality, sexuality, irrationality, darkness, evil" (94). Moreover, Orr argues there are different ways in which the female body and experiences can be classified as non-normative: "from freakery, to mental illness, maternity, and queer sexuality – their experiences of embodied difference are all heavily mediated by gender; their bodies are subject to surveillance, policing, and correction in ways that are specific to their identification as women" (27). Even when women conformed to this Victorian feminine ideal, at times regarded as the cult of true womanhood, they were still subordinated to men and considered significantly inferior and always secondary to them. This way, as argued by Orr, any woman who did not conform to these social conventions and "transgressed this ideal—through madness or some other display of non-normative female embodiment—were doubly disadvantaged" (28).

We can appreciate this in Bella's previous identity as Victoria: a woman who complied with the demands of the Victorian feminine ideal, yet remained unhappy, oppressed within a society that devalued women to such an extent that Gordon Baxter felt no ethical hesitation in treating her dehumanised body as material for experimentation. Bella—as this "doubly disadvantaged" other—is frequently catalogued as mad and, through her exercise of sexuality—with both men *and* women—in pursuit of social freedom from Baxter and McCandless, she is reduced to a fear-inducing object and, consequently, constructed as a monstrous other: "no normal healthy woman—no good or sane woman wants or expects to enjoy sexual contact, except as duty . . . only debauched women wriggle their hips" (Gray 218). Thus, Victoria's husband, General Sir Aubrey Blessington, represents the conceptualisation of the Gothic *femme fatale* as a threat to "not literal but more symbolic forms of castration: rebellion against their patriarchal roles as dutiful daughters, faithful wives and self-sacrificing mothers" (Williams 91). However, rather than being doubly disadvantaged, Bella transforms her self-assigned sexual freedom and intellectual ambition in a traditionally masculine field such as medicine into an advantage for herself, which ultimately deconstructs the *femme fatale* as a solely sexual, patriarchal archetype.

I argue that *Poor Things* simultaneously invokes and dismantles the traditional figure of the *femme fatale* through its satirical portrayal of those men who perceive Bella as dangerous, therefore critiquing the patriarchal portrayal of women as defined solely by their relationships with men (Surena et al. 3129). Rather than presenting her as genuinely manipulative, Wedderburn's melodramatic description of Bella as a "White Daemon who destroys the honour and manhood of the noblest and most virile men in every age" (Gray 94) undermines his judgement by portraying him as weak, dramatic and ultimately ridiculous. In this way, *Poor Things* constitutes a satire of the patriarchal tendency to construct sexually autonomous women as monstrous threats to male subjectivity. The *femme fatale* displaces the role of the male subject, destabilising the traditional gender hierarchy in which men occupy active positions while women remain passive objects of desire. Bella's sexuality is therefore perceived as threatening not because it is inherently destructive, but because it is role-reversing. The novel further reinforces this connection between female sexual transgression, and monstrosity through mythological intertextuality. Like figures such as Eve or Lilith, Bella is associated with female desire that exists outside male control and is therefore coded as dangerous, unnatural, or even demonic. Wedderburn's claim that his relationship with Bella was "Faustian from the start" (Gray 77) reflects this tendency to interpret female sexual agency through narratives of temptation and corruption. However, *Poor Things* exposes the absurdity of these projections by presenting Bella as a character who does not destroy men through malice but whose existence challenges patriarchal parameters through which these men define themselves. Consequently, the novel transforms the *femme fatale* from a monstrous figure of male fantasy into a posthuman subject whose sexual and intellectual autonomy defies the binary structures that traditionally define femininity as passive and subordinate.

Furthermore, it is relevant how, with the rapid scientific and medical advancements of the Victorian period, the body of the other becomes, aside from the usual fear-inducing object, a fascinating fixation, which is also reflected in the novel. In "Science and the Gothic," Kelly Hurley underlines the "creepy and uncanny" scenario that both authors and scientists explored during the Victorian period in an attempt to "figure monstrosity within scientific terms" (171–72). Bella's body is "othered" not only for its being a female body but also because she is a human, scientific, patchwork creation that goes against, as I mentioned before,

both natural law and human social impositions. This is what turns Bella into a posthuman *femme fatale*. She is identified as monstrous, as evil, and as deviant and unnatural. As Bella becomes the central subject of the novel, she decentres the traditional Victorian humanist narratives that surround her. Consequently, she can no longer be understood as a monster subordinated within the hierarchical binary of human versus non-human. However, in order to place her as a subject, Bella cannot be described as merely human either. While posthumanism contends that all humans are technologically mediated (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 33), the science fiction surrounding Bella's origin in McCandless's account makes especially evident the fact that Bella is a scientifically modified body who—apart from defying conventional notions regarding gender and sexual roles—challenges the limits of humanity and resists the perceptions surrounding human creation. In this way, Bella is an inherently posthuman subject. Therefore, in MacCandless's account, Bella is manufactured by Godwin—and the men she engages with—in the same way the archetype of the *femme fatale* is manufactured by patriarchal standards of female innocence and sanctity when a woman threatens traditional phallocentric authority by means of her sexuality and reproductive freedom—as well as her singlehood—, all of which are considered deviant, morbid, and uncontrollable, or as it were, monstrous. By developing her sexual curiosity and engaging in sexual explorations, Bella destabilizes the reality of a conventional Victorian environment that employs monstrosity as a way to construct femininity (Mulvey-Roberts 106). Bella is a posthuman *femme fatale* because she blurs the lines between traditional binaries such as the feminine and the masculine, creature and creator, human and non-human, object and subject. She is constructed by two sets of expectations—Godwin's physical and romantic expectations, and society's cultural and sexual ones—but she challenges and defies both.

CONCLUSIONS

Poor Things reimagines monstrosity as a site of resistance that destabilises traditional notions of subjectivity, gender, and humanity. By situating the novel within a neo-Victorian and posthumanist framework, this article has argued that Bella Baxter's hybrid existence challenges the binary structures through which patriarchal and humanist discourse define the human subject. As a technologically mediated body who is non-compliant with gender and sexual expectations, Bella nomadically transitions from

object to subject as the novel progresses. Bella occupies a liminal position between human and non-human, object and subject, creator and creation.

Through its intertextual relationship with *Frankenstein* and other Gothic and mythological narratives, *Poor Things* exposes monstrosity as a cultural construction rooted in anxieties surrounding female autonomy and corporeal difference. However, unlike many Gothic narratives Bella evolves from Godwin's "fine, fine woman" into a politically active, sexually liberated figure, two narratives that, as a patchwork creation like the novel and Bella themselves, compete until she finally asserts agency over her body and mind and redefines herself away from the monstrous category. Her progression from scientific object to autonomous subject demonstrates how the monstrous can function not as a marker of abjection, but as a means of reconfiguring dominant structures of power.

Bella's reworking of the *femme fatale* further reveals how patriarchal discourse constructs sexually autonomous women as threatening or unnatural. Yet the novel simultaneously satirises these perceptions, exposing the fragility of the masculine authority and the patriarchal archetypes that depend upon them. In this sense, Bella's posthuman hybridity ultimately dismantles the hierarchical binaries—man/woman, human/monster, mind/body—that sustain traditional humanist conceptions of identity. In the novel, the male perception of Bella as a monster and a fear-inducing object reveals the limitations of humanist discourse and opens the possibility for hybridity and non-hierarchical forms of being and relating to the other. Bella supposes not only the redefinition of what it means to be human, but also of what it means to be a woman.

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Whose Room? The Domestic Library in the Nineteenth Century[1]

¿De quién es la habitación? La biblioteca doméstica en el siglo XIX

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Abstract: The nineteenth-century domestic library has been considered a masculine space though dedicated scholarship on the matter is scarce. This article seeks to locate the position of this room within the household, to illuminate how and why it challenges established assumptions regarding Victorian domesticity and, in many instances, is presented as an ambiguous, liminal space. Building on scholarship on Victorian domesticity, contemporary sources on architecture and realist domestic fiction by Jane Austen, Anne Brontë and George Eliot, this article inquires into the difficulties surrounding questions of entitlement and ownership of this room.
Keywords: Victorian domesticity; liminal spaces; gender and space; library; study.
Summary: Introduction. Unstable Domesticity. Inside the Library. The Difficulties of a Normative Library. Libraries and Domestic Realism. Conclusions.

Resumen: La biblioteca doméstica decimonónica se ha considerado un espacio masculino y los estudios específicos sobre el tema son escasos. Este artículo busca situar la posición de esta habitación dentro del hogar, aclarar cómo y porqué escapa a los fundamentos conocidos sobre la domesticidad victoriana y, en muchas ocasiones, se presenta como un espacio ambiguo y liminal. A partir de estudios sobre domesticidad victoriana, fuentes contemporáneas sobre arquitectura y novelas del género del realismo doméstico escritas por Jane Austen, Anne Brontë y George Eliot, este artículo indaga en las dificultades que rodean las cuestiones de apropiación y derecho sobre esta habitación.
Palabras clave: Domesticidad victoriana; espacios liminales; género y espacio; biblioteca; estudio.

[1] An earlier, partial version of this article was delivered at the 44th AEDEAN Conference.

Sumario: Introducción. Domesticidad inestable. Dentro de la biblioteca. Las dificultades de una biblioteca normativa. Bibliotecas y realismo doméstico. Conclusiones.

INTRODUCTION

Although the Victorian household was conceived as private, and therefore female, some of its spaces remained fluid and would operate both as public and private, attesting to the porousness and blurriness of the theory of separate spheres. One such example of the collapse of separate spheres is the domestic library or study. Although these two spaces can make for different rooms within a Victorian household, contemporary architects and designers, as well as present-day scholars, acknowledge their similarities and often use both terms without making any distinction.[2] This article adds to scholarship on domesticity by exploring the mutable depictions and uses of this room during the nineteenth century.

In the collective imaginary "the library and study are perhaps the most obviously masculine spaces in the home" (Tange 147).[3] So much so, that scholarship on this domestic space, unlike other spaces in the Victorian household, is extremely scarce. This may be due to the fact that women's use of domestic space, especially when it comes to instances of subversion, has stirred more interest among scholars, and to the difficulty of challenging deeply ingrained assumptions. In fact, neither nineteenth-century specialized writings in architecture and house planning nor fictional representations of this room provide a clear-cut, straightforward picture of this domestic space. It is thus that the Victorian domestic library remains greatly underexamined.

This article builds on scholarship on Victorian domesticity as well as nineteenth-century works written by renowned architects and designers such as J. C. Loudon, Robert Kerr, C. J. Richardson, and Charles L. Eastlake in search of a comprehensive description of the domestic library in the nineteenth century. To establish a contrast between these descriptive and normative writings and what coeval realist novels actually tell us about

[2] See for instance: Davidoff and Hall 377; Eastlake 127; Kerr 117, 118, 123; Loudon 855; Ponsonby 93; Tange 137; Tosh, *A Man's Place* 60.

[3] The belief that the nineteenth-century library was a male space was well spread. See for instance: Eastlake 127; Hamlett, "The Dining Room" 576; *Material Relations* 584; Kerr 116; Logan 31; Monrós-Gaspar and Arias Doblas 11–12; Tosh, *A Man's Place* 60.

this room, passages from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–1872) are analyzed. Understanding literary styles and cultural domestic codes as continua which change progressively over time without clear-cut delimitations, these novels, authored by women and belonging to the realist convention, portray different versions of the library and describe the domestic dynamics going on inside a specific type of abode: large-scale gentry-style homes. These novels cover approximately the period between 1813 and 1832, which helps provide an idea about the instability of domestic codes in the early nineteenth century. This instability likely results from the mutability of spatial arrangements that Jennifer Ciro has shown to be taking place in the previous century, with country-house libraries owned by the aristocracy becoming public spaces towards the end of the eighteenth century. This shift, not surprisingly, would progressively leave its trace on Victorian domesticity as well (Ciro 89). Moreover, Ciro describes the different purposes that these libraries would come to serve depending on occasion and time of day, which further points to the versatile nature of the room. Therefore, this article shows how the library has been portrayed as male, female, and, ultimately, a liminal, fluid space "where power relations are played out" (I. Armstrong, "Spaces" 587). This analysis offers the opportunity to further explore what these representations may tell us about upper-class domestic ideology and the impact that different models of femininity and masculinity have on space. In fact, classifying the library as 'in-between' sheds light on its actual nature and brings this space into dialogue with current studies about nineteenth-century domesticity.[4]

1. UNSTABLE DOMESTICITY

For several decades, scholarship on Victorian domesticity has shown how blurred the public/private dichotomy actually was. It is thus that the "apparent coherence and authenticity" on the one hand, and the "internal instability and artificiality" on the other of Victorian spatial ideology permeates representations of the domestic library (Poovey 3). That is to say, the same tensions and frictions which were inherent to Victorian ideology also emerge when analyzing the domestic space of the library.

[4] For a recent study on the blurriness and liminality of Victorian spaces see Monrós-Gaspar and Arias Doblas.

The ideological instability which materializes within the four walls of the library allows for a fluidity that affects space and gender dynamics and helps illuminate the mutability of nineteenth-century domesticity codes in everyday life. Far from "the ordered space" which Nancy Armstrong sees as heavily reliant on "cultural hegemony" (23–24; 201), the ideal Victorian household was as much in the making as the ideology it was trying to live up to, contain, and display. Despite the ideological commitment to separate home and work, and place the figure of the woman at the center of the former, "[t]he boundaries between public and private life . . . were permeable and frequently transgressed" (Hamlett, *Material Relations* 41), a fact which becomes obvious when analyzing the library.[5] Even if the Victorian practice of sex segregation was also replicated inside the family house, some rooms, as it was the case with the library, functioned as liminal spaces whose purposes and 'rightful' inhabitants varied not only between households but even depending on the occasion and time of the day.[6] What this suggests is that Victorians had a variety of threshold, multipurpose spaces in their houses even if the importance of rooms with specific purposes was becoming the norm.

The instability of the library is also related to the "spatial negotiation" that Jane Hamlett highlights as essential to household dynamics ("The Dining Room" 579; *Material Relations* 96). While Hamlett's argument aligns with nineteenth-century experts when stressing the fact that Victorian interiors were increasingly designed for specific uses, she acknowledges how divisions of space were in fact "relational" and afforded permeability and transgression with the study being the epitome of the "divide between public and private" since, although it was a domestic space, its function belonged to the public sphere (Hamlett, *Material Relations* 5; 31; 38; 40). This shows how the in-betweenness of the library makes it a space with the necessary potentiality to subvert the status quo depending on who uses it and for what purpose, further

[5] Precisely because of this "permeability," scholars have had to resort to labels such as "privately public rooms" (Flanders 254) or "semipublic places" and "truly private spaces" when providing accounts about actual house management and arrangement practices (Gillis 120).

[6] In her study of Victorian architecture, domesticity and identity, Andrea Tange refers to "staircases, halls, and corridors" as *the* "liminal spaces of the middle-class home" (177). Yet, because liminality refers to a state "betwixt and between" and precludes having a clear structural status or identity (Turner 95), the domestic library or study can be fittingly categorized as liminal.

reinforcing the idea that spaces are not fixed and, indeed, are prone to be transformed by their users, or negotiated (Hamlett *Material Relations*; "The Dining Room"). This argument also foregrounds how, in spite of the implications which architecture has on identity formation, with space having an impact on individuals and their interactions (Tange 14), these are mutable. In fact, it is rather individuals' identities and the use they make of space that can have a truly transformative impact on the supposedly stable connotations of space.

2. INSIDE THE LIBRARY

As Ciro's work shows, from the end of the eighteenth century, the country-house library ended up becoming a public reception room (90–91); a change in identity that would progressively be adopted more widely by the upper classes. In 1825, *The Complete Servant*, a household guide with extremely minute details and advice for servants, refers to the library as one of "the usual family sitting-rooms" (Adams and Adams 277). Thus, we can see how at the beginning of the nineteenth century the upper classes were already using the library as a family room, hence destabilizing the notion of the library as the quintessential male space within the house. This raises questions about the real place, if any, reserved for the paterfamilias, the extent to which 'center' and 'periphery' were also unstable concepts within the household, and how these could accommodate Victorian gender dynamics.

2.1 Periphery and Manliness

The fact that the library has been considered – and largely remains– a male space poses a paradox: its being labeled as male within an allegedly female realm makes it sit on the periphery even when it is described as the space reserved for the patriarch. Moreover, the library is only financially affordable to the upper classes, regardless of the use they make of it, hence it is informed by notions of (gentle-)manliness which were under revision from the end of the eighteenth century thus further enhancing the in-betweenness and unstable characterization of this room. Therefore, the library represents a constant tension between in and out, private and public, and male and female, not only at the level of its physicality and actual location within the household, but also from an ideological perspective,

since, if the center of the home was female, a man's place was arguably the periphery.[7]

As historian Judith Flanders puts it, "[t]hat work was moving outside the home" was one of the "essential factor[s] in the creation of nineteenth-century domesticity" (xxii). In fact, scholars have commonly referred to the home not just as "the opposite of public" (Tange 11) but as its "antidote" (Tange 11; N. Armstrong 48). Therefore, the efforts to spread and sanctify the Angel-in-the-House ideal, with the woman at the center, meant that the man was allegedly relegated to the margins of his own home. It is for this reason that scholars have argued that "the paradox of defining masculinity significantly through domesticity meant that certain home spaces were coded as masculine places" (Tange 137). And the library or study, a threshold "internal[izing] the divide between private and public" (Hamlett, *Material Relations* 38), has been understood by many as a solution to the paradox.

The in-betweenness and blurriness of the library and study within the domestic space is underscored when John Tosh asserts that "[i]ndependent professional men . . . nearly always used a room at home *which served as office, library and an interview room according to need*," usually referred to as "the study," and which was "[r]eserved for the husband's exclusive use and often out of bonds for the rest of the family" (*A Man's Place* 60, emphasis mine). Tosh's work brings forward the ambiguity regarding the purpose this room should serve, and the collapse of the private-public distinction within the Victorian home. Nonetheless, Tosh traces here a difference between library and study, with the latter being a space specially devoted to work-related matters. The argument that this space conforms "to the principle of separate spheres by removing [men's] work from the domestic atmosphere" (*A Man's Place* 60) follows the trend, already discussed, which supports that not all rooms in the household were to be considered purely domestic. These statements emphasize the ambiguous and peripheral nature of the library and study as spaces that escape clear demarcation.

Indeed, while some scholars see the need for a male library as stemming from the fact that some professions made it a requirement, others

[7] As it has been argued, "[t]he ideological centrality of woman helps account for the importance that the idealized domestic sphere played during this period" (Poovey 80), and this "ideological centrality" was translated into space: "[t]he drawing room was the centre of the house, literally and spiritually. It was the status indicator, the mark of gentility, the room from where the woman governed her domain" (Flanders 131).

have argued that men were in want of a domestic space that could protect them from too much domestic bliss. The fact that the library or study has been described as "not so much sited *within* the home, as carved out *from* the home" (Tosh, *A Man's Place* 60, emphasis original) is another example of the difficulties to try and accommodate the public sphere within the perimeter of the house. This reinforces the peripheral and liminal qualities of this room from a physical point of view and makes it stand in direct relation to the Victorian gentlemen's club.

Considered "a surrogate home" or "a home away from home" (Milne-Smith, "A Flight to Domesticity?" 796; 807; Black 181), clubs are threshold spaces in between "private/public sphere dialectics" in as much as they provide privacy, and a sense of belonging to a community of "chosen equals" (Capdeville 22; 8). They were at the same time places of leisure and work, and, therefore, threshold spaces that contained all the comforts of the home without any of its pressures or demands. Thus, the Victorian club provides an "alternative domestic life for men" where all their needs were catered for in an intimate space chiefly characterized by privacy, discretion, propriety, and the absence of women (Milne-Smith, "A Flight" 798). These characteristics, essential to the gentleman's clubs, are shared by the domestic library or study as depicted by some scholars. This conceptualization has led Barbara Black to refer to clubs as 'a room of his own.' Similarly, when talking about the domestic library or study, Tange notes that "[i]t was the lucky middle-class man who had a room to himself that no one disturbed" (156). This statement complicates the Victorian concept of the home as refuge from the public sphere.

It was not until the late Victorian period that middle- and upper-class women could enjoy women's clubs, with The Somerville Club, founded in London in 1878, being considered the first of its kind and, possibly, the most emblematic (Monrós-Gaspar and Arias Doblas 160–62; Hughes 234). Yet, prior to this period, women had access to voluntary organizations and associations as early as 1775 (Morris 397). Although these were not appointed spaces and did not follow the rules of clubs, they nonetheless offered women the possibility of experiencing the public sphere on equal terms.

Like their masculine counterparts, women's clubs became hubs for political debate and discussion about the Woman Question but also spaces for "cultural production, training, and the generation of progressive ideas" (Monrós-Gaspar and Arias Doblas 148, my translation). In short, some of these clubs became spaces for women's liberation and betterment through

education. Women's clubs were also liminal spaces. In fact, and curiously enough, the decoration of the club's drawing room in particular was taken as a sign of the establishment's respectability (Monrós-Gaspar and Arias Doblas 151), establishing the threshold status of these spaces as continuations of the household. Yet, as Monrós-Gaspar and Arias Doblas conclude, the porosity and liminality of the clubs' drawing rooms eventually debunked the Angel in the House to give way to the New Woman's aims (156–57). Therefore, clubs functioned as proxy households that hosted activities proper to the public arena in spaces which still retained a clear connection, even if only aesthetically, to the private sphere.

3. THE DIFFICULTIES OF A NORMATIVE LIBRARY

The challenges to attempt a straight-forward definition of the Victorian domestic library or study stem largely from the fact that not even contemporary writings by architects and household experts are categorical. While there is consensus regarding ornamental aspects, its purpose is not always clearly delimited, and the terms "library" and "study" are often used interchangeably. It is important to note that the manuals analyzed in what follows are closer to the conduct-book tradition insofar as they focus on idealized notions about how houses should be run, decorated, and 'used' and try to present them as achievable because they are desirable, which helps to accommodate the contradictory nature of the library and its liminal qualities. Robert Kerr provides the clearest differentiation when stating that in the absence of a library in a small house owned by a professional or a man of learning, a study will be necessary (117; 118), an argument also supported by Tosh (*A Man's Place* 60).

Architects J. C. Loudon (*Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture*, 1835), Robert Kerr (*The Gentleman's House*, 1865) and Charles L. Eastlake (*Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and Other Details*, 1877) address the question of the decoration of the library but, instead of explicitly branding it a male space, they focus on how it should differ from other rooms usually considered female: "[t]he library, though it ought to be a handsome room, should present a great contrast to the light elegance of the drawing-room. The furniture should be substantial, the hangings of a warm but dark colour" (Loudon 798). Eastlake's take on this matter is much more categorical: "[o]f all the rooms in a modern house, that which is used as a library or study is the one least

like to offend a fastidious taste by its appointments. Here at least the furniture, usually of oak, is strong and solid" (Eastlake 127).

Loudon's advice on the decoration of the library draws upon gender without directly referring to it. While the characteristically female space of the drawing room should be "light" and "elegant," much as its ideal occupant, the library stands apart for its being "substantial" and presenting a "great contrast" (798). Loudon does not need to use the words "male" or "female," or "man" or "woman" for his message to get across. Having previously established that "none but a lady" can oversee the decoration of the drawing-room (Loudon 797), there is little need for further elaboration about the sex of the main occupant of the library. It is thus that we can see in Loudon's writing how "[t]he epistemological term *woman* could guarantee men's identity only if difference was fixed" (Poovey 80, original emphasis). The difference man/woman was the principle at the basis of Victorian ideology and demarcated man as the original, whole "I" and woman as "other." It is not surprising then that nineteenth-century architects applied this "familiar field of information" (N. Armstrong 87)—almost a universal language—to their works. In fact, when referring to the decoration of spaces, the adjectives used could, in some instances, refer to the room as much as to its rightful occupant. This shows to what extent "the sophisticated grammar" organizing household principles was internalized (N. Armstrong 87).

Such is also the case with Eastlake, who genders the library by opposition to other rooms in the house when he explicitly asserts that "'knick-knacks' were usually banished from the library. By that expression I meant to include that heterogeneous assemblage of modern rubbish which, under the head of 'china ornaments' and various other names, finds its way into the drawing-room or boudoir" (136). This "modern rubbish" that ladies store and display in their drawing-rooms or boudoirs is, we can infer, the fastidiousness Eastlake is glad to see the library free of. It is in this bold manner that the architect demarcates space and gender, making it clear that the library was male.

Kerr's advice is more succinct even if gender implications are still present. For him, "the style of design and decoration ought to be, although not devoid of cheerfulness, certainly subdued in character" (Kerr 116). In the same vein, Eastlake stresses the "intense respectability" that the library projects (127). This subduedness runs alongside the "manly simplicity" that was gaining currency as a trait of desired Victorian manliness (Tosh, "Gentlemanly Politeness" 471).

Another point of agreement among most contemporaries—though Eastlake provides very little specific information—is the fact that the library serves as family sitting room, as anticipated in *The Complete Servant*. In fact, Loudon and Kerr bring the domestic library close to the parlor, one of those public rooms in the house. While Loudon refers to the library as being "used as the family sitting-room on common occasions" (796), Kerr further describes it as "a public room, and somewhat of a lounge" (118). It is thus that the ambivalent and liminal nature of this room begins to appear in contemporary accounts: one single space is marked as reserved for the family—private—but also as a "public room" and "*somewhat of* a lounge" (emphasis mine).

In fact, the versatility and ambivalence of the library, its lack of a clear status, are further underscored by Loudon when he turns it into a male space: "[w]hen there is company in the house, the library would be the morning sitting-room for the gentlemen, who might here read the papers and new publications, write and answer letters" (799). In spite of his initial claim that "every apartment in a house has, or ought to have, its particular use" (258), Loudon ultimately surrenders to the mutability of this room. His concession further highlights how individuals have an impact on space since, on such occasions, the library serves as a masculine homosocial space for leisure and work, that is, it becomes a club at home—a significantly liminal place, as this article has shown.

Therefore, even if "specificity in house planning" became progressively prevalent during the nineteenth century (Hamlett, *Material Relations* 40), the library would remain a contradiction and an exception since architects themselves do not assign a specific role even when depicting the ideal library. In fact, the nineteenth-century library changes purpose not only depending on the occasion but also on the time of day,[8] a habit that began in the aristocratic country house.

Ciro has recorded how the library turned into a space for social gatherings and how the Victorian upper classes would progressively assign different uses to this room depending on the time of day. Being so, the mornings could see the library being used as morning room for family and guests or just for the group of men assembled at the house (91; 93). Towards the early afternoon, men could retire to the library after lunch

[8] In her seminal study about the Victorian parlor, Thad Logan also acknowledges that "the occupation of certain spaces was carefully regulated by time of day and occasion" in relation to dinner parties (32).

(92), thus signaling it a "clubbable space."[9] In the evenings, however, both sexes would meet again there and use it as "a proxy drawing room" turning it into a space of frivolity (91; 93). In turn, Hamlett has noted how, during the second half of the nineteenth century, "[l]ibraries often contained large numbers of chairs and pianos, suggesting family and possibly public sociability as much as male seclusion" ("The Dining Room" 584).

To add to this ambivalence about the library, Robert Kerr somewhat struggles to describe it:

> It is not a Library in the sole sense of a depository for books. There is of course the family collection; and the bookcases in which this is accommodated form the chief furniture of the apartment. But it would be an error, except in very exceptional circumstances, to design the Library for mere study. It is primarily a sort of Morning-room for gentlemen rather than anything else. Their correspondence is done here, their reading, and, in some measure, their lounging;—and the Billiard-room, for instance, is not unfrequently attached to it. At the same time the ladies are not exactly excluded. (116)

Kerr's library seems to be more practical than ideal since his attempt at a description is more rooted in everyday practicalities. His description undermines categorical assumptions about the Victorian library and destabilizes notions of gender segregation in this particular space. Being so, Kerr's library is, if anything, depicted as a liminal, in-between space: for every allowance he makes, there is an exception or clarification to be noted. The library is not just "a depository for books" or a room for "mere study," and it is only "in very exceptional circumstances" that the latter may be the case. Kerr's attempt to define the library thus starts with what it is not rather than with what it actually is. In this sense, we can see in Kerr's prose the importance of epistemologically fixed differences and how they work to identify a presumably male space based on opposites rather than similarities.

The sentence "[i]t is primarily a sort of Morning-room for gentlemen rather than anything else" attempts a gender categorization of this space. Nonetheless, Kerr, as Loudon, has to draw on a female framework of

[9] The term "clubbable" has traditionally referred to "one who is sociable or possesses the qualities requisite to be a club member" (Milne-Smith, *London Clubland* 30–31), however, I here propose to apply the term to those spaces possessing the qualities to function as a club since in the culture of 'clubland' space was as important as individuals.

reference—the morning-room—to establish what the library may be "rather than anything else." The ambiguity in Kerr's description of this space, and of the space itself for that matter, reaches its peak when the author clarifies that "[a]t the same time the ladies are not exactly excluded." With this final annotation we are left with a room that is best described as male "rather than anything else" but not "exactly exclud[ing]" women. Kerr's portrait of the Victorian library actually records the impossibility of setting in stone the practicalities of an ideology that was in the making.

In his aim to reflect on the reality of Victorian household arrangements, Kerr's premises are less restrictive than Loudon's and hence allow for multipurpose rooms. Still discussing the library, he concedes that "this is in great measure a Sitting-room" which in a small house may be "used as the Study, by a clergyman for instance, or as the Business-room" (Kerr 117). It is here that we can infer a difference between library and study: the study may substitute the library in a small house—probably due to lower income—and it does not appear to hold 'social' connotations. Rather, Kerr also specifies that "when the owner is a man of learning, we must either add a Study or constitute the Library itself one" (118), thus accounting for the versatility of the library and its similarities with the study.

It is when the library has to serve as study that Kerr clearly demarcates the gender of this space. The fact that the owner is immediately recognized as male is not surprising due to the ideological systems in place at the time of writing. Also, by describing the chief occupier of the study as a man with intellectual inclinations (Kerr 118, 123; Loudon 800) both Kerr and Loudon delimit on architectural terms the gender of the person with access to culture and intellectual accomplishments. This is likely the main reason why both the library and the study have been traditionally thought of as male spaces. Because "the good [Victorian] reading subject should integrate inward depth and public life" (Cohn 12), the good reader had to be male.

At the other end of the spectrum we find C. J. Richardson's *The Englishman's House* (1870). His is an entirely descriptive work which limits itself to explaining the layouts of existing dwellings. Therefore, while the words 'library' and 'study' recur several times, there is nothing in Richardson's publication that advises about functions and purposes. For this reason his 'case studies' further destabilize previous gendered or practical notions about the study in particular. While he describes the

layouts of several libraries, these passages do not offer any insight about the occupiers and, in most cases, he just enumerates and describes the style of the pieces of furniture. However, when dealing with the study, there are three instances where Richardson provides contextual information that makes the unstable, liminal status of this space clear and refutes the premises which Loudon and Kerr painstakingly try to establish.

The multipurpose nature of this space in what Richardson terms the "cheapest model that can be given for a villa" makes the room serve as "study or school-room" (229; 231). This particular example is the opposite of what Loudon and Kerr ascribe to the study. A similar example is provided when Richardson describes the spatial arrangements at "a small villa in the modern French style" (269), a so-called "French Maisonette." Here, "room c" on the floor plan "can be used as a study, but it is intended for a sleeping room" (271–72). With this example, the normative identity of the study is erased. Far from having "a marked character of use; as well as a particular character of style" and overlooking the fact that the features of a "library, or other superior living-room, ought never to be liable to be mistaken for those of a bed-room or closet" (Loudon 259), the space designed and built for a study has become a "sleeping room."

Nonetheless, Richardson's most destabilizing description of a study appears when he comments on the floor plans of a "villa, which has just been erected in Berkshire, in the neighbourhood of Windsor" and which is "intended as the country residence for a lady of rank" (183). This villa, according to Richardson, features a space he refers to as "the lady's room or study" (184). The author does not brand this room a morning room, or a boudoir, probably the closest female counterpart to the study, even if he uses such terms in other instances throughout his work. In considering the possibility of referring to a room for "a lady of rank" as study, Richardson re-genders this space to show the liminal, undefined status of the room.

4. Libraries and Domestic Realism

Although Nancy Armstrong has stated that "the household could not be invoked and used arbitrarily any more by authors of fiction than by those who wrote conduct books" (86) because "[domestic fiction] helped to formulate the ordered space we now recognise as the household" (23–24), truth is that the library has been endowed with an arbitrary nature by many. Despite the statement that "Victorian texts rely on the fact that these places held relatively stable associations for their middle-class occupants" (Tange

177), contemporary novelists have depicted the domestic library in a variety of ways that unsettles a fixed structural identity within the household and therefore exposes its liminal nature.

Even if, as this article has shown, specialists in architecture have gone to great lengths to try and delimit the library or study, they haven't always succeeded, precisely because "[t]he house, like its occupants, is never a stable entity" (I. Armstrong, "Spaces" 589). In the nineteenth-century novel space is "discontinuous, broken, and fractured" (I. Armstrong, "Theories" 21), precisely because it is not stable and it is depicted as prone to transformation depending on its inhabitants and the use they make of it. Furthermore, Isobel Armstrong goes on to show how "[i]n nineteenth-century narrative texts the order of family, class, outsiders and insiders, the barrier and the border, are paramount" because "[t]he Victorian novel is heavily invested in exploring boundaries, which are the sites of power, status, and exclusion, as well as the taboos on transgressing barriers, whether of class, or morals" ("Spaces" 582; 597). Therefore, the "ordered space" that Nancy Armstrong (23–24) considers so important is, in some novels, on the verge of collapse due to spatial subversion, something which is aligned with the depictions of the library. In fact, the novels under examination here are concerned with "the barrier and the border" of the library more to test their stability than to take them for granted.

Jane Austen draws on pre-Victorian architecture in her novels. By the time of their publication "the separation of masculine and feminine interior space was complete, explicit, and . . . ideologically self-justified" (Wall 367). Thus, her fiction shows household arrangements which would become normative in the Victorian period because "the domestic novel antedated . . . the way of life it represented" (N. Armstrong 9).

Although the author had first-hand knowledge of architecture thanks to the trips she made and the buildings she got to know, as her private correspondence evidences, some critics have noticed how descriptions of buildings in her novels are vague (Pevsner 404) or merely names (Kroeber 159), and that she is "spare in spatial imagery" (Hart 310). Nonetheless, "Austen's reader almost always knows exactly in which room any scene takes place" thanks to the descriptions provided (Wall 367). In particular, in Austen's novels drawing rooms are especially meaningful since they are the space where most social relationships and plot twists—and misunderstandings—take place (Wall 368); they are spaces for display. This is the opposite of what happens with Mr. Bennet's room in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Mr. Bennet's characteristically private room is

portrayed as a clear example of the library as a male space that offers solace from feminine interference and social pleasantries:

> In his library [Mr. Bennet] had been always sure of leisure and tranquillity; and though prepared, as he told Elizabeth, to meet with folly and conceit in every other room in the house, he was used to be free from them there. (Austen 70)

In a household populated mostly by women, Mr. Bennet's library is a retreat, almost a hiding place, the only room in the house which he can truly call his own (Austen 110; 341). Thus, the library is depicted as a clearly demarcated male space, a trait in line with conventional promulgations about the room but contrasting nineteenth-century general understandings about the library as the family sitting-room. Nonetheless, Hart has studied the importance of "privacy and intimacy" as organizing forces in Austean domesticity (306), and he has referred to Mr. Bennet as a "disturbing example of . . . ruthless privacy [and] selfish solitude" (326). Yet, if the "[t]he 'comfortable' room for Austen," as depicted in her novels, is one that must allow for "social comfort" and be "without confusion, show, or clutter" (Hart 314), Mr. Bennet's library exemplifies comfort in his own terms, to the point that even the mistress of the house is exiled from this room:

> "My dear," replied her husband, "I have two small favours to request. First, that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room. I shall be glad to have the library to myself as soon as may be." (Austen 110)

Although Mr. Bennet's library is here portrayed as "[r]eserved for [his] exclusive use" and he is desperate to mark it as "out of bonds for the rest of the family," especially for Mrs. Bennet, this is not due to a wish to comply with the ideology of separate spheres "by removing his work from the domestic atmosphere" (Tosh, *A Man's Place* 60). On the contrary, Burgan argues that within "Austen's implicit critique of the patriarchal hierarchy . . . Mr. Bennet can be seen as the only consistent and unyielding critic of society in the novel" precisely because of his constant retreats "to the sanctuary of his library" (537; 539). Because of the character's limitations to fight the status quo, Burgan considers Mr. Bennet "a 'victim

of the system'" (543), a circumstance which turns the character into an example of precarious, peripheral masculinity.

In spite of his desire for social distance,[10] Mr. Bennet's library ushers the purposes of male leisure—we are not aware of his having any specific task or occupation—and enforced social transactions and conventions. Access to a club being out of the question, Mr. Bennet's need for an exclusively male space within the house aligns with what different scholars have pointed out about men's need for domestic privacy. Perhaps to emphasize the social aspect of Mr. Bennet's room, we are first introduced to this space when Mr. Bingley returns the former's visit, a matter of merely "ten minutes" (Austen 11). It is also in the library where Mr. Collins is welcomed, to the owner's inconvenience, to spend his time reading or studying (70). Thus, Mr. Bennet's library becomes a homosocial space "carved out *from* the home" (Tosh, *A Man's Place* 60), showing that space is an unstable category.

Although at the Bennets' the library is the place where masculine civilities take place, most of the passages referencing this room relate to one of the key themes in Austen's works: marriage. The fact that the library is the place where some of the Bennet girls have their suitors accepted or turned down by the father makes for an interesting reading of this space: Wall has noted how "[t]he spatial margins of the novel—not its drawing-rooms—are where things have room to change" (370). This fact also problematizes the statement that "Mr Bennet consistently retreats into his library to protect and prolong his patriarchal inadequacy and inaction" (Wall 27; 369), since, even if in *Pride and Prejudice* Mrs. Bennet has a more business-like attitude to marriage, it is her husband who is in charge of taking the decisions. With Mr. Bennet always taking Jane's and Lizzy's opinions into account, the library is the place where the daughters' marital future and wishes are sanctioned, as shown in the following passage:

> In the evening, soon after Mr. Bennet withdrew to the library, [Elizabeth] saw Mr. Darcy rise also and follow him, and her agitation on seeing it was extreme. She did not fear her father's opposition, but he was going to be made unhappy . . . and she sat in misery till Mr. Darcy appeared again, when, looking at him, she was a little relieved by his smile. In a few minutes he approached the table where she was sitting with Kitty; and, while pretending

[10] In his work, Hart pairs privacy and intimacy with different types and levels of distance and decorum in Austen's novels.

> to admire her work said in a whisper, "Go to your father, he wants you in the library." She was gone directly.
> Her father was walking about the room, looking grave and anxious. "Lizzy," said he, "what are you doing? Are you out of your senses, to be accepting this man? Have not you always hated him?" (Austen 355)

Mr. Darcy is the last of the suitors to propose in the novel and, like those before him and irrespective of his higher status, he undergoes the same ritual. During these interviews between father and prospective husbands, the reader, together with the other characters in the novel, is shut out from the library, most likely because in Austen's novels "[c]eremonies of greater intimacy require more privacy" (Hart 312). Mr. Bennet's library then, is not a space of male seclusion just within the text but also outside it.

Even if Mr. Bennet is always candid about his views, the fact that the content of the interviews is not disclosed endows such meetings in the library with an aura of secrecy and confidentiality remindful of the unwritten codes of conduct set to regulate men's behavior in nineteenth-century clubland. It is thus that Mr. Bennet's library, a space he is openly protective of, may be read as a metaphor for his relationship with his two elder daughters, Jane and Elizabeth, about whose marriages he is also especially watchful. This way, although the library is portrayed as a clearly male space, it is also the place where Mr. Bennet keeps his daughters' best interests at heart, showing how "[s]paces are realized in Austen by the social actions and rituals that happen in them" (Hart 311).

In the case of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) roles are reversed, and the reader is presented with a completely abusive husband. Brontë's novel is a prime example of how spatial 'identity' can be easily overcome and transformed by the occupier's identity. The clash between Helen's Victorian morals and Arthur's Regency ways is key to show how it is the individual who has an effect on space rather than the other way round.[11] Furthermore, the novel shows how the library escapes normative "cultural assumptions" based on gender (Tange n. 15; 293).

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* "the novel's relationship to domestic ideology is an unusually vexed one" to the point that "[t]he novel makes a heroine out of a woman who runs away from her husband" (O'Toole 176).

[11] For a comprehensive analysis of how the Rengency and the Victorian periods are portrayed in the novel see Juliet McMaster's "'Imbecile Laughter' and 'Desperate Earnest' in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" (1982).

Here the library is consistently depicted as a place of retreat, a characteristic also present in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Middlemarch*. However, in Brontë's novel this is its prime function, that is, for the most part, the library is not portrayed as a space where things get accomplished; rather, it is a refuge, a sanctuary to escape to in moments of distress. And, what is more, libraries in *The Tenant* are an indisputably female space. This sets the different libraries in the novel away from the notions of masculine studious habits, family sitting room, etc. Throughout the novel, Helen Huntingdon is the chief occupier of the libraries at her different places of abode. She is shown to "retir[e] to the library" (Brontë 154; 315; 340), "take refuge in the library" (156; 167), and "shut [herself] in the library" (361) on numerous occasions. It is therefore no surprise that Helen comes to regard the library at Grassdale Manor "as entirely [her] own, a secure retreat at all hours of the day" (Brontë 353)—a depiction which offers a great contrast to the arguments put forward by some scholars regarding the gender of the natural inhabitant of this room.

Unlike Mr. Bennet, Helen is not escaping from female "folly and conceit" (Austen 70). Once she realizes she cannot perform her "higher calling" as dutiful wife, she takes refuge to shield herself from ruthless masculinity: Arthur Huntingdon is portrayed as the epitome of obnoxious, pernicious, aristocratic Regency habits (McMaster 354). As a man with no further interests than the enjoyment of the public, leisured, male sphere, Arthur has long been a member of clubland, a social space which he favors over any other and which he is unable to keep at a distance from the domestic, private sphere of the home. Thus, while the Victorian library, as described by architects and depicted in other novels from the period, bears a connection to the gentlemen's club, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* clubland invades Grassdale Manor disrupting any notion of domestic propriety and only the library remains uncontaminated. This process of disruption escalates and the collapse of spheres is made more and more obvious making the house "night after night one scene of riot, uproar, and confusion" (Brontë 348–49) to the point that any connection with the propriety of the gentleman's club is blurred, and domestic realism is displaced by a Gothic atmosphere, "replicat[ing] a cultural split between male and female spheres that is shown to be at least one source of the tragedy at the center of the fictional world" (Jacobs 204). This shows how individuals can impact 'architectural identities' in different ways, thus doing away with any notion of stability attached to or derived from

particular spaces, and, in fact, "exemplif[ying] the ways in which domestic reality is obscured by layers of conventional ideology" (204).

Because "[n]one of [the] gentlemen had the smallest pretensions to a literary taste" (Brontë 353), Helen Huntingdon can turn the library into a female space from where she starts plotting her independence. It is in the library that Helen keeps her painting materials and where she starts producing works with a view to being able to sustain both her son and herself once she finally leaves Arthur.

> [Arthur] walked into the library. I followed, whether with the dim idea of preventing mischief, or only to know the worst, I can hardly tell. My painting materials were laid together on the corner table, ready for to-morrow's use, and only covered with a cloth. He soon spied them out, and putting down the candle, deliberately proceeded to cast them into the fire: palette, paints, bladders, pencils, brushes, varnish: I saw them all consumed: the palette-knives snapped in two, the oil and turpentine sent hissing and roaring up the chimney. (Brontë 365)

Although Helen had subverted the conventionalities of the library as regards the gender of its main occupant, this space remained, nonetheless, a space of female confinement. Critics have noted how the narrative architecture of the novel, with Helen's account at the center, means that it is framed and, therefore, restrained by a male voice,[12] a pattern which mirrors her use of space, since, for the most part of the novel, she is forced into confinement. In fact, the passage above shows how Helen sees her plans thwarted, once again, by pernicious masculinity and Victorian codes of female submission. Therefore, while she has been the only regular inhabitant of the library, and after writing in her diary about her total lack of control over the household, her small realm is taken away from her.

The proto-feminist tone of *The Tenant* undermines notions about men's need for a room of their own within the household since, as the novel shows, it is the woman who ultimately gets displaced by the patriarch. Nonetheless, by portraying the library as a temporary female safe space, Brontë destabilizes cultural assumptions about the gender of the space showing how different types of femininity—in this case, the Victorian domestic woman—and masculinity—the aristocratic reckless

[12] In her article "Siblings and Suitors in the Narrative Architecture of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" (1999), Tess O'Toole explores the different readings that critics have made of the narrative structure of the novel.

husband—affect space dynamics within the household. As O'Toole has argued, "Brontë's novel exposes rather than reproduces the myth of power embedded in cultural constructions of the domestic woman" (717). Because individuals' identities and personal interactions are not fixed, spaces have to adapt to accommodate new interpersonal dynamics.

A very different case, in fact quite the opposite, is depicted in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72) where Rev. Edward Casaubon also likes having the library to himself but fails to take advantage of this privacy and accomplish any substantial task. Trying to come up with the *Key to All Mythologies*, Eliot's character is shown to spend most of his time in his library—a space with a charged symbolic importance (Kroeber 160; Swann 297) which evidences how characters can "come to be known or defined by libraries" (McCray 86).

Although Lowick Manor "lies somewhere between the parsonage and the palace" it does not feature a study (Trotter 48). Thus, this library destabilizes the ideal because although it serves the purpose of a study, this space changes from "private retreat" (Kerr 118) to public room depending on the occasion and Casaubon's mood, thus reinforcing the potential of this room as an ambivalent, fluid space impacted by its occupant. In fact, although Trotter, building on Kerr's treatise, has argued that in *Middlemarch*, and especially at Lowick, we find "mutually exclusive gendered spaces" (48), the library is not as clearly demarcated as in *Pride and Prejudice*. Contrary to the domestic arrangements shown in Austen's novel, Casaubon's library is a negotiated, fluid space and Dorothea is often invited to spend time there as assistant to her husband's intellectual quest:

> Even drawing Dorothea into use in his study, according to his own intention before marriage, was an effort which he was always tempted to defer, and but for her pleading insistence it might never have begun. But she had succeeded in making it a matter of course that she should take her place at an early hour in the library and have work either of reading aloud or copying assigned her. (Eliot 281)

The role that Dorothea performs in relation to this space is key to understand how power relations work in this couple: the wife accesses the library, a clearly male territory in this case, but only upon invitation and as accessory to the husband. This shows how, even if the room is used for different purposes, it is the man that oversees what happens in this space, thus relegating the woman to a subservient, secondary place that complies

with the notion of the library as "reserved for the patriarch." Swann has argued that the library at Lowick is one of the "expanding symbols" in *Middlemarch* since we can see how this space progressively expands for Dorothea (297).

Casaubon's library is a multipurpose room where he "gives audience," spends his "leisure" time on his own—"dozing chiefly" (Eliot 274; 474) —and also in the company of his wife:

> After dinner, at the hour when she usually began to read aloud, Mr. Casaubon proposed that they should go into the library, where, he said, he had ordered a fire and lights. He seemed to have revived, and to be thinking intently. (Eliot 475)

Yet, the chief purpose of Casaubon's library remains academic, which mirrors the conception he has of himself, that is why once he becomes ill and intellectual activity is forbidden, spending time in the library is understood to be "out of the question" (Eliot 288). Therefore, although this room is shown to serve multiple purposes, a change in its chief occupant has a direct impact on the functionality of the space, and once Casaubon is forced to stop his intellectual" enterprise the library loses its *raison d'être* and is shut.

With this turn of events, a process of emasculation begins for the character of Casaubon which, in turn, also affects the library. In as much as he is unable to fulfil the grandiose intellectual task he had set for himself due to his physical feebleness, his alleged superiority as patriarch is compromised and so is his use of the male space *par excellence* in the novel.[13] It is then that the library is "re-negotiated" and Dorothea is depicted progressively occupying a more prominent role in this room—a fact which anticipates Dorothea's reclaiming of this space upon her husband's death.

Immediately after Casaubon's burial the library is taken up by the other male figures in Dorothea's life—her brother-in-law, Sir James Chettam, and her uncle and former guardian, Mr. Brooke—who get together to debate the best course of action regarding the young widow's immediate future (Eliot 483). However, this paternalistic and patriarchal "occupation" of the room soon comes to an end.

[13] Casaubon's library has been categorized as one of the "most decisively gendered spaces" together with Dorothea's boudoir (Trotter 50).

Once Dorothea regains control over her life, and money, the library seems to recover its function as a place for study:

> She sat down in the library before her particular little heap of books on political economy and kindred matters, out of which she was trying to get light as to the best way of spending money so as not to injure one's neighbours, or—what comes to the same thing—so as to do them the most good. (Eliot 805)

Dorothea does not have much longer left as mistress of Lowick Manor but, in the meantime, her presence at the library re-writes the story of this space and "the process of rebirth begins for [her]" (Swann 297). Her "little heap of books" is insignificant compared to the array of books, notebooks, etc. which the late Casaubon required for his work. Nonetheless, this does not mean that Dorothea's task, because a woman's, is petty. On the contrary, while Casaubon's incomplete, never-ending, extremely ambitious project was of importance merely to himself and had a negative impact on his relationships with others, the library now becomes the place from where philanthropic projects will emerge. Reclaimed by Dorothea, this room, previously considered a "dead space" due to its symbiotic association "with the heart disease first manifest within it" (Trotter 50), or "a zone of incarceration" (McCray 86) is now a nest for new beginnings; "its restrictions giving way to freedom" (Swann 297).

The fluctuation that this library undergoes shows two facts: first, albeit initially branded male, the library at Lowick Manor is an unstable, mutable space that is negotiated as regards occupier and purpose, therefore, far from having the fixed status that some have attributed to it, it is an in-between space. Secondly, there is a direct impact of the individual upon the space, which furthers the liminality of the room from the perspective of its inhabitants, and which shows how domestic spaces can be reclaimed and altered.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the many sources that aim at establishing clear and stable gender boundaries within the Victorian middle-class household, this article has shown how the library is a room which escapes delimitations. Although it has been branded male by many, the paradoxical nature of this space emerges from contemporary architectural writings to nineteenth-century

fiction and present-day scholarship. It is for this reason that this article has suggested that the Victorian domestic library be best categorized as an ambiguous, liminal space whose status within the household is fragile because it is not static, but rather open to different meanings and functions. In fact, the library has been shown to be especially permeable: different types of masculinity and femininity have a direct impact on this space and its dynamics; hence its transmutable character. Therefore, despite the different premises that aimed at normativizing space, it has been evidenced that mutability affects both individuals and space and feels especially at home in the Victorian library.

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Representing Mental Health Struggles in YA Literature: The Case of *Vampire Academy* and *Neferet's Curse*

La representación de las batallas contra la salud mental en la literatura juvenil: El caso de *Vampire Academy* y *Neferet's Curse*

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Abstract: This article examines the representation of mental health in YA vampire fiction, analyzing *Vampire Academy* and *Neferet's Curse* through the lenses of bibliotherapy and scriptotherapy. It argues that while YA literature can offer therapeutic benefits, such as encouraging empathy and prompting readers to seek adult help, it may also be triggering or foster copycat behaviors on vulnerable readers. While *Vampire Academy* portrays recovery as attainable through emotional support, therapy, and personal responsibility—in spite of including some potentially problematic elements—*Neferet's Curse* ultimately silences and revictimizes a sexual assault victim in ways that might hinder the therapeutic potential of trauma narratives. Adopting a theoretical approach, this article considers both the positive aspects and limitations of these novels while offering possibilities for future reader-response research.
Keywords: Medical humanities; YA vampire fiction; bibliotherapy; healing process; mental health.
Summary: Introduction. The Therapeutic Potential of YA Literature. Lissa Dragomir's Mental Health Recovery. Neferet's Revenge Plot as a Cautionary Tale. Conclusions.

Resumen: Este artículo examina la representación de la salud mental en la ficción juvenil sobre vampiros, analizando *Vampire Academy* y *Neferet's Curse* desde la perspectiva de la biblioterapia y la scriptoterapia. Sostiene que, si bien la literatura juvenil puede ofrecer beneficios terapéuticos—como fomentar la empatía e incitar a los lectores a buscar la ayuda de un adulto—también puede ser un detonante o fomentar comportamientos de imitación en lectores vulnerables. Mientras que *Vampire Academy* presenta la recuperación como algo alcanzable

mediante el apoyo emocional, la terapia y la responsabilidad personal—a pesar de incluir algunos elementos potencialmente problemáticos—*Neferet's Curse* acaba silenciando y revictimizando a una víctima de agresión sexual de formas que podrían obstaculizar el potencial terapéutico de las narrativas sobre el trauma. Adoptando un enfoque teórico, este artículo analiza tanto los aspectos positivos como las limitaciones de estas novelas, al tiempo que ofrece posibilidades para futuras investigaciones sobre la respuesta de los lectores.
Palabras clave: Humanidades médicas; ficción juvenil de vampiros; biblioterapia; proceso de curación; salud mental.
Sumario: Introducción. El potencial terapéutico de la literatura juvenil. La recuperación de la salud mental de Lissa Dragomir. La trama de la venganza de Neferet como cuento con moraleja. Conclusión.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health has traditionally been misrepresented in popular culture, with fictional narratives either demonizing or romanticizing mental disorders, self-harm and even suicide attempts (Packer xi–xvii). This is the case of young adult (YA) vampire fiction, most notably Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series. However, there are also other YA vampire novels that seemingly try to challenge these misguided representations and offer a potentially safer platform for emerging adults who suffer from these mental health issues. In fact, Michael Cart claims that some of the positive traits of YAL include its capacity to reflect teen real-life experiences and worries, as well as encouraging "understanding, empathy and compassion," and revealing hard truths, even when they are difficult to accept.

However, Riestra-Camacho et al. contend that the apparently positive traits that some works of literature might have in mental health struggles need empirical testing to be claimed so. They conducted a reading experiment with a large group of participants to test the claim that bibliotherapy may have a positive therapeutic effect on patients suffering from eating disorders (ED). This experiment followed a creative bibliotherapy approach, which "involves reading literary texts (e.g., poetry or narrative fiction) for therapeutic purposes, especially in the context of mental health conditions" (305). Riestra-Camacho et al. concluded that while it may be useful to include creative bibliotherapy in the therapeutic treatment of ED patients, we must also acknowledge "the potential for damaging as well as beneficial reader responses to textual material" (327). This is the case of Michelle Mead's *Vampire Academy* series and P. C. Cast and K. Cast's *Neferet's Curse*, two YA vampire literary series. The

focus on vampire fiction in the present study is due to the allure that this supernatural creature has on young readers, who "may internalize and project their identities through narratives that blend both real-life struggles and fictional elements" (Riestra-Camacho 19). Indeed, the vampire, a literary figure traditionally associated with death, transformation and anxiety is a particularly suitable character to explore questions of mental health and recovery (Riestra-Camacho 20) in YA fiction.

Mead's *Vampire Academy* is a series of six novels that follow Rose Hathaway, a teenage girl who shares a psychic bond with her best friend, Lissa Dragomir, while they are both students at St. Vladimir's Academy, a boarding school for vampires. The novels have a spin-off series called *Bloodlines* which revolve around Sydney Sage, a human teenager who is part of a clandestine group known as the Alchemists, who keep the existence of vampires secret from humans. By 2021, the franchise had surpassed 15 million copies sold internationally (Radulescu).

The *Vampire Academy* series (Mead) feature several characters who suffer from a number of mental health issues—i.e., addiction, depression, suicidal ideation and anxiety disorders. However, in this article, I only focus on Lissa Dragomir's struggle with depression and self-harm in the aftermath of her family's death. Mead's groundbreaking portrayal of mental health problems in young characters stresses the importance of verbalizing and normalizing them to start their recovery (Darragh 257).

Neferet's Curse is the third spin-off novella in Cast and Cast's New York Times bestselling YA fantasy series *House of Night*. The main novels of this literary franchise follow Zoey Redbird, a 16-year-old vampire fledging and her adventures in the House of Night, a boarding school for young vampires in Oklahoma. *Neferet's Curse*, on the other hand, is a neo-Victorian YA novella set in Chicago in 1893 that follows Emily Wheiler—later reborn as Neferet, the High Priestess of the House of Night. It explores her transformation from a victim of incest and domestic violence to an empowered vampress who violently gets back at her abuser. In this article, I explore how *Neferet's Curse* could encourage YA readers to develop empathy and understanding towards Emily and her psychological distress. Yet, the morally ambiguous end might also make readers question the healing potential of revenge plots as well as its appropriateness for a YA audience.

In this article, I first offer an overview of the therapeutic potential of literature, particularly in the case of YA literature through bibliotherapy or scriptotherapy. Then, I compare the representation of mental health

struggles in *Vampire Academy* and *Neferet's Curse* and the heroines' recovery journeys. First, I argue that Lissa Dragomir's path to recovery is arguably portrayed in a positive and encouraging light for YA readers in *Vampire Academy*, although some aspects of her journey may be triggering for vulnerable readers and potentially prompt copycat behaviors. By contrast, Emily/Neferet's revenge plot and forced silence in *Neferet's Curse* lead her to a violent and destructive journey that could be a negative influence on impressionable YA readers. Her ultimate revictimization and vilification could also be discouraging for these readers, who might feel hopeless due to the heroine's tragic evolution. Nonetheless, the story may also have a positive impact on them, as it could make them develop empathy and feel identified with her traumatic experience. This study offers a theoretical analysis of the potential responses of readers experiencing similar difficulties after engaging with these novels, taking into consideration both the possible positive and negative effects they might have on them.

1. THE THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF YA LITERATURE

Regarding the therapeutic and healing potential of literature, bibliotherapy emerges as a key concept in the field. According to Zipora Shechtman, the term is made up of the word biblio, whose origin is the Greek word *biblus* ("book,") and therapy, which refers to "*psychological help*" (1). This term could be defined as "the guided reading of written materials in gaining understanding or solving problems relevant to a person's therapeutic needs" (Riordan and Wilson 506). Bibliotherapy sometimes overlaps with Narrative therapy, a collaborative, psychotherapeutic approach developed in the 1980s by Michael White and David Epston. This latter approach focuses on how people construct meaning through stories about their lives, whilst bibliotherapy is the intentional use of literature, books, poetry, or reading materials for therapeutic purposes. Bibliotherapy can be used within many frameworks, such as cognitive behavioural therapy and narrative therapy. These theoretical approaches provide a useful framework for analyzing *Vampire Academy* (Mead) and *Neferet's Curse* (Cast and Cast). Rather than asking whether the novels are simply "positive" or "negative" representations of mental illness, they allow us to examine how particular narrative strategies may encourage—or discourage—therapeutic responses in readers.

Moreover, (non-)fictional narratives portraying mental illnesses may work as a "healing tool" that could be used in medical settings (Artacho-Martín 141), offering emotional support to patients during their medical treatment. At the same time, it is important to stress that one of the main controversies of bibliotherapeutic approaches is that scholars sometimes uncritically take for granted the supposed positive effects that literature might have without empirically testing them on patients.

Consequently, what could be naively deemed potentially therapeutic could actually be detrimental for a reader's vulnerable mental health. This is called 'iatrogenic effects' in medicine and psychology: harmful and unintended health problems derived from a medical treatment. Bibliotherapeutic scholars like Rosen contend that one of the main issues with unevaluated studies is not just that there is no guarantee that the treatments are actually effective, but also that they are not harmful to patients. For example, Troscianko et al. contend that, reading self-help books and narratives non-related to ED appears to have positive effects on patients with an ED, whereas reading (non-)fictional texts connected to their EDs is usually regarded as having negative ones. These effects may include "exacerbation of ED-relevant behaviours (e.g., by gaining tips from protagonists), an increase in obsessive ED-related thoughts, comparisons between oneself and a character . . ., and changes in physical sensations or attitudes towards them" (2).

Likewise, Suzanne Keen (136) contends that literature is often assumed to generate empathy between readers and literary characters, yet empirical evidence for this conjecture remains limited. Rather than automatically producing sympathetic readers, fictional stories create opportunities for developing empathy whose effects depend on contextual factors, including the readers' own experiences and the discussions that surround their reading experience.

Another key term in narrative therapy is "scriptotherapy," coined by Suzette Henke, which she defined as "the process of writing out or writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment" (xii–xiii). Scriptotherapy became very common in survivor narratives and women's autobiographies in the twentieth century, and builds on theories of trauma verbalization. According to these, the victim needs to articulate their trauma and share it with an empathetic audience—in this case, potential readers—to start their recovery (Laub 78). Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that, like any other kind of psychotherapeutic practice, scriptotherapy might lead to the patient's revictimization. According to

Schippert et al., revictimization could be defined as "the reactivation of trauma symptoms via thoughts, memories, or feelings related to the past" traumatic experience. Revictimization stems "from events or interactions in healthcare settings that remind survivors of their previous traumatic experiences" (2).

According to Kimberly Reynolds, the most commonly explored mental health problems in YA novels are self-harm, suicide, depression and cutting—suicide being the least tackled of the four, whereas cutting is the most salient one (103). In these novels, the characters embark on a healing journey, and that they share three key characteristics. First, they usually end on a hopeful note. Second, they target an audience who engage in self-harming behaviors and who seek "solace and guidance." And third, they are also intended for readers who are not experiencing mental health problems. For these latter readers, such novels may be informative and educative, but "discourage copycat behavior" (Kokkola 36). However, studies have shown that literature connected to EDs—particularly anorexia memoirs—is deliberately employed by patients to amplify their risky behaviors (Troscianko 185), although they do not seem to be a trigger for healthy patients (Seaber 485).

In this article, I focus on *Vampire Academy* (Mead) and *Neferet's Curse* (Cast and Cast), two literary works that utilize the vampire to explore mental illness and distress. These include self-cutting and PTSD as a result of sexual assault, respectively. As stated above, vampire fiction is one of the preferred fantasy genres among YA readers, particularly for patients suffering from mental health issues, as in the case of anorexia nervosa (Riestra-Camacho). However, despite the commonly held belief that literature always has a positive effect on susceptible readers and patients, vampire fiction may actually be used to learn about risky behaviors and even "model themselves after the protagonist" (Riestra-Camacho 32). In the next sections I analyze *Vampire Academy* (Mead) and *Neferet's Curse* (Cast and Cast) to examine how these novels may affect prospective readers.

2. Lissa Dragomir's Mental Health Recovery

In this section, I examine how *Vampire Academy*'s (Mead) narrative strategies may foster—or hinder—the bibliotherapeutic responses discussed above. The *Vampire Academy* series (Mead) are fantasy novels that explore the lives of teenage vampires, particularly its two female

protagonists: Rose Hathaway and Lissa Dragomir. In Mead's universe, vampires fall into one of the following categories: Moroi—or living vampires—, dhampirs—half-human, half-vampire and the Moroi's designated bodyguards—and Strigoi—undead and soulless vampires. The novels are set in St. Vladimir's academy, a boarding school for vampires, and they are narrated from Rose's perspective.

Nevertheless, these vampiric categories are not Mead's invention, as they are rooted in Romanian folklore. The Moroi (from the Slavic *mora*) are "creatures born out of babies who were not baptized, who were stillborn or miscarried and buried, [and] who come out of their graves after seven years to haunt the living" (Balinisteanu 157). The Moroi are likely a later addition to Romanian vampire folklore, whereas the strigoi presumably date back to the Roman conquest, as some Romanian philologists have traced its etymology back "to the Latin *striga* ('evil spirit, sorcerer')" (Balinisteanu 155). Even though strigoi are not vampires in the Western sense of the term, they share some common traits, such as the fact that they are neither alive nor dead, and that they can be killed by driving a wooden stake through their hearts (Gerard).

Even though understanding Mead's vampire taxonomy is necessary because Lissa's condition is inseparable from the magical system of spirit, the representation of her mental health also depends on how readers access her experience. However, Lissa is not the narrator of the series. The novels present her emotional suffering through her friend Rose's perspective, making narrative voice just as important as the supernatural world-building for understanding the depiction of her trauma.

There is a preference for first-person narrators in YA fiction (Schuhmann 314). One of the reasons behind this choice is that it gives the narrative voice a sense of authenticity and proximity, while third-person narrators are perceived as more distant and detached. However, Barber and Hodges underscore the irony of such preference in YA literature, since adolescent readers will hear "an *authentic* voice that continues to illuminate their experiences and emotions, giving insight into their lives" (123, emphasis added), but this voice is actually constructed by an adult writer in most cases. Therefore, "the so-called adolescent voice is never—and can never be—truly authentic" (Cadden 146).

Regarding readers' empathy, first-person narratives are thought to foster a particularly close relation between reader and narrator and to have a "strong effect on readers" (Keen 144–45). However, empirical results for such assumption remain limited. While some readers seem to prefer a

first-person point of view, studies show that "enhancement of sympathy for protagonists through positive internal focalization actually weakened as teenagers matured" (Keen 146).

Nonetheless, there is no traditional first-person narrator in *Vampire Academy* (Mead), but rather a peripheral one, as the novels are told from the perspective of Rose Hathaway, Lissa Dragomir's best friend and protector. In first-person narrations there is usually a correspondence between the "narrating self" and the "experiencing self," with a "restriction of . . . knowledge and perception" (Edmiston 735). In the case of the peripheral narrator, they are "embodied" in the story, but are not the main character. They usually are "a close friend or admirer" and thus their perspective is external, yet limited—as they are also part of the story, not an external entity with an outsider perspective and "omniscience" (Edmiston 735). In the case of *Vampire Academy* (Mead), Lissa's mental health problems are mainly described from Rose's point of view, with the aforementioned limitations in her external perspective. However, the two girls share a unique psychic bond that allows Rose to connect with Lissa's mind, forcing her to feel the latter's emotions and thoughts, as well as seeing the world through her eyes—in other words, making her perceive reality as if she were inside Lissa's mind and body. From Keen's perspective, *Vampire Academy* (Mead) may invite empathetic engagement with Lissa through Rose's narration, but this does not necessarily mean every reader will respond therapeutically, as discussed above.

Princess Lissa Dragomir is a royal Moroi who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after a car accident where her whole family died. She experiences common symptoms of PTSD, including nightmares, anxiety and panic attacks, as well as survivor's guilt. These experiences are so overwhelming and painful that where she needs to find a physical "release" so as to attenuate them. As a result, she occasionally cuts herself, although she does not seem to have any suicidal ideations, as Rose explains:

> I didn't get her cutting at all. She'd done it sporadically, ever since the accident, and it scared me each time. She'd try to explain it to me, how she didn't want to die—she just needed to get it out somehow. She felt so much emotionally, she would say, that a physical outlet—physical pain—was the only way to make the internal pain go away. It was the only way she could control it. (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 162)

As explained above, there are three different kinds of vampires in Mead's universe: the Moroi, the strigoi and the dhampirs. The Moroi are not humans who have been turned, but they are born as vampires. They are living and mortal creatures who need the protection of their bodyguards, the dhampirs—creatures that are half-human and half-Moroi—from the strigoi—evil vampires who can either be former humans or Moroi who have been turned into undead and immortal creatures.

The Moroi have the ability to wield magic in one of the four elements—fire, water, earth or air—but are physically weak. There is, however, a less known fifth element that Moroi can specialize in: spirit. This is the case of Lissa Dragomir. Moroi who wield spirit have healing abilities and enhanced compulsion or mind control. Other powers include dream walking, telekinesis and sensing auras. They can also resurrect the dead, which establishes a magical and psychic bond between them and the person they have brought back. This person is called "shadow kissed." This is what happened to Lissa and Rose before the events narrated in the series. It is implied in the first book that what "awoke" the spirit abilities in Lissa was seeing her best friend, Rose, die in the same car accident as her parents. When Lissa brought Rose back from the dead, she forged the magical bond between them. This supernatural device is significant for the present argument because it shapes how readers engage emotionally and empathetically with Lissa's psychological suffering.

However, spirit is a dangerous element, as it takes a lot of mental energy and strength to wield it. Framing depression as the cost of magical power externalizes psychological suffering, allowing the novels to explore mental illness through the conventions of fantasy while still inviting readers to recognize familiar emotional experiences. The continued use of spirit has some detrimental side effects on its users, including depression, outbursts of rage, paranoia and, eventually, insanity. This is why spirit users tend to engage in self-harm and many of them attempt to commit suicide. In the case of Lissa, she keeps a razor blade in her purse and uses it to cut herself to release the pain. According to Rose, "[t]he cutting stung horribly, yet in doing it, she was able to focus on the physical pain, distract herself from the mental anguish so that she could feel like she was in control" (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 260). In presenting depression as a supernatural metaphor through spirit magic, Mead's novels externalize psychological suffering without trivializing it. This narrative strategy may make mental distress more accessible to YA readers while simultaneously

constructing professional and adult intervention as necessary, thus reinforcing the bibliotherapeutic model discussed above.

At the end of the first book of the series, Lissa gets adult help, as she tells her teachers and a therapist what she is going through. She is prescribed antidepressants that numb the magic associated with spirit and, therefore, keep her depression and anxiety at bay. However, in the following books of the series it is revealed that spirit users who have brought someone back from the dead can use this "shadow kissed" person to absorb their "darkness"—i.e., the rage, depression and anxiety derived from spirit. This is the case of Rose, who is told by Adrian—another spirit user who can read her aura—that "[e]veryone has light around them, except for you. You have shadows. You take them from Lissa" (Mead, *Frostbite* 275). Shadow-kissed bond mates who absorb this darkness may eventually develop the same mental health issues as spirit users, to the point where they may even commit suicide.

In the third book of the series, *Shadow Kiss*, Lissa decides to stop taking her medication in order to keep practicing her magic with Adrian. She believes that she needs to learn to control her power without any chemical aid. That way she will be able to help others with her healing magic. Yet, it is worth noting that quitting their medication without consulting a doctor first is a dangerous behavior that some patients may incur in, which could have detrimental effects on their overall health and recovery process. Thus, this positive representation of such a risky health decision might actually trigger copycat behavior in readers who could be suffering from similar mental health issues, endangering their own therapeutic journey. Therefore, ironically, the same empathetic engagement that may encourage readers to seek adult help could also make vulnerable readers identify too strongly with Lissa's risky behaviors. Hence, empathy itself is neither inherently beneficial nor harmful; its effects would depend on how readers interpret the narrative.

As a result of Lissa's decision, Rose starts to experience the side effects of spirit, including rage outbursts and depression, as she absorbs Lissa's "darkness." This literal and magical absorption of Lissa's anxiety and depression seems to be a metaphor and a warning of what may happen if you do not seek help to cope with your psychological distress: they might affect others around you. Eventually, Rose also seeks adult help and she is assigned a school counselor who helps her deal with her mental health problems.

According to Artacho-Martín, the relationship between readers and writers in illness narratives is characterized by the concept of mutual care (134). The connection between reader and writer—or narrator, in the case of fiction—emerges from sharing similar traumatic experiences "supported by a caring structure" (Artacho-Martín 134) whereby both readers and writers aim at the same goal: starting their recovery. The manner in which these novels could prompt healing among YA readers is by becoming a positive example for them. Stasiewicz-Bienkowska underscores sharing one's problems with another person, as well as the positive depiction of therapy and counseling sessions as two of the main positive representations of mental health problems in *Vampire Academy* (Mead) ("Suicide" 224). These could encourage readers who are experiencing similar problems to seek adult help, emulating the actions of the protagonists in the novels. Consequently, Mead's vampire series could encourage the former to begin both their healing and identity formation. According to Richmond, said processes usually include "learn[ing] something about themselves, experienc[ing] therapeutic release, feel[ing] less isolated and more connected to others, and develop[ing] new methods of dealing with their problems" (3).

At the end of the last novel of the series, *Last Sacrifice*, the psychic bond between Rose and Lissa is broken when the latter becomes queen, so Rose can no longer tap into her friend's mind to read her thoughts or keep an eye on her. She cannot absorb Lissa's darkness anymore either, and she is afraid that spirit madness will consume her and she will commit suicide. However, as Lissa tells her, "[i]t's my problem now, Rose. Like it always should have been . . . And . . . there's always the antidepressants. I don't like them, but I'm queen now. I have responsibilities. I'll do what I have to . . . I'll protect my mind. Your job's to protect my body, right?" (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 556). According to Stasiewicz-Bienkowska, it is not until the bond between the two friends is broken that they can establish a healthy relationship in terms of safety and equality ("Suicide" 225). This is a turning point in their lives, as Lissa takes full control and responsibility for her own recovery, and Rose is allowed to make her own choices and put her needs first. Thus, both girls become more mature and independent in the process.

Consequently, I contend that the end of the series seemingly offers a positive message for YA readers, as they are encouraged to take control of their own lives and become independent and empowered agents in their own recovery. This also seems to show the therapeutic potential of

bibliotherapy in helping adolescent patients suffering from mental health issues to recover. However, presenting Lissa's recovery in such positive terms might also have the opposite effect: readers struggling with similar experiences may idealize her recovery and see it as unattainable for them. This, in turn, could discourage them from attempting to initiate their recovery.

It is also worth mentioning that, even if no empirical studies are carried out, fictional narratives still have value for readers. Literature has worked throughout history as stories that have helped humans understand our complex lives and experiences, including our psychological distress. As Raymond A. Mar and Keith Oatley point out, fiction functions as a simulation of social experience that allows readers to rehearse emotions, relationships and moral dilemmas. Thus, reading stories that directly explore mental health problems—such as the ones analyzed in this article—may support potential readers in their recovery through literature's social simulation.

All in all, *Vampire Academy* (Mead) illustrates how narrative perspective, fantasy conventions and the positive representation of therapy may encourage empathy among readers while simultaneously exposing them to potentially risky behaviors. This ambivalent duality reflects the need to carry out experiential studies based on readers' response. This would help us test the actual effects of bibliotherapy that were proposed above.

3. NEFERET'S REVENGE PLOT AS A CAUTIONARY TALE

This section scrutinizes how the novella *Neferet's Curse* (Cast and Cast) employs scriptotherapy to represent the female protagonist's psychological distress and sexual trauma. Unlike the *Vampire Academy* series, this novella questions whether trauma narratives necessarily foster the readers' recovery. The novella is written in the form of a personal diary through a first-person narrator. As explained in the previous section, young readers seem to have a preference for this type of focalization. However, there is limited empirical evidence that supports its presumed ability to foster empathy between readers and narrator (Keen 145). Yet, David Lodge argues that first-person narrator "creates an illusion of reality, it commands the willing suspension of the reader's disbelief, by modeling itself on the discourses of personal witness: the confession, the diary, autobiography, the memoir, the deposition" (qtd. in Keen 146). This

is arguably the case of *Neferet's Curse* (Cast and Cast). The diary format is particularly relevant for this analysis because it illustrates both the possibilities and the limitations that scriptotherapy may have in fostering readers' empathy discussed above.

Personal diaries can be used as "unsolicited" illness narratives "which conceptualize suffering within a personal biography" (Alaszewski 43). In *Neferet's Curse*, Cast and Cast fictionalize this therapeutic strategy by presenting Emily/Neferet's traumatic story in the form of a diary. Verbalizing one's trauma through storytelling or by "keeping a diary" may help the victim/survivor to understand, come to terms with and eventually overcome their traumatic experience. As Aaszewski contends, telling one's story "may be an important mechanism by which an individuals [*sic*] makes sense of and manage adverse events, for example by constructing accounts in which they are the active rational agents not the passive victims of events" (44). However, as stated above, another problem that may arise when applying scriptotherapy as a therapeutic practice is that it could lead to the patient's revictimization. In the case of Emily/Neferet, she experiences it throughout her life, as can be seen in other novels in the *House of Night* series (Cast and Cast). Indeed, it is arguably this revictimization that eventually pushes her to become the villain of Cast and Cast's novels.

The diary is a narrative genre that is perceived by readers as "an honest and authentic account by 'telling it as it is' or was," and also allows them to access the narrator's feelings associated with that experience, "whether they are guilt, anxiety or elation" (Aaszewski 44). In the following fragment, Emily starts her diary by stating that she believes she is going mad. Thus, she has decided to keep a written record of her daily life in an attempt to rationalize and come to grips with her mental struggles and to, eventually, find a cure:

> I have begun to suspect my thoughts are quite mad.
> That is why I feel compelled to record them. It could be that in the re-reading, sometime in the future, I will discover why these horrible things have befallen me.
> Or, I will discover that I have, indeed, lost my mind.
> If that be the case, then this will serve as a record of the onset of my paranoia and madness so as to lay the foundation to discover a cure. (Cast and Cast 1)

Following her mother's death in childbirth, Emily becomes increasingly isolated within a patriarchal household where grief, coercive control and incestuous abuse are systematically ignored. These circumstances establish the conditions under which scriptotherapy ultimately fails, since every attempt to verbalize trauma is silenced.

At first, Emily feels flattered by her father's attentions, but his behavior soon starts to morph into a controlling and possessive grasp over every aspect of her life. She also starts noticing that he is sexually attracted to her, probably due to her uncanny resemblance to her late mother. Just like in the *Vampire Academy* series, Emily tries to seek her friends' help by telling them about her father's control and abuse. She confides in her best friend Camille, but rather than empathizing with Emily, she awkwardly tries to change the topic right away. This reaction leads Emily to believe that her experience is too horrifying to share with her social circle, and that she should have kept quiet about it:

> I had begun to say more than Camille could bear to hear and I should have ended the subject and kept my thoughts to myself and to this, my silent, nonjudgmental, journal. But then all I had wanted was someone to talk with—to share my growing fears and frustrations with. (Cast and Cast 36)

This latter statement echoes Laub's argument that the traumatized victim needs to verbalize their experience and share it with an empathetic listener to start the process of recovery (78). In this case, however, Camille cannot bear to listen to and process Emily's account. Thus, an empathetic bond between the two cannot be established, so the protagonist is forced into silence.

Moreover, survivors of (attempted) sexual abuse who are blamed or not believed after speaking out may experience a "second assault," a phenomenon also known as "secondary victimization" (Ahrens 264). In these cases, verbalizing the assault may "have detrimental consequences for rape survivors as they are subjected to further trauma at the hands of the very people they turn to for help. Negative reactions can thereby serve a silencing function" (Ahrens 264). Thus, survivors who at first try to articulate their traumatic experience and seek help may eventually resort to silence so as to avoid public shame and revictimization. This is exactly what happens to Emily in the novella. As a consequence, Emily learns that her father's coercive control and abuse cannot be made public, and that the

only way to escape his prison is by seducing her suitor, Mr. Arthur Simpton, into marrying her.

In the *House of Night* series (Cast and Cast), vampires "come into being through a biological reaction that triggers a recessive vampire gene in certain human teenagers" (Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska, *Girls* 26), with symptoms that include fever, rapid pulse, colds and coughs. Shortly before her transformation into a vampire, Emily's distress is dismissed as female hysteria by both her father and the physician who examines her. This misdiagnosis reflects nineteenth-century medical tendencies to ignore domestic and sexual abuse (Sacco). Since the doctor prescribes her rest and quiet, Emily leaves her father's party and returns home early, where he later finds her and sexually assaults her.

Soon after, Emily is marked as a vampire and enrolls as a student in the Chicago House of Night, leaving her human life behind. Here, her new vampire mentor, Cordelia, offers her some advice to start her recovery. Instead, she breaks into her father's house one night and strangles him with her mother's pearl necklace. This is a turning point for her, since she also decides to adopt a new name as a vampress, Neferet, which represents "female power and freedom from patriarchal oppression" (Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska, *Girls* 196).

At the end of the novella, Neferet is forced to leave Chicago by the Vampyre School council and is sent to the Oklahoma Territory, where she will later become the High Priestess of the House of Night. There, she decides to bury her journal, where she recounted all her story of domestic and sexual abuse, but also, her transformation and ultimate vengeance.

Consequently, the therapeutic value that her journal may have had to help her—and, potentially, to readers—understand her psychological struggles and overcome them is obliterated in the end. This is so because her journal is hidden and buried, rather than being publicly shared with other prospective victims. Thus, Emily's past is to remain silenced and forgotten, so no lesson can be learnt from her experience. In fact, she claims that she does not regret any of her actions, and that she only wants to move forward, leaving all her past behind:

> No one will ever know my secrets for they will be entombed in the land, safely hidden, silent as death. I regret none of my actions and if that curses me, then my final prayer is to let that curse be entombed with this journal, to be imprisoned eternally in sacred ground. (Cast and Cast 146)

This forced silence is problematic for potential readers of the novella who may also be victims of sexual assault. As Laub contends, trauma survivors who are forced to remain silent do not usually find peace and "become victims of a distorted memory" (79). Remaining silent perpetuates the power these memories hold over them, which "pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life" (Laub 79). This is arguably what happens to Neferet in the *House of Night* novels (Cast and Cast), as her untold memories suffocate her and pollute her existence to the point where she is no longer able to lead a normal life and she eventually becomes the archvillainess of the series.

In an afterword to the novella, the author P. C. Cast addresses her readers in relation to the content of the story and acknowledges that the protagonist's violent revenge against her father is not the right path to recovery. She also claims that this decision did not give Neferet "true empowerment," and advises her readers to seek adult and professional help if they find themselves in a similar experience, as this is the only way to "regain personal power" (Cast and Cast 149). However, the story depicted in the novella could mislead a young and impressionable audience who, as stated above, often regard the protagonists of YA novels as role models and their journeys as a guide to their own recovery. As Stasiewicz-Bienkowska contends, "Neferet's rape-revenge ultimately serves as a cautionary tale and is far from celebratory" (*Girls* 196), but this message might be misinterpreted by young readers.

Therefore, unlike the case of the *Vampire Academy* series (Mead), where the main protagonists have a positive evolution, as they seek adult and professional help and eventually take control of their own recovery, *Neferet's Curse* (Cast and Cast) features a protagonist who is forced to choose a violent path, since she was ignored and turned away when she tried to seek help from her father's abuse. In the main novels of the *House of Night* series (Cast and Cast)—set in Tulsa in the 2000s—Neferet is the High Priestess of the House of Night, still marked by her traumatic experience of sexual assault. Here, she is progressively portrayed as a *femme fatale*, embodying the monstrous feminine. She is a vampire "causing harm to others and using men" through her "powerful allure of darkness" (Etain 14). This seems to prove that in some trauma narratives the protagonist might experience revictimization and, as in this case, vilification.

As Moreno contends, many survivors of sexual assault are revictimized by society, the public, media or even the government, since

their stories are neglected or invalidated. They will likely be criticized if their behavior does not correspond to that of the "*good survivor*" (Moreno 24) and portrayed as the villains of their own assault. This is arguably what happens to Neferet in Cast and Cast's novels, as rather than being allowed to come to terms with her traumatic experience of sexual assault, she is portrayed as an evil temptress.

However, the fact that this novella does not present an empowered or morally righteous character does not necessarily mean that Neferet's experience could not potentially help readers through their mental health struggles. Bibliotherapy was originally thought to have three distinct phases: identification, catharsis and insight, to which universalization or recognition and projection were added (Lutovac and Kaasila 486). When readers start approaching a text, they may first experience an identification phase, where they identify with elements in a story, particularly with the main characters. This could engage readers emotionally, leading them to the catharsis stage, which can be followed by insight. Here, individuals could "see their problem in a new light," coming to terms with how to solve them. In the universalization or recognition phase, they see that they are not alone, or they are not the only ones who have these problems, which ultimately leads them to the projection phase. Here, they are able to imagine for themselves "a different kind of identity" (Lutovac and Kaasila 486). This is what could arguably happen in the case of *Neferet's Curse* (Cast and Cast). Even if the novel does not present an empowered character as in Mead's novels, readers might still empathize or relate to her psychological suffering, which could have a life-changing effect on them.

Overall, in contrast to *Vampire Academy* (Mead), *Neferet's Curse* (Cast and Cast) demonstrates that scriptotherapy and trauma narratives do not necessarily conclude in recovery. Instead, the novella questions assumptions about literature's therapeutic potential by portraying the consequences of silencing and revictimizing victims of sexual assault.

CONCLUSIONS

Mental health has often been misrepresented in YAL, most notably in fantasy novels such as Meyers's *Twilight* saga, where suicide attempts and self-harm are romanticized (Kokkola). Bibliotherapy explores the therapeutic potential of literature and how it might help readers experiencing the same difficulties through their recovery. This article

adopts a deliberately theoretical approach and therefore does not attempt to empirically measure readers' therapeutic responses.

YAL arguably allows teenage readers to see themselves and their real-life experiences represented in fiction, including emotional suffering and psychological distress. These novels could encourage readers to seek adult help and counseling to overcome them. As a consequence, readers might learn to take control and responsibility for their own recovery, becoming more mature, independent and confident in the process. However, they might also have the opposite effect, as they might prompt copycat behaviors or enable patients to amplify their mental health problems. This is the case of Mead's *Vampire Academy*. The series end on a hopeful note, as Lissa finally learns to control her anxiety and overcomes her depression, becoming an independent and empowered woman. Thus, her experience and healing process can be informative and educational for teenage readers to understand and accept their own mental health issues. However, there are also some aspects of these novels—such as Lissa's decision to stop taking her medication—that might encourage readers experiencing the same difficulties to engage in risky behaviors related to their therapy. Likewise, Lissa's path to recovery could set unattainable therapy goals or standards for young patients, who might feel frustrated for not being able to meet them.

On the other hand, *Neferet's Curse* (Cast and Cast) depicts a protagonist whose forced silence and violent revenge seemingly set her as a negative example for YA readers. Neferet never fully overcomes her sexual assault—as can be seen in the main novels of the *House of Night* series, where her inability to let go of her painful past eventually leads her to become the archvillainess of the story. Thus, she never fully embraces her healing process, as she does not have any adult or healthcare professional to guide her, and she is blinded by her thirst for revenge. However, the fact that Neferet is not portrayed in the series as an empowered survivor, but rather as a villain and a *femme fatale* who preys on innocent men, does not necessarily mean that readers cannot empathize with her traumatic story, or that it cannot positively affect readers. Prospective readers may still feel identified with her through universalization and projection in bibliotherapy, which might prompt them to share their story with empathetic adults or healthcare professionals.

Although this article is intentionally theoretical, future research could examine whether discussing these novels in classrooms, reading groups or therapeutic contexts could produce different responses from solitary

reading. The mediating presence of a teacher or fellow readers when discussing one's experience and connection with a particular book seems —according to Keen—to be pivotal in the development of readers' empathy. However, while Keen stresses the valuable nature of conducting this kind of research in a public setting, she also warns researchers that these readers might feel self-conscious or fall silent in the presence of authoritative teachers or critics, so we need to be cautious and not merely assume the reliability of this type of empirical research (122).

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The Love That Wounds: Ambivalence of Motherhood in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Sula*

El amor que hiere: la ambivalencia de la maternidad en *Beloved* y *Sula* de Toni Morrison

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Abstract: Though often romanticized as inherently selfless and nurturing, motherhood is neither uniform nor eternal. Rather, it is shaped by cultural norms, social constructions, and historical circumstances of oppression and resistance. The portrayal of motherhood is recurrent yet intricate, and often shocking, in many of Toni Morrison's novels. In her seminal works *Beloved* and *Sula*, maternal identity is depicted as a site of profound ambivalence, where love and trauma coexist. Morrison's Black mother figures navigate the intersections of historical oppression, racial marginalization, and socio-political constraints, revealing mothering as simultaneously nurturing and destructive. In explicating these dualities inherent in motherhood, Morrison neither sanctifies nor vilifies motherhood; instead, she reveals its complex reality offering a radical reimagining of maternal identity. Through critical engagement with the theoretical underpinnings of maternal feminist and Black feminist theorists, this paper seeks to interrogate and foreground the radical, political, and deeply personal dimensions of Black motherhood, conceptualizing it as a paradoxical terrain simultaneously marked by vulnerability and empowerment.
Keywords: Motherhood; ambivalence; slavery; resistance; maternal agency.

Summary: Introduction. Theoretical Framework: Motherhood as Institution and Experience, "Motherwork" as a site of Resistance, and Mothering as a Transformative Act. The Ambivalence of the Maternal Role in *Beloved*. The Paradoxical Dimensions of Motherhood in *Sula*. Conclusions.

Resumen: Aunque a menudo se la idealiza como una labor intrínsecamente altruista y protectora, la maternidad no es uniforme ni eterna. Está marcada por normas culturales, construcciones sociales y circunstancias históricas de opresión y resistencia. La representación de la maternidad en muchas de las novelas de Toni Morrison es recurrente, compleja, y a menudo impactante. En sus obras fundamentales, *Beloved* y *Sula*, la identidad materna se presenta como un espacio de profunda ambivalencia, donde coexisten el amor y el trauma. Las figuras de madres negras en Morrison navegan las intersecciones de la opresión histórica, la marginación racial y las limitaciones sociopolíticas, revelando la maternidad como algo simultáneamente protector y destructivo. Al explicar estas dualidades inherentes a la maternidad, Morrison no la santifica ni la demoniza; en cambio, revela su compleja realidad, ofreciendo una reinterpretación radical de la identidad materna. Con base en fundamentos teóricos de maternidades feministas y teóricas feministas negras, este artículo cuestiona y destaca las dimensiones radicales, políticas y profundamente personales de la maternidad negra, conceptualizándola como un terreno paradójico marcado simultáneamente por la vulnerabilidad y el empoderamiento.
Palabras clave: Maternidad; ambivalencia; esclavitud; resistencia; agencia materna.
Sumario: Introducción. Marco teórico: Maternidad como institución y experiencia, "Trabajo materno" como sitio de resistencia, y maternidad como acto transformador. La ambivalencia del rol materno en *Beloved*. Las dimensiones paradójicas de la maternidad en *Sula*. Conclusiones.

INTRODUCTION

Motherhood, long enshrined as the cornerstone of feminine identity, is often draped in idealized notions of selflessness, nurture, and sacrifice. Across epochs and cultures, motherhood has been immortalized in art and myth, and institutionalized in societal expectations, with a woman's status as a "childbearer" having been "made into a major fact of her life" (Rich 11). Ann Dally in *Inventing Motherhood* states that "there have always been mothers, but motherhood was invented" (17); it is not a timeless essence, but a cultural construct, historically reshaped and burdened with idealistic expectations. Yet, beneath this gilded veneer of maternal idealism lies a space fraught with paradoxes, a site where domination and resistance, love and loss, creation and destruction converge, especially for Black women whose maternal experiences are shaped by histories of racial oppression, cultural erasure, and socio-political marginalization. It is in this complex terrain that Toni Morrison, one of the most applauded African-American literary voices, situates her narratives of Black motherhood, challenging both the literary canon and the ideological foundations of maternity. Through her nuanced characters and lyrical

prose, Morrison offers a vision of mothering that is at once deeply personal and inherently political. In her novels, the act of mothering becomes a radical gesture—one that asserts humanity and spiritual wholeness in a world that seeks to deny Black mothers these very things. Motherhood, in her fictional world, is a space where historical wounds are both inherited and resisted, where maternal bonds can be nurturing yet destructive, and where identity is forged at the crossroads of oppression and self-determination. Morrison unearths the ambivalence that haunts Black motherhood, a space where the mother becomes at once a healer and a source of inherited pain.

Unlike Western feminists, such as Beauvoir who considers motherhood as the main feature which causes women to be seen as "others" (484) and Kristeva who reads pregnancy as "the overtaking of woman's identity and corporeality by a foreign body, an alien intruder" (Grosz 162), Black women often reclaim and reframe motherhood through cultural traditions uniquely their own. Hence, maternal feminist Andrea O'Reilly observes, "mothers and motherhood are valued by, and central to, African American culture" (*From Motherhood* 11). Barbara Christian also echoes O'Reilly's view, contending that the "concept of motherhood is of central importance in the philosophy of both African and Afro-American peoples" (213). The maternal figures in Morrison's oeuvre pose themselves as embodying these dynamic paradoxes who can be both empowered and enslaved, rather than static archetypes. They occupy a site somewhere in between resignation and resistance. Because they have had to survive in a society that makes their feelings subversive, these women exhibit a striking ambivalence. By concentrating on the psychological, emotional, and political landscape that Morrison's fictional mothers traverse, this paper aims to uncover the dualities inherent in the maternal experience as it is depicted in *Beloved* (1987) and *Sula* (1973). Drawing upon maternal feminist theories—particularly Adrienne Rich's notion of the "institution of motherhood" versus the "experience of mothering," Andrea O'Reilly's concept of empowered maternal subjectivity, and Patricia Hill Collins's Black Feminist Thought—this study argues that Morrison destabilizes normative maternal scripts. Her maternal characters inhabit a space where caregiving is entangled with power, absence, and unresolved grief. In foregrounding the contradictions inherent in a Black woman's mothering practices, Morrison exposes the psychological aftershocks of slavery, patriarchy, and systemic oppression. However, she also inscribes within her narratives a deep, if painful, insistence on

maternal agency, with a refusal to allow Black motherhood to be reduced to either victimhood or sainthood. Through lyrical fracture, temporal disjunction, and psychological interiority, *Beloved* and *Sula* become more than novels; they are palimpsests of generational trauma and maternal survival. Ultimately, this paper contends that Morrison does not seek to redeem motherhood, nor to vilify it, but to reveal its raw, ragged truth that to mother in a world that systematically denies Black women autonomy and dignity is to live in constant ambivalence, a love that both cleaves and clings, a bond that can both redeem and destroy.

1. Theoretical Framework: Motherhood as Institution and Experience, "Motherwork" as a Site of Resistance, and Mothering as a Transformative Act

The analytical foundation of this paper rests upon an interdisciplinary framework that foregrounds the insights from Black feminist thought and feminist literary criticism. Central to this methodology is the assertion that Morrison's depiction of motherhood cannot be extricated from the racial, historical, and socio-political contexts in which her narratives are situated. To interpret the ambivalence coursing through Morrison's maternal figures, this paper primarily draws upon the insights of Adrienne Rich, Patricia Hill Collins, and Andrea O'Reilly. Their feminist theories of motherhood dismantle mythologized ideals and expose maternal ambivalence as an embodied, racialized, and politicized reality, especially for Black women navigating the interwoven oppressions of race, gender, class, and history.

Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* provides the foundational distinction between motherhood as an institutionalized social construct and as an intimate lived experience. She asserts:

> I try to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control. (13)

For Rich, the institutional model imposes patriarchal expectations of self-sacrifice and obedience on mothers, thereby rendering women's reproductive power as a site of control rather than of autonomy. This

distinction is dramatized in Morrison's *Beloved*, where Sethe's maternal act of infanticide defies the institutional model of nurturance. It is not merely a horrific crime, but a desperate attempt to resist slavery's commodification of Black bodies. Her action, born out of trauma and maternal love, exposes the paradox Rich outlines in her book that motherhood can be both a site of empowerment and deep suffering, of liberation and loss. In *Sula*, Eva Peace, who burns her son alive and sacrifices her leg to secure financial aid for her family, also epitomizes Rich's theory that motherhood, under patriarchy, is too often cast as monolithic and idealized. Eva's decisions disrupt romanticized narratives of caregiving; her maternal agency is pragmatic, ambiguous, and fiercely unsentimental. In this regard, Rich writes, "We know more about the air we breathe . . . than about the nature and meaning of motherhood" (11). Morrison's work, when read through Rich's critical creeds, seeks to redress the imbalance inherent in institutionalized representation, where the myths of motherhood eclipse its raw paradoxical reality, and to reveal the submerged emotional, ethical, experiential, and existential struggles inherent in Black maternal identity.

While Rich critiques the universal myths of patriarchal motherhood, Patricia Hill Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, focuses on the racialized dimension of maternal identity. For Collins, Black motherhood emerges as a dual site of oppression and resistance, wherein mothers negotiate both systemic racism and patriarchal norms. She introduces the concept of "motherwork"—a political form of caregiving that involves not only physical sustenance but also the transmission of cultural memory and oppositional knowledge (Collins 208–09). In *Beloved*, Sethe's refusal to let her child be enslaved is a radical form of love that insists on protecting the child's humanity even at the cost of life. Her maternal body becomes a battleground and a weapon scarred by history, but is fiercely active in shaping a counter-narrative to White supremacist violence. Moreover, Collins critiques how dominant Western ideologies of motherhood systematically exclude Black women. In Morrison's work, this exclusion is palpable. Sethe's mothering is criminalized by both White institutions and her own community. Similarly, Sula's refusal to mother is framed as a failure and her assertion of autonomy is criticized in the community. In this circumstance, to be a Black mother is to constantly resist and reimagine motherhood in the face of erasure.

Andrea O'Reilly's contributions to maternal theory, particularly in *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's* Of Woman Born, and *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings*, concentrate on "Black Motherhood" by centering mothering as a self-conscious, transformative, and inherently political act. She challenges binary thinking that labels mothers as either "good" or "bad," arguing instead for a view of motherhood that honors moral ambiguity, complexity, and maternal agency (O'Reilly, *Maternal Theory* 801). Sethe's act of infanticide, when seen through O'Reilly's critical perspective, becomes not a moral aberration but a tragic assertion of maternal power. O'Reilly posits that "the focus of Black motherhood . . . is how to preserve, protect, and empower Black children" (*From Mothering* 11). Sethe's decision to kill her daughter is an anguished effort to achieve precisely this. In *Sula*, Eva's authoritarian control, Hannah's sensual maternal ambivalence, and Sula's outright rejection of motherhood—all suggest that maternal identity cannot be defined by convention. Besides, O'Reilly's emphasis on the mother-daughter dyad enriches the understanding of how trauma, love, and resistance are inherited. Denver's eventual growth is rooted in the emotional wreckage of Sethe's maternal decisions. Sula, marked by the coldness of her mother, seeks emotional depth elsewhere, which demonstrates how daughters internalize, reinterpret, or reject their maternal legacies. O'Reilly frames this as part of a continuum of mothering, one that complicates the notion of motherhood as either wholly redemptive or utterly ruinous.

Together, Rich, Collins, and O'Reilly construct a theoretical foundation based on which the ambivalence of the maternal role in Morrison's work can be explored and understood. Rich reveals the tension between the experiential and the institutional, where love and oppression coexist. Collins situates Black mothering within a broader historical and communal struggle, highlighting how resistance emerges from both care and critique. O'Reilly reclaims maternal agency, emphasizing its transformative potential even in morally ambiguous contexts. Seen through these critical lenses, Morrison's maternal figures emerge not as archetypes of nurturance or neglect, but as radically human women, navigating the fraught terrain of motherhood with defiance, sorrow, and love. The theoretical framework not only informs the literary analysis that follows, but also affirms the power of maternal ambivalence as a site of feminist inquiry and Black feminist resistance.

2. THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE MATERNAL ROLE IN *BELOVED*

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a novel suffused with the spectral presence of history, memory, and the unrelenting weight of maternal love. Nowhere is the tension between nurture and destruction, devotion and despair more palpable than in the character of the protagonist, Sethe, a mother whose love is as boundless as it is ruinous. Sethe's motherhood, in *Beloved*, illustrates how slavery distorts and devalues maternal identity, reflecting a grim reality in which "[b]lack maternity is removed from the realm of the human" (Wilt 160). Hers is a love that defies convention, a love that, shaped by the brutality of slavery, both affirms and annihilates. Andrea O'Reilly, in her book *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, asserts that "Anglo-American perspectives were hopelessly inadequate for an understanding of Morrison's maternal vision" (xi). She points out a distinction between African-American maternal practices and those of the Western world. The central claim O'Reilly puts is that Morrison rejects the role of mothers delineated by American culture and "defines Black motherhood as a site of power" (*A Politics* 1). Morrison's portrayal of motherhood indicates that mothers neither follow fixed roles and set boundaries, nor can they be fitted in uniform definitions. Instead, there lies a keen awareness of the fundamental contradictions of Black motherhood, a significant issue aptly put by Patricia Hill Collins: "Black motherhood can be rewarding, but it can also extract high personal costs. The range of Black women's reactions to motherhood and the ambivalence that many Black women feel about mothering reflect motherhood's contradictory nature" (133). The ambivalence of motherhood in *Beloved* emerges from the convergence of Sethe's maternal instincts, the sacrifices she makes for her children, the indelible scars of trauma and guilt she carries in her heart, and the haunting embodiment of all her struggles in Beloved herself. The novel resists a singular definition of motherhood, instead offering a complex and layered portrayal of maternal devotion as both a redemptive force and a site of deep and inescapable torment.

Sethe's love for her daughters is elemental. It is fierce and unwavering, shaped in the iron grip of a world that denies enslaved women ownership of their own bodies, let alone of their children. Her mothering is a refusal to relinquish her claim on her offspring even as the institution of slavery seeks to sever the ties between them. This maternal instinct, as Morrison illustrates, is neither simple nor sentimental, but wrought with suffering and resilience. Sethe is a devoted mother who prioritizes her

children in every possible way and asserts that her children were the "precious and fine and beautiful" (Morrison, *Beloved* 163) parts of her. To Sethe, "Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't no love at all" (164). Even in the midst of the most unimaginable suffering, her foremost concern is the child within her womb, a testament to the way maternal love survives even in the face of physical exhaustion and violent subjugation. A pivotal moment in *Beloved* unfolds with the theft of Sethe's breast milk, a violation that embodies the dehumanizing brutality of slavery. In a conversation with Paul D, Sethe recounts the harrowing events preceding her escape from Sweet Home. Having sent her children ahead to the house in Cincinnati, including her nursing infant, she remains behind and falls prey to Schoolteacher's nephews. In an act that reduces her to mere livestock, they forcefully suck the milk from her breasts. Her profound attachment to her children is underscored by her strong emotional response to this dreadful act. Breastfeeding, for Sethe, signifies more than a biological necessity. It is an act of profound intimacy and the sole expression of care she can offer her children amidst the brutality of enslavement. The theft of her breast milk by the slave owners is not merely a physical violation, but a symbolic assault on her identity as a mother. It robs her of the one nurturing power that remains hers, reducing her to a state of helplessness and desecrating a sacred maternal bond. Sethe does not grieve for her own suffering; rather, her sorrow is rooted in the loss of her ability to nourish her child, a loss that signifies the depths of her maternal instinct and the centrality of motherhood to her sense of self. This indignity becomes a psychological wound that time cannot heal. The memory resurfaces with unspent fury when she recounts it to Paul D, underscoring the enduring trauma of a mother whose love was rendered powerless by a system designed to break both the body and the spirit of a Black mother.

The punishment scene is also both unexpected and unspeakably cruel. Schoolteacher's nephews, in a grotesque mockery of care, carve a hole in the ground to cradle Sethe's six-month-pregnant belly, preserving the unborn child while unleashing their violence on the mother. With a leather strap, they lacerate her back into a grotesque map of scars and mutilate her feet to prevent any attempt at escape. The wounds inflicted on Sethe's body in that barn are among the most visceral and abhorrent acts of violence one can imagine against a human being. The chilling contradiction that her womb is shielded even though her body is brutalized reveals the cruelty of slavery: she is to be broken and subjugated, still expected to serve as a vessel of life for the plantation's profit. When Paul

D expresses his concern about the scars on Sethe's back from being whipped, she instead fixates on a more profound violation, repeating, "And they took my milk" (17). For Sethe, the physical pain of being harassed and beaten is not the most harrowing aspect of her experience under slavery, but the theft of her breastmilk is—a violation that Paul D, as a man, cannot fully grasp. This scene sheds light on the dehumanization she endures, reducing her from a person to a mere reproductive object.

Sethe exemplifies how mothering and nurturing children can be a source of not only empowerment but also resistance against the brutal system of slavery. To nurse one's child in a world that dehumanizes Black motherhood is a radical assertion of love and agency. This love, however, is not without its burdens. Morrison, in *Beloved*, writes the story in blood, milk, and memory, refusing to sentimentalize it. Sethe's love is suffocating, obsessive and, at times, destructive, an intensity that stems from the knowledge that at any moment her children could be taken away from her. Motherhood, in *Beloved*, is inextricable from sacrifice. The most harrowing expression of this sacrifice is, of course, Sethe's act of infanticide, an act of love so consuming that it collapses into violence. In this novel, slavery "renders love, particularly maternal love, a risk" (Jeremiah 64). Sethe believes, with the clarity of a woman who has endured the worst of human cruelty, that death is preferable to enslavement. As she puts it: "It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that" (165). Feminist philosopher Sara Ruddick, in *Maternal Thinking*, also makes the point that "in any given culture, maternal commitment is far more voluntary than people like to believe" (22). For Sethe, the required violence embodies the purest form of maternal love since she believes that she has protected her children from every possible threat, human or otherwise. She avers: "I stopped him … I took and put my babies where they'd be safe" (164).

In Adrienne Rich's opinion, "[m]otherhood without autonomy, without choice, is one of the quickest roads to a sense of having lost control" (13). From this perspective, Sethe's act of infanticide is an extreme and terrible manifestation of such a sense. When faced with the horror of possible re-enslavement, Sethe acts with terrifying resolve: "If I hadn't killed her, she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her" (200). This chilling declaration underlines the paradox Morrison threads throughout the novel: in a world where Black motherhood is continually violated by external forces, maternal love

becomes both a weapon and a shield. Renee Gardner delves into these inherent contradictions and untenable conditions of enslaved motherhood in *Beloved*, positing that motherhood operates on a dual axis: "one of which invests a woman with power, the other which strips it from her" (209). Seen from this perspective, Sethe's decision emerges not as madness, but as a radical assertion of maternal agency, driven by her uncompromising desire to shield her child from the horrors of bondage. Yet, Sethe's act of protection becomes the source of her eternal suffering. She exists in a liminal space, haunted by the consequences of her motherly love, becoming a figure trapped in an endless cycle of grief and justification, unable to move beyond the act that defines her. Her love, once a force of salvation, transforms into a spectral weight that refuses to be exorcised. Paul D understands the destructive power of her love for her children as he considers it very risky: "For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love" (Morrison, *Beloved* 45). The act of infanticide underscores this entanglement of maternal love and violence.

Gloria Wade-Gayles points out that mother figures in Black women's fiction are strong and devoted, but they are "rarely affectionate" (10). Sethe's relationship with her children, both living and dead, is irrevocably shaped by the trauma she carries within her. Her relationship with Denver is marked by an almost claustrophobic protectiveness. Denver becomes both the daughter she must now shelter from the world and the lingering reminder of the daughter she lost. In spite of limitless complexities, her maternal devotion stands out. To Denver, Sethe is the "quiet, queenly woman" (Morrison, *Beloved* 12), steadfast in the face of adversities without ever turning away. Sethe's guilt is not only about the act itself, but about what it means to be a mother who has chosen death over life for her child. The spectral presence of Beloved, both as a revenant and as an embodied girl, personifies the lingering trauma existing in the mother-daughter relationship. In *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, O'Reilly states: "The matrilineal heritage metaphorically represented by Beloved is a radical reclamation of the mother and daughter bond that was denied and severed under slavery" (111). This act of reclamation, however, cannot be disentangled from Morrison's wider undertaking of what Edwards calls "a revision of history" (19), which reveals accepted accounts of the past to be contingent and partial. In *Beloved*, the repressed history of slavery resurfaces not as a static memory but as a living, embodied presence. Beloved demands more than just

recognition; she demands recompense. She is insatiable, consuming Sethe's love, attention, and, ultimately, her sense of self. She embodies what Marianne Hirsch terms "postmemory" (96)—the inherited trauma that refuses to be buried. Sethe, desperate to atone for her past act of infanticide, submits herself so completely to Beloved's suffocating presence that her maternal love ultimately destroys her sense of self. The past here is not a distant echo but a living presence, manifested in the guilt that permeates every aspect of Sethe's being.

Thus, maternal power in *Beloved* is shadowed by an unrelenting vulnerability—a reminder that the maternal body is both a sanctuary and a site of irrevocable loss. Sethe embodies this fragmentation, unable to mother freely because she is always mothering against something—against loss, against enslavement, against the ghost of the past. She was trying to "[o]ut-hurt the hurter" (Morrison, *Beloved* 234). Barbara Christian has pointed out that Morrison in this novel demonstrates that "mothers have a right to fullness of life and that sacrifice should be a means to more life rather than an end to itself" (247). Sethe asserts her power and resistance following her heart while protecting her children in an extreme manner. She embraces mothering and considers it as her very own space. Morrison, thus, portrays this space of motherhood as complex and ambivalent, intersecting love, sacrifice, guilt, and trauma. It is not confining; rather, it is a site where a mother can assert power.

3. THE PARADOXICAL DIMENSIONS OF MOTHERHOOD IN *SULA*

In *Sula*, Morrison resists any monolithic portrayal of motherhood, instead mapping its various manifestations across a spectrum that oscillates between nurture and neglect, freedom and entrapment, social conformity and personal autonomy. The novel explores a terrain where maternal figures are both revered and resented, where motherhood is both an identity and an imposition. Many Western feminists, including de Beauvoir, propound that if women are to claim their right to the status of being the "subject," they must reject "the feminine" (Hekman 46), up to and including the practices of motherhood. Yet, Morrison's sustained focus on motherhood in her novels, as Ghasemi notes, is "indicative of the significance of maternity as an integral part of a woman's state of being" (243). This tension between rejection and reverence, autonomy and emotional obligation, lies at the heart of the maternal experience in *Sula*.

As Robert Staples has noted, motherhood in the African-American community "represents maturity and the fulfillment of one's function as a woman" (153), and yet Morrison asks us to question what it means when women, like Sula, reject that role or perform it in disruptive ways. Susan Blake aptly draws attention to the inevitable perplexity of the readers: "whether to applaud Eva's self-sacrifice or deplore her tyranny, whether to admire Sula's freedom or condemn her heartlessness" (86). Morrison crafts maternal figures who confound expectations, whose roles are never merely biological or social, but deeply psychological and often political. In Morrison's portrayal of these complex facets of motherhood in *Sula*, ambivalence becomes not a weakness, but a fundamental truth of the maternal condition.

Conventional motherhood, embodied in characters like Helene Wright, appears secure and morally upright on the surface, but even this model is not without its contradictions. Helene's life is one of unwavering propriety, marked by obedience to societal codes that reduce motherhood to be synonymous with sacrifice and submission. Her insistence on respectability defines her interactions with her daughter Nel, inculcating within her a belief that motherhood marks the ultimate fulfillment of a woman's life. Yet, this very conviction also breeds repression. From the onset, Nel's identity is fashioned around the roles of wife and mother. She marries Jude only to be abandoned later, and though she remains steadfast in her maternal responsibilities, her emotional landscape is shaped by quiet grief and unspoken loss. Nel's version of motherhood reflects what Adrienne Rich terms "the *institution*" (13), a socially constructed model in which women must surrender their autonomy for the sake of familial duty. Rich further observes: "Most women in history have become mothers without choice" (13). Nel's life is, thus, emblematic of this controlled, duty-bound form of motherhood, a role that offers socially-imposed identity but limits emotional fulfillment.

In contrast, the maternal model embodied by Hannah Peace introduces an unsettling complexity. Hannah does not openly reject her maternal duties, neither does she embrace them in ways that conform to societal norms. She tends to Sula's physical needs, yet emotionally detaches herself from her daughter. When Sula overhears Hannah confessing: "I love Sula, I just don't like her," (57), the words become a quiet wound, shaping the contours of Sula's emotional isolation and future defiance. This confession underscores the uneasy truths that underlie many mother-child relationships, truths that are often repressed in traditional maternal

narratives. Hannah's emotional distance, paired with her sexual freedom, leads Sula to construct her identity untethered from conventional familial roles, seeking instead a life unbound by the attachments and obligations her mother and grandmother are expected to comply with. Sula not only refuses to become a mother in any conventional sense, but consciously distances herself from any maternal impulse. Her decision reflects both resistance and rupture, at once a claim to personal freedom and a silent scream against the social expectations that render women valuable only for their reproductive roles. This abandonment becomes a metaphor for the existential ambivalence of motherhood itself. Sula's cold, detached reaction to her mother's death reveals the emotional chasm between them, as she watches the fire with unnerving calm: " . . . standing on the back porch just looking" (78). Her stillness, often read as cruelty by other characters, may also represent emotional exhaustion, a response to the failures and contradictions of maternal intimacy. Jiao observes that such miscommunication between mothers and daughters may turn mothering "awry," resulting in "the contempt of mother by her own children" (554). The novel repeatedly portrays how absence, silence, or emotional disjunction are passed down across generations. Thus, the ambivalence between love and resentment, care and detachment, becomes an inherited condition rather than a personal flaw.

Nowhere is maternal ambivalence more harrowingly portrayed than in the character of Eva Peace. As both a matriarch and an enigma, Eva embodies the contradictions of motherhood in extreme terms. Her decisions to sacrifice her leg for insurance money and later to kill her son Plum in an act of mercy or control illustrate the blurred line between love and domination. Her motherhood is not gentle; it is exacting and relentless, forged in the fires of deprivation and survival. Hence, the narrator voices that " . . . she left all of her children with Mrs. Suggs, saying she would be back the next day. Eighteen months later she swept down from a wagon with two crutches, a new black pocketbook, and one leg . . ." (34–35). As Remi Akujobi states "[t]he idea of self-sacrifice emphasizes the centrality of motherhood in African society" (2), yet, Eva's story unsettles this patriarchal discourse and her acts of sacrifice, whether by surrendering her leg or ending Plum's life, complicate the notion of instinctive, nurturing motherhood. The discourse of patriarchal, normative motherhood presupposes that mothering is the work and responsibility of primarily one person (the woman), and it assumes that mothering is and should be natural or instinctive to women rather than the product of skill and conscious

commitment (O'Reilly, *Matricentric* 14). The ideology of patriarchy shapes "women's as well as men's view of motherhood" (Rothman 125). However, mothers in African-American communities "combined work and family without seeing much conflict between the two" (Collins 49). Eva becomes the only parental figure to bring up her children in the absence or unavailability of the father. Ghasemi asserts that the oppressive social system considers mothers only as "the nurturer, protector, and servant of their children" (239), but Morrison's mothers are distinguished from these stereotyped ones. It is "their attempt at determining the course of their own and their children's destinies" (Ghasemi 239) that makes these fictional mothers extraordinary and unconventional. Judith Butler's notion of agency as "a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power" (15) helps frame Eva's choices not merely as acts of control, but as deeply embedded responses to structural violence. Eva is both a fierce protector and a terrifying wielder of authority. Hannah's death, engulfed in flames even as Eva hurls herself from a window in a desperate attempt to save her, becomes a haunting metaphor for the peril of maternal overextension, where devotion turns destructive. She becomes a victim of her own self-sacrificing instinct.

The relationship between Hannah and Eva Peace in *Sula* stands as one of Morrison's most subtly devastating portrayals of the complexities embedded within the mother-daughter bond. Beneath the surface of their shared household and mutual survival lies an undercurrent of emotional estrangement, shaped as much by the harsh demands of life in the Bottom as by the unspoken expectations of womanhood and motherhood. Eva, the iron-willed matriarch, exists at the extreme edge of the maternal spectrum where love is indistinguishable from control, and protection is almost identical to annihilation. For Eva's daughter Hannah, this brand of maternal authority seems both awe-inspiring and alienating. Their relationship is not characterized by warmth or verbal affirmation, but by a distance that reveals itself in one of the novel's most strikingly understated exchanges. When Hannah asks her mother: "Mamma, did you ever love us?" (67), the question is as plain as it is shattering, cutting through years of unspoken dissatisfaction and emotional ambiguity. Eva's response is laced with both defensiveness and quiet pride: "What you talkin' 'bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you" (69). In this reply, Morrison distills the duality at the heart of the mother-daughter bond. For Eva, love is proven not through sentiment or softness, but through sheer endurance; the physical act of surviving, of sacrificing limb and autonomy is her language

of love. Yet, for Hannah, the absence of affection in its tender, recognizable form leaves an emotional chasm, one that no gesture of material sacrifice can bridge. This exchange reveals not only the gap between maternal intention and filial expectation but also the generational shift in the understanding of love itself. Eva's world, carved by poverty and racial hardship, permits no luxury for emotional vulnerability, whereas Hannah yearns for a love less bound by duty and more infused with warmth. Morrison, thus, positions their relationship as a meditation on the limits of maternal power: Eva's sacrifices secure her family's survival, but cannot foster emotional closeness; Hannah's longing for maternal affection is met not with denial, but with a kind of tragic misalignment.

In juxtaposition to Sula and Hannah's emotional detachment, Helene and Nel represent an opposite, but equally troubled, maternal paradigm, rooted in discipline, conformity, and emotional suppression. Helene imparts to Nel a blueprint for survival, that is rigid and exacting. Nevertheless, the same model ultimately fails to protect Nel from pain and disillusionment. Her identity as a mother becomes the shell around an empty self, one that cannot shield her from betrayal or abandonment. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins offers a more empowering vision of Black motherhood as a space of self-definition and autonomy, a site where women "learn the power of self-definition . . . and a belief in Black women's empowerment" (118). However, Morrison's portrayal of Nel's maternal role suggests how difficult this empowerment becomes within communities that insist on respectability, silence, and obedience as essential principles of motherhood. Nel's private grief and quiet despair ultimately reveal the deep fissures within even the most seemingly stable maternal roles. Sula, then, stands as both a culmination and a critique of the ambivalent maternal legacies she inherits. She does not simply rebel; she withdraws from motherhood entirely, staking her identity on radical freedom rather than relational bonds. As Adrienne Rich puts it in *Of Woman Born,* motherhood is not "an identity for all time" (36–37). Sula lives this truth, refusing to define herself through children or caregiving. Yet, her freedom is not without its cost. She becomes a pariah in her community, a woman both envied and condemned, an emblematic figure of both liberation and loneliness. Her sexual autonomy, her rejection of maternal sentiment, and her refusal to conform reveal the power and price of non-maternal womanhood. When she abandons the child born of her affair with Shadrack, she marks a turning point not only in her own life but

also in the community's perception of her, becoming a warning and a rupture in the collective maternal narrative.

Morrison's *Sula* thus reveals motherhood not as a sacred duty or biological instinct, but as a conflicted, contradictory space where love and loss, freedom and responsibility coexist. The maternal figures—Helene, Hannah, Eva, Nel, and Sula—are not types, but anomalies. Each embodies the paradoxes of the maternal role, from devotion to defiance, from nurture to harm. The novel insists that we reckon with motherhood as an ambivalent condition—one shaped by history, race, gender, and power, but also by the intimate and often painful terrain of individual choice. While Takševa reminds us that "the universal and essential category of mother exists only within the fictional landscapes of patriarchy" (40), Morrison deftly dismantles that fiction, replacing it with an honest, though uncomfortable, portrayal of mothers as whole, fallible, and fiercely human.

CONCLUSIONS

Toni Morrison reimagines motherhood as a fluid-fraught domain, shaped by struggle, empowered by resistance, and imbued with layered expressions of maternal agency. She subverts the sacrificial maternal idea through the portrayal of maternal ambivalence. Sethe's act of infanticide—both desperate and deliberate—reveals the extremities of maternal love within the socio-political context of slavery. Her love becomes an act of salvific violence, challenging the traditional notion of motherhood as solely nurturing. Eva Peace represents a matriarch whose maternal love is expressed through a cold pragmatism that borders on cruelty, while Hannah's laissez-faire approach reveals a maternal detachment that unsettles conventional norms. Sula's own maternal inheritance, or lack thereof, casts a long shadow over her identity. Escaping from the nurturing embrace of a conventional mother, she forges an identity marked by radical autonomy and social defiance. This absence of a traditional maternal model echoes the void left by Beloved's death in *Beloved*, where the lack of a maternal presence haunts future generations. Morrison's mothers are neither idealized nurturers nor vilified abandoners; rather, they are portrayed in all their aching humanity, caught in the relentless interplay of personal desire, communal expectation, and historical trauma. Morrison portrays these women as guardians, creators, and destroyers, whose love is never simple and whose power, though often muted by suffering, remains indomitable. She does not romanticize motherhood; she ennobles

it by honoring its pain, its paradoxes, and its aching truths. Her maternal figures become vessels of historical memory and cultural survival. They resist not through grand gestures, but through remembrance, love, and endurance. By representing Black motherhood as a dynamic and multifaceted space, Morrison reclaims it from reductive patriarchal constructs and redefines it as a realm of agency, legacy, and profound resilience.

This paper has wandered through that vision, seeking to trace the silhouettes of Morrison's mothers as they move through grief and glory. Motherhood in Morrison's novels does not fit a singular definition, but mirrors a kaleidoscope of maternal realities, each one pulsating with life, with struggle, and with unspeakable beauty. Ultimately, *Beloved* and *Sula* reveal motherhood as a condition defined not by the purity of purpose, but by its irreducible contradictions. It is a realm where tenderness and severity coexist, where the impulse to protect may also wound, and where acts of resistance are often inseparable from acts of surrender. Viewed through the lenses of Black feminist thought and maternal feminist theory, the tales of Morrison's fictional mothers illuminate the ambivalence at the heart of the maternal role, an ambivalence born not of moral failing, but of the profound human reality of mothering within histories of dispossession, racial violence, and communal resilience. In embracing rather than resolving these contradictions, Morrison affirms that maternal agency is not diminished by the inherent complexity of motherhood; it is made more enduring, more truthful, and more deeply human because of this paradoxical intricacy.

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Re-gendering the New African Migrant Novel: Relational and Migrant Masculinities in *The Bad Immigrant* by Sefi Atta

Reconstruyendo el género en la nueva novela de migrantes africana: Masculinidades relacionales y migrantes en *The Bad Immigrant* de Sefi Atta

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Abstract: This article studies notions of masculinity in Sefi Atta's novel *The Bad Immigrant*, particularly focusing on the proposed frameworks of relational and migrant masculinities. The aim of this paper is to analyse how the protagonist Lukmon, as a literary representation of Nigerian immigrant men in the United States, portrays the failure of adapting to the reconfiguration of gender practices that accompanies migration. In order to do so, I not only examine his issues in preserving his main role as provider but also reveal a misogynistic and sometimes violent attitude that now informs his sense of manhood.
Keywords: Masculinity; relationality; migration; African migrant literature; Sefi Atta.
Summary: Introduction. Theoretical Perspectives on Masculinities. Reading Masculinity in *The Bad Immigrant*. Conclusions.

Resumen: Este artículo estudia las concepciones de la masculinidad en la novela *The Bad Immigrant* de la escritora Sefi Atta, centrándose en una propuesta basada en los marcos teóricos de las masculinidades relacionales y migrantes. El objetivo de este ensayo es analizar cómo el protagonista Lukmon, en tanto que representación literaria de los hombres nigerianos inmigrantes en Estados Unidos, describe el fracaso en adaptarse a la reconfiguración de prácticas de género que acompaña a la migración. Para ello, no solo se examinan sus problemas para

preservar su rol principal como encargado del sustento de la familia, sino que también se destapa una actitud misógina, algunas veces violenta, que ahora informa su sentido de hombría.
Palabras clave: Masculinidad; relacionalidad; migración; literatura africana de migrantes; Sefi Atta.
Sumario: Introducción. Perspectivas teóricas acerca de la masculinidad. Leyendo la masculinidad en *The Bad Immigrant*. Conclusiones.

INTRODUCTION

The lives and struggles of migrant men remain to this day a strikingly underexplored theme in African literature in English, despite their relevance to contemporary diasporic narratives. While a considerable amount of scholars have studied masculinities in depth (Raewynn Connell, James Messerschmidt, Andrew Gorman-Murray, Peter Hopkins), only a few have focused on the intricate interplay between migration and masculine identity (Katie Walsh, Raymond Hibbins, Ndungi wa Mungai, Bob Pease) and the poor implementation of migrant masculinities in relation to other fields of arts and humanities also reveals several limitations in cross-disciplinary engagement. As a result, it is possible to contend that it is time to examine the intersection between masculinity theories, migration and contemporary postcolonial literary practices.

Moreover, one can observe that, just as "men have rarely been the subject of research on gender in Africa" (Lindsay and Miescher 1), the inquiry into the representation of migrant masculinities in African literatures has likewise been marginal or overlooked in academia. In light of the need for studies that address migrant masculinities critically, this article attempts to "explore the experiences of men *as men*" (Hibbins and Pease 4) in contemporary African migrant literature, thereby contributing to an underexplored dimension in the research in the field.

For that reason, I will examine the novel *The Bad Immigrant* by Nigerian American author Sefi Atta, which offers profound insight into the understanding of the crisis of masculinity lived by some Nigerian immigrant men. In order to achieve this, I will make use of different critical theoretical contributions which have been grouped into two sets: on the one hand, relational masculinities, and on the other, migrant masculinities. Immediately after the discussion of these methodological tools, a text-centred analysis unfolds serving as the main body of this study. My proposal establishes a reading of the novel that far from viewing the character of Lukmon solely as an educated immigrant commenting on

racial tensions, it instead problematises and interrogates his masculine identity.

1. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MASCULINITIES

1.1 Relational Masculinities: The Construction of Men as a Group

Gender identities and their expressions should be assessed from a framework of relationality that deliberately diminishes the role of individuality. Since these gender identities and expressions transcend subjectivity, as they depend on a number of social and cultural factors, theoretical perspectives into this matter must consider an extended network which goes beyond the individual person. Scholars, such as Sally Robinson for instance, have approached gender as "a relationship of hierarchy and power among individuals and not the property of separate individuals" (151). On a similar note, Harry Brod has also emphasised that gender is part of a collective picture inasmuch as it is "not an attribute of individuals at all, but a relational category" (165). Both these claims not only underscore the intersubjective dynamics of gender but also confirm the necessity of adopting specific approaches to gender that take relationality into consideration.

The forerunners of critical masculinity studies have not been completely oblivious to the relational nature of gender either. In point of fact, when analysing hegemonic masculinity, Raewynn Connell and James Messerschmidt have effectively brought attention to how gender "is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity" (848). In addition, Pierre Bourdieu has similarly noted that manhood is "an eminently relational notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity" (53). Hence, masculinity and femininity have consistently been interconnected and they have been formed discursively and in opposition to each other. For patriarchal systems, gender is binary, it entails a hierarchy and requires a performative display of the differences between men and women. As Allan G. Johnson highlights, patriarchal regimes want men "to be in control at all times, to be unemotional (except for anger and rage), to present themselves as invulnerable, autonomous, independent, strong, rational, logical, dispassionate, knowledgeable, always right, and in command of every situation, especially those involving women" while women are "assumed

(and expected) to be just the opposite, especially in relation to men" (13). In view of this, it becomes clear that gender categories are "always constructed in the context of a broader social order" (Gorman-Murray and Hopkins 6) and that it is the responsibility of critical men's studies "to explain more fully the relational construction of masculinity and the power relations sustained by its hegemonic definitions" (van Hoven and Hörschelmann 7).

In general, masculinity has been seen as something that simultaneously belongs to the self as well as to the realm of politics. For Bettina van Hoven and Peter Hopkins it can be defined "as a form of identity (i.e., a process of identification whereby particular traits, personal qualities, and attributes are seen to be masculine (or not)) and as a form of ideology (i.e., a doctrine or set of beliefs dominant in institutions, society, and culture at large)" (492). In this sense, masculinity manifests as "a social, historical, and political construct" whose performance actually "interrelates with space, place, and time", allowing for the same person to reveal "a different kind of masculinity and/or femininity at different times and in different contexts" (492). For many, this sense of specificity is a tacit condition for an accurate critical inspection of men, since "the starting point for any understanding of masculinity that is not simply biologistic or subjective must be men's involvement in the social relations that constitute the gender order" (Carrigan et al. qtd. in Berg and Longhurst 352). In addition, some experts warn us that "masculinity is both temporally and geographically contingent" and therefore it becomes necessary to acknowledge the plurality of masculinities insofar as they "are highly contingent, unstable, contested spaces within gender relations" (Berg and Longhurst 352). Considering all these observations, it is essential to speak of masculinities in the plural and to pay attention to the adaptability and interconnectedness of gender discourses. For this very reason, I propose the methodological approach of relational masculinities for textual and cultural analyses.

According to Andrew Gorman-Murray and Peter Hopkins, it is possible to conceptualise masculinities "as *relational* achievements—that is, masculinity/masculinities is/are constructed in *relation* to other entities, including bodies, identities, institutions, ideas, social norms and categories, and historical and geographical contexts" (6). Not only that, these authors also sustain that this relationality remains "an ongoing and ever-changing process, as masculinities are continuously reconstructed in and through these social and material relations" (6). Put differently, being

a man "requires active maintenance" (Cornwall 244), as it prescribes a sequence of making and remaking identity, especially in front of others. In a similar manner, Peter Hopkins and Greg Noble have used the term "relational masculinities" to refer to how masculine identities are "constructed processually around senses of similarity and difference" (815), an observation that certainly goes along with theoretical premises of relationality which defend that "[a]ll identities are relational [because] all rely on *not* being something else" (Lawler 12). On this basis, I attempt to associate the field of masculinities with the theoretical model of relational ontologies which not only "gives primacy to the relations between entities as a constitutive element of their existence" but also "presumes the inseparability of one entity from another" (Spyrou). To that end, Karen Barad's discussion of relationalities of becoming is key to understanding the so called approach of relational masculinities. As a result, a "man" could never be an independent, pre-existing entity but rather a performative unit co-constituted through diverse entanglements that "acquire[s] specific boundaries and properties through the open-ended dynamics of intra-activity" (172). Therefore, men have to be analysed as subjects who become gendered in their social performance and interaction, whose existence is delimited by the existence of other beings and whose identities are profoundly shaped by context, place and time.

1.2 Migrant Masculinities: The Re-Construction of Men in a Foreign Country

Due to the fact that context, place and time are indeed crucial for comprehending gender, it is of utmost importance to underline their influence on the formation of migrant masculinities. African émigrés, for example, often experience a disruption in their masculine identity after moving to Europe and America, where they encounter challenges regarding the perception of their masculine self. Seeing that their relocation means adapting to a previously unknown set of values and behaviours, navigating new social norms and redefining their roles within their families and communities, migrant men are faced with the dilemma of deciding if it would be better for them to change. As some scholars have suggested, it is necessary to interrogate whether transnational spaces "produce even greater opportunities for the reinforcement of prevailing gender ideologies and norms, or, conversely, . . . provide openings for men and women, girls and boys to question hegemonic notions of gender"

(Mahler and Pessar 42). Since they can either adhere more firmly to their already established patterns of masculinity while finding new forms to reproduce them or abandon them altogether when engaging in a radical reconfiguration of their gender behaviour, it is imperative to analyse what remains the same and what is altered for these men.

Building upon the necessity to examine the elements of continuity and of transformation in the overseas experiences of these men, it is essential to consider some of the cultural elements that affect the re-construction of their masculine identity in the country of arrival. Migratory movements do not occur in a vacuum, for they are heavily shaped by the social conditions that exist in the subject before, during and after the journey. In the case of the stories depicted in the bulk of contemporary African novels, relocations are usually motivated by economic reasons. Thus, the manhood of male characters is intricately tied to their ability to finally achieve financial success within the host society, especially in relation to their families and other fellow immigrants. In this sense, migration is more often than not "perceived to reconfigure masculinities by enabling or inhibiting a male migrant's ability to be a successful 'provider'" (Walsh 518) and clearly reinforces a traditional paradigm of Western masculinity, applicable to a certain extent in the postcolonial context to middle-class African men living in big urban areas who relocate in search of employment opportunities and who tend to replicate this role. In a similar manner, when these African men become transnational migrants, they start coping with pressures "to be the main breadwinner in the societies in which they are settled, and to continue to maintain their authority in the family" (Hibbins and Pease 5), proving that they are somehow still in command, even if this was not necessarily their case in the first place. This is Lukmon's situation in *The Bad Immigrant.*

Usually, what changes for these men in the diasporic context is the scale of "a range of personal, cultural, educational and systemic barriers" (Hibbins and Pease 5) that they must face on a daily basis as racialised, foreign others. These new constraints usually foster deskilling in the labour market of their host countries together with a diminishment of rank in their households, seeing their power and status undermined, particularly in relation to women. For this reason, experts have also called attention to migration as a process that "entails a constant *reworking* of masculinity", endowed with "tensions between gender ideologies in the homeland and the country of settlement" as well as with "a renegotiation of work and social life within changing networks of family and employment" (Hopkins

and Noble 815). This perspective points out "the geographical contingency of gender identities and relations" (Walsh 519), due to the fact that migrant masculinities may vary according to contextual differences as they are influenced by the convergence of "old" and "new" cultural practices and values.

Migrant masculinities should not be discussed merely as identities located in a new transnational space where broader sociocultural and geopolitical forces merge, but more importantly, as constructs actively assembled and negotiated within that very context. This cultural reconstruction of masculinity occurs in what we might call the *diaspora space*, a spatial framework which not only recognises the "confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes" (Brah 141) but also includes "the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'" (181) when experiencing the "effects of crossing/transgressing different 'borders'" (242). A thorough examination of migrant masculinities in the diaspora space underscores the entangled histories and relationships between migrants and non-migrants, and it undoubtedly proves beneficial when emphasising how identity formation is shaped by transnational flows of culture, power, and belonging. Therefore, Nigerians in the United States are exposed to the interaction of different narratives of how to be a man and they also observe how their masculinity gradually adapts to align with the expectations and beliefs of their new communities. In their case, they move "from a culture that is more communal and family-oriented to one that is individualist, materialistic and consumer-oriented" (Mungai and Pease 110), which causes significant difficulties and impediments to preserving their previous roles as men. The ideal of a provider for the family that they had been in touch with is now framed differently, marked by a predominantly neoliberal conception of success. Similarly, their ideal of a family leader has now been dispossessed of its entitlement of an authoritarian, strong-handed rule. This implies that the assumptions they used to hold about being a husband and a father are probably no longer applicable.

Indeed, it is noticeable that "premigration gendered and social hierarchies are being challenged and contested in the hostland, as diasporic conditions force the majority of African men to rethink their masculine identities within diaspora households and society" (Pasura and Christou 530). While they might have to readjust to new social and cultural realities, African migrant men will still try to pass as honourable, glorious men who are venerated to a certain extent. In this way, it is their "desires and efforts

to claim positive recognition" that drive them to obtain a certain degree of *respectability*. And, in light of this, we can correlate the approach of relational masculinities with migrant masculinities, as their masculine identity relies on positive recognition by others. In other words, migrant men achieve a sense of accomplishment regarding their new positions and roles if and only if their diasporic families and communities welcome this reworking of their gender self-awareness. Nevertheless, this does not mean that all men will be able to achieve this, as some of them may fail in this process, and could end up resorting to violence, turning their home into a living hell, or abandoning their family and their future plans in the host country.

2. READING MASCULINITY IN *THE BAD IMMIGRANT*

The novel *The Bad Immigrant* thoughtfully follows the trajectory established by *A Bit of Difference* in giving voice to the experience of mobility. In both novels, Sefi Atta offers a nuanced critique of class privilege and gender roles while opening up "a productive space of critical inquiry into the pre-scribed production of Africa and the figure of the African in the West" (Knudsen 166). Through the story of a family that represents the broader profile of Nigerians arriving in the United States—individuals with high levels of education and a clear intention to settle permanently (see Imoagene 689)—, Atta includes a male protagonist who is continuously learning "about the workings and peculiarities of race relations" ("Racism") and who scrutinises how middle-class immigrants can "occupy structures of privilege" as well as "inhabit structures of oppression" (Adebayo 291). Not only that, her portrayal of Lukmon Ahmed-Karim also serves as a compelling case study for understanding the (re)construction of masculinities for Nigerian migrant men. For this reason, I argue that the novel enables the critical exploration of the reworking of gender identity in migrant families. As a result, a close reading of this book displays the author's "gift for dialogue and perusing intimate family cris[e]s" (Ossana-Álvarez 87) and allows for a complex discussion on how masculinity needs to be constantly reenacted and reassessed. Since "[n]o man is automatically granted the status of manhood" (Noble x), Atta's fictional character is trapped in a vicious cycle of reaffirming his position as a man in a manner that diverges from previous practices, as these past gender assumptions are no guarantee of maintaining his role within the family in the present. Drawing on the

theoretical framework proposed above, the next two subsections will employ the exposed ideas referring to relational and migrant masculinities to study the novel.

2.1 "What Kind of Man Are You?": Lukmon's Failure as Provider and Authority Figure

The uncertainties brought by the new life of the Ahmed-Karims in the United States are the true source of the crisis of masculinity that Lukmon experiences in the novel. He recognises from the very first page that he was not completely convinced of moving and that it has always been his wife Moriam who was in charge of the details concerning their migratory process. It was her who applied for the green card lottery, sorted out documents and meetings and took care of all these prior arrangements while still in Nigeria: "I couldn't stop her . . . She filled out our immigration application forms and arranged our medical tests and interviews at the US Embassy . . . To raise money for our journey, she traded gold jewelry and sold our furniture and other belongings" (Atta, *Bad Immigrant* 2). Not only does Moriam seem to be way more resourceful and proactive than her husband, she is also eagerly attempting to modify their living conditions and, theoretically, succeeding in doing so. Certainly, while in Lagos, he felt relatively at peace and never questioned the established family dynamics, nor did he perceive his wife's resoluteness as a source of threat of any kind. However, this may have been a concern that has remained latent—one that did not make him uneasy until the social, cultural, and economic context of the family changed with their arrival to the States.

Actually, for him, the image of a life abroad did not carry along any sense of security and he admitted he had some reservations about it: "I had my doubts from the very beginning—for one, about my job prospects. But Moriam didn't give up until she had made her case" (1). Truth be told, Lukmon was right in not spotting himself coming across abundant opportunities and his worries about his career opportunities have remained constant since their arrival to America in the summer of 1999: "There was a possibility that I might have to return to graduate school . . . We had enough money to tide us over for the summer, but it was unsettling not knowing when and where I would find a job" (15). As a matter of fact, the Ahmed-Karims can meet their own expenses throughout the summer only

because they are staying at his cousin Ismail's place. This precarious situation involves their exposition to a more powerful masculine presence, Ismail, who has to be revered and thanked in every circumstance and who now serves as a constant reminder of the protagonist's subordinate position.

During this time period, Lukmon lacks material means and cannot be relied on to secure a future untouched by hardship. As experts have commented, "unemployment brings into sharp focus the centrality of the wage as an affirmation of masculinity" (Brah 57) and makes it especially hard for migrant fathers to feel at ease. Therefore, Lukmon is a desperate man seeking for any possibility of remaining relevant for his nuclear family and his attempts to secure a position that aligns with his career expectations unfortunately result in deskilling. Such an adjustment is perceived not only as negative and unwanted but more specifically as degrading. In this manner, his carefully cultivated intellectual abilities, which up to that moment had helped him fulfil the role of provider and made him proud, are something that he can no longer cling on to. Taking a low-skilled job is perhaps the best chance he has now to contend with the perceived failure associated with unemployment. So, even though he is "more educated than the US average citizen", he eventually accepts "a menial job" considering that his Nigerian diplomas are practically useless in this country, thus becoming an easy target for "labour market discrimination" (Serón-Navas 231). Given that his wife also needs to undergo a series of examinations in order to obtain the necessary qualifications for practicing nursing in the host country, he has no choice but to start working as a security guard to maintain the family in the meantime.

This new job of his as security staff in a cosmetics shop entails an ambivalent position. It allows the family to move out of Lukmon's cousin's house, thus becoming indispensable for their independence in the US, but it also symbolises the many obstacles that need to be surmounted for an immigrant life to be considered successful. To begin with, he acknowledges his economic struggle as provider: "I could barely afford to provide for my family with what I earned as a security guard" (80). Then, there is a passage that further illustrates other sides of his vulnerability as an unqualified racialised foreign worker. Lukmon is asked to escort an African American man who has allegedly been seen stealing to the manager's office. It turns out to be a big misunderstanding, for the man is an attorney whose only suspicious movement has been putting his own

wallet back inside of his pocket. Still, the incident brings along some masculine interethnic confrontation: "'Goddamned African' . . . 'You're lucky you didn't mess with me'" (115). The scene is relevant because we see how Lukmon has to obey his affected white female boss as well as be at the mercy of angry customers while coping with both situations happening at the same time: "I wasn't sure what humiliated me more, his dressing me down in front of her, or her coming to my defense on the assumption that I was there to do her dirty work" (115-16). This is definitely a blow to his masculine pride; the experience of defencelessness in front of a woman in the middle of a whirlwind of xenophobia when his sole intention is to keep putting food on the table.

His fragility intensifies as the narration progresses. Lukmon feels attacked when his wife suggests that he could become a stay-at-home dad as soon as she finds a job, because in his own words: "What kind of man does that?" (118). She seems serious about this proposal and does not force him to give an answer immediately but Lukmon views himself as utterly disappointed by the role he is left in, apart from being quite reluctant to this proposed change in their positions: "She might as well have asked me to get a vasectomy. It would never occur to me to rely on Moriam to be the wage-earner of our family" (118). His wording compares this modification of roles with an actual instance of emasculation and denotes that his masculine self in this moment relies both on not yielding to his wife and on not abandoning his primary role. As a matter of fact, my claim here is that his response is a manifestation of his anxiety about losing his masculine authority; firstly, in relational terms, given that Moriam will hold more power over him and this will diminish his position within their family, and secondly, in what concerns the respectability of a migrant man, as Lukmon is on the verge of becoming a stay-at-home dad, performing tasks typically associated with femininity and being symbolically emasculated as a husband financially dependent on his wife.

In spite of his initial hesitation to let his wife carry this heavy responsibility, he ultimately decides to quit his current job when Moriam is hired in a nearby hospital: "I stopped working . . . and took over most of her chores at home" (133). Lukmon's new role is predominantly domestic and is conceived in very sexist terms. The situation is described as his taking part in tasks that were initially meant for her as a woman and as a wife; as though he was never meant to bear responsibility for household duties. It would not be wrong to say that the circumstances have forced him to accept this reconfiguration of gender and labour practices,

subsequently promoting a decline in his Nigerian postcolonial sense of masculinity rooted in what Cornwall calls "[n]otions of legitimate control embedded in a man's capacity to be the responsible provider" (237). He seems to consent to this in the end but expresses nonetheless his dissatisfaction with the suppression of his sexuality: "She earned more than I had as a security guard, which would have been all right, if we were having sex more often" (Atta, *Bad Immigrant* 188). Their poor sex life is something that will gradually become a huge torment for him, as it will be later discussed in the following section.

Not earning a wage makes him concerned, because the family relies now on Moriam's new salary to overcome their delicate economic situation. Although this is not as dreadful as he might have initially thought, Lukmon's self-perception is by now quite pitiful and miserable: "Being a househusband wasn't exactly challenging work, but I often felt worthless" (197). Hence, he actively decides to recover his professional activity, not due to necessity, but just so he can build again some self-esteem: "I had to get a job as soon as possible. I needed to for my own self-respect. Success to me was teaching African literature in an African Studies department" (228). His masculine self is indeed invigorated when he is accepted for a visiting professorship in Middlesex, Mississippi, but the offer comes with a particular set of inconveniences, as the rest of the family stays in New Jersey. For example, he is needed when their son Taslim takes the family car and does not make it back home on time. Moriam calls Lukmon and tells him: "I want you to take care of this now, as a father and as a man" (305). The protagonist's response expresses profound discontent with the instability of his position and the continual construction of his identity through external circumstances: "The woman ought to make up her mind. When I was home, she'd wanted me to switch roles; now I was away, she wanted me to switch back" (306). Additionally, his own thoughts betray him and reveal that, although he makes occasional efforts, the reality is that he generally fails his children, not engaging in a mindful and diligent upbringing of them: "There were times I was conscious of playing a role as a father and this was one" (307).

As a matter of fact, the ambivalent relationship that he nurtures with his offspring has several negative consequences for him. In a given moment when he comes back from Mississippi and tries to confront the insolence and rebelliousness of their eighteen-year-old, Taslim, Lukmon lives an unpleasant moment marked by his son's negative perception of him: "'Why didn't you just stay there?' Taslim said. 'We were doing fine

here! Mom went to work! She paid our bills! What did you ever do, except sit around correcting our English and whining about America?'" (349). Matters escalate between them, Lukmon grabs him by the collar and blames Moriam for their son's impertinence, for having failed at drawing boundaries in his absence. In a matter of minutes, he reaches the point of physical fighting and abuses his son, catching him off-guard while he was taking a shower. Violence becomes in this way Lukmon's desperate strategy to claim back his authority and it shows his inability to handle their personal issues in a relaxed and empathic manner. As time goes by, his lack of control over the family can no longer be ignored. He confesses: "I was scared. I'd been unable to provide for them for a while. I couldn't protect them fully. They'd changed so much I could hardly recognize them and I had no control over a single one of them" (356). Lukmon's words perfectly portray a failed masculinity, in view of the fact that Yoruba culture regards the position of husband as someone "vested with control over the household" (Cornwall 235). His flawed manhood is met with surprise by his own wife who pronounces: "'What kind of man are you?' . . . 'How could you do that to your son?'" (Atta, *Bad Immigrant* 361). As a result, it can be argued that Lukmon embodies the figure of a man who has been unable to reconstruct his sense of masculinity within the new transnational context, resorting to violence as a means of asserting himself as the man of the house.

2.2 The Man Who Did Not Know He Hated Women: A Misogynistic Husband Fallen from Grace

Despite having a good educational background with extensive academic credentials, Lukmon's views on women are illustrative of misogynistic thinking and reflect many aspects of the patriarchal ideologies he has been internalising along the years. First of all, as a young man he has to step up for one of his sisters in very patriarchal terms, as evidenced by his striking his sister's ex-husband with a punch. In response to the man's disrespect toward his sister, accusing her of a supposed lack of proper manners—likely attributed to poor upbringing by their mother as he suggested—Lukmon engages in physical conflict with him. This represents not only an example of masculinistic competition but also his duty to defend his family's honour, particularly his mother's and his sister's. In contexts involving women beyond the family domain, he also shows a slight tendency toward misogynistic bias. For instance, as an academic who has

specialised in the field of African literature, he keeps acclaiming a long list of admirable authors exclusively composed of men writers until his daughter Bashira's sound advice compels him to include women in the syllabus of his literature classes. Not to mention how surprising it is to see on other occasions the countless ways in which female authors' contributions are disregarded and treated with disdain: "Not that I was opposed to African women writers, but their domestic preoccupations put me to sleep" (42).

Women are described mainly through sexist stereotypes in his own romantic life as well. His memories of Lucy—a white English classmate he encountered during his time in London as a student—reveal a certain aversion toward Caucasian women and interracial relationships. This attitude further reflects Lukmon's particular form of prejudice against white people as well as a subtle hint of machismo that permeates all his anecdotes, such as his criticism of the first girlfriends he ever had as though they were utterly annoying for "talking about remaining a virgin" or "so loose" for "sleeping with three guys [he] knew" (189). In a similar manner, when he narrates how he first met his wife Moriam, he highlights that he felt lucky to have the chance to interact with somebody who had not been sexually active before, exposing between the lines that such a behaviour was deplorable for a woman but probably permissible for a man: "I was just glad that a fine chick who hadn't been passed around was talking to me" (12). Not only that, he also explains that he generally caught women's attention unintentionally, which worked well for him, while being conscious that something was off: "she talked to me only because she thought I was a nice guy. Why women assumed I was nice, I never knew. They mistook my silence for shyness. I was usually thinking about how to get them to go to bed with me" (12). Next, when referring to the media content that Moriam is fond of, he takes personal offence as a man at the biased representation that they allegedly offer: "And men? According to the television programs she watched . . . we were violent and depraved. We abused and subjugated women. We raped and killed them. We stifled them simply by being men" (197). These examples are illustrative of how he constructs his own identity relationally through a certain degree of opposition to what women supposedly do and think.

In a clear demonstration of male chauvinism, he implies that beauty is the trait that made him respect, tolerate and appreciate women: "she didn't know how lucky she was because I would never put up with bad behaviour from an ugly woman" (13). Then, in a specific moment of the novel, when

he learns that his cousin Ismail is having an affair with his female boss, Lukmon belittles her professional achievements and translates what he is being told to match his sexist worldview: "she had broken the glass ceiling by using her brains, he said. I took that to mean she was not attractive" (28). To him, if these initiatives to achieve professional growth are the truly relevant thing to tell about her, it means that she clearly does not conform to conventional beauty standards or does not have a pleasing appearance, which was, apparently, the thing that mattered the most to Lukmon. But his sexist focus on aesthetics does not pertain only to his interactions with unknown women and he also applies it to people within his own social circle. Take for example Lukmon's participation in the African Literature Association conference, where he meets up with Ranti Shonubi, "a fellow student from [his] PhD years at the University of Ibadan" (201). As soon as she sees her, he feels drawn to her because of her outfit, finds her short hair exhilarating, admires her beauty and inevitably assesses her strong-minded and opinionated character, for he claims that she is "as contrary as [he] remembered" (202). Within the span of two pages, it is already palpable not only the scorn with which he hears her reflections on gender and feminism but also an undeniable objectification of her body: "The more she talked, the more challenging it was to concentrate on what she was saying anyway. Why did women do that? Expose their breasts and expect men to listen to them?" (204). Later on, towards the end of the novel, Lukmon airs again his opinion on female partners and frames it in such a way that despite the fact that it begins as a praise, it actually ends up in derogatory terms: "Women were wonderful. Women were fantastic. Women would be amazing if they'd only be quiet occasionally, and have sex more often" (257). As it can be easily noted, he passes from expressing rejection of both chaste and promiscuous women to voicing his obsession with women who delay and/or decline sexual encounters with men. This well-constructed inconsistency in his morals shows that although he might not be aware of his own bigotry, his prejudice against women is blatantly displayed for readers and is key to understanding his masculine identity.

Most of Lukmon's negative comments about women are really connected to the underlying resentment he has been growing towards his wife. It could be argued that in fact his troubled relationship with Moriam is what exacerbates his misogynistic attitude throughout the whole book. Lukmon knows that his wife is in command and both pretend that this is not the case, in order to avoid shaking the foundations of their family unit:

"She could almost make me believe I was in control" (61). Their lack of a healthy sex life as a couple is also one of the most recurrent topics in the novel as well as one of the biggest issues in their turbulent marriage. Through his rage towards her for "having turned [him] into a eunuch" (63), Lukmon discloses the reconfiguration of gender practices in the diasporic household and sees his conception of "married man" readjusted. He notices that her wife's domestic obligations and personal hobbies are now different, that she is freer to act as she pleases even if this means confronting her husband's wishes: "She was always too tired to have sex, but she was never too tired to go shopping" (188). At certain moments, he attempts to bring up the subject via humour but fails to realise that his remarks are extraordinarily insensitive: "Go and shop, and when you're finished, come back here and make up for your bride price" (219); "Her hair was dyed a color she called cinnamon. I'd told her the color made her look like a loose woman and it was a shame she wasn't" (238). Lukmon's reaction to her new day-to-day life, which indeed includes lots of shopping and hair salon appointments, is no less than suggesting the possibility of banishing his wife to find a new subservient one: "I warned Moriam that I would send her back to Nigeria and get my sisters to fly over a village woman who would cook, clean and fulfill her wifely duties if she wouldn't. She found that funny" (189).

Rather than remaining a simple joke, as Moriam interprets it, this evolves into the perfect example of husbands considering whether it would be pertinent to reclaim traditional values in order to "regain their privileged position again" (Pasura and Christou 533). However, this perception is not exclusively his, as it is shared by many other immigrant husbands in the novel who believe that their wives do not conform to established gender norms while they are in the West. For instance, Dr. Aderemi specifies that the gender dynamics at the barbecue held at the Ahmed-Karim's place would have been really different had they had it in Nigeria: "'If we were home', he said, 'they would be serving us food on their knees'" (Atta, *Bad Immigrant* 245). These men are realising that they have ceased to enjoy favoured treatment in the host country, although in many cases they are truly embracing a fantasy, an idealised representation of their marital dynamics back home. Lukmon, for instance, notes how the external circumstances at play in Lagos would have induced his wife to display greater attentiveness and affection: "She was too comfortable in America; that was the problem. In Nigeria, she would be afraid of the competition. She would have to perform her wifely duties on a nightly basis in case

some other woman might" (190). Nonetheless, this probably fails to capture the reality in a faithful manner. In this regard, his view is that the American way of life is to blame and their new life circumstances actually make him hold grudges against his wife. This will result in their interests and opinions progressively diverging, thus becoming more and more detached from one another in the course of their navigation of the diaspora space.

Another striking episode in their married life is when he discovers that she keeps a vibrator in the drawer of her bedside table. Still flabbergasted, Lukmon urgently needs to know all the details: "Look at you, barely off the boat and already behaving like a bad woman. I will beat the hell out of you if you don't tell me who gave this to you" (320). The excessively violent language he uses and his disproportionate rage likely stem from a slight suspicion that his wife could be telling a lie when claiming that it was a birthday present, which would only increase his feeling of betrayal. Learning that she was actively seeking ways to explore her own sexuality without him would have destroyed to the core his sense of masculinity. Nevertheless, in Lukmon's view, Moriam still violates the behavioural expectations placed upon her and ignores the manners of a decent Nigerian woman by accepting such a gift. She is going against her culture and joining what he calls the group of "badly behaved Nigerian women" in America (243). Moriam represents in this context sexual agency and displaces her partner from the so-called husband's "exercise of exclusive rights to sexual access and control" (Cornwall 240) by opening up the possibility of masturbation and female-centred pleasure. Her detachment from traditional values brings along not only a great humiliation and rage for Lukmon but, most importantly, the deterioration of his masculine self.

CONCLUSIONS

Like many other Africans in the United States in their quest for a satisfying immigrant life, Atta's protagonist and narrator is rearranging his sense of self. Driven by his wife, Lukmon leaves Nigeria behind in order to forge a new path for his loved ones and in so doing he inevitably confronts intra-family disagreements and tensions. The new sociocultural context allows Moriam to embrace the privileges of personal freedom as a woman, not merely as a wife, while also providing young Taslim the means to defy the authoritarian tendencies of his parents. Both situations simultaneously push Lukmon to unimportance, to seeing his expected position as head of

the household continuously destabilised. Indeed, Lukmon is no longer reliable as a provider and slowly evolves into an emotional stranger for them. He fails to accomplish a harmonious and balanced reconfiguration of his masculine identity, and resorts to both verbal and physical violence. Similarly, not only does he show his prejudice and bias against women in many different contexts, he also reaffirms his manhood precisely by doing that. As a result, it can be claimed that his sexism has been of core importance in the development of his masculinity and now functions as a shield for his weak standpoint as a migrant man. Completely overwhelmed by the versatility of his wife in New Jersey, Atta's male protagonist also discovers an unusual fellowship with other Nigerian men through reclaiming traditional gender roles and is even tempted by the possibility of polygamy to rework his masculine power within their marriage.

As this study has demonstrated, the character of Lukmon deliberately portrays the challenges associated with masculinity lived by many Nigerians abroad, whose sense of manhood is eroded through relational dynamics stemming from their migrant condition. Although this exploration provides valuable insights, further research is needed to see the convergence of critical masculinities and new African diasporic fiction. The task now is to find texts and narratives that revolve around the presence of progressive black masculinities and other positive gender discourses in the African immigrant communities.

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Exploring Contextual Swear Words: A Case Study on the Translation of *Goddamn* in *The Catcher in the Rye*

Exploración de las palabrotas contextuales: Un estudio de caso sobre la traducción de *goddamn* en *The Catcher in the Rye*

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Abstract: This study undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the contextualised swear word *goddamn* in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and its translation into Turkish. This study aimed to examine how the usage of *goddamn* differs across abusive, casual, and cathartic settings in both the source and target texts, thereby shedding light on contextualised swearing in translation. The analysis revealed that *goddamn* was the most common swear word, accounting for 31.9% of all the swear words in the book. Interestingly, out of 251 sentences, *goddamn* was employed casually in 218 instances, suggesting that its usage goes beyond being a mere swear word and serves pragmatic functions. The translator employs various techniques to adeptly convey the pragmatic nuances of the term in the target text. Notably, the author, J. D. Salinger, predominantly employs *goddamn* in delexicalised and pragmatic contexts, refraining from its abusive usage. This decision underscores the author's intent to de-emphasise the word's profanity, highlighting its pragmatic utility. Similarly, the translator's choice to delexicalise *goddamn* in the Turkish rendition strengthens its pragmatic usage, aligning with the author's original intentions. In conclusion, this study illuminates the nuanced contextualization of swear words, particularly *goddamn*, in literary texts and their translations. This underscores the importance of considering cultural and pragmatic factors when effectively conveying the intended meaning across languages while preserving the essence of the source text.
Keywords: Swear words; *goddamn*; translation studies; contextualised swear words.
Summary: Introduction. Swear Words. Contextual Swear Words. Swearing as a Discourse in Teenage Communication in *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger. *Goddamn* as a Swear Word.

Translation of Swear Words for the Target Audience. Methods, Materials and Data Analysis. Results and Discussion. Concluding Remarks.

Resumen: En este estudio se ha llevado a cabo un análisis exhaustivo de la palabrota contextualizada *goddamn* en *The Catcher in the Rye* y su traducción al turco. El objetivo era examinar cómo difiere el uso de *goddamn* en contextos abusivos, casuales y catárticos, tanto en el texto de origen como en el de destino, arrojando así luz sobre las palabrotas contextualizadas en la traducción. El análisis reveló que *goddamn* era la palabrota más común, con un 31,9% del total de palabrotas del libro. Curiosamente, de 251 frases, *goddamn* se empleó de forma casual en 218 casos, lo que sugiere que su uso va más allá de una mera palabrota y cumple funciones pragmáticas. El traductor empleó varias técnicas para transmitir hábilmente los matices pragmáticos del término en el texto meta. En concreto, en seis casos, *goddamn* se utilizó en contextos catárticos, lo que llevó al traductor a adoptar una estrategia de traducción literal para preservar la esencia contextual. En los contextos abusivos, en 24 casos, el traductor tendió a suavizar el tono, posiblemente para llegar a un público más amplio. Esta preferencia por la suavización coincide con tendencias históricas en las que el uso pragmático y deslexicalizado de palabrotas como *goddamn* servía como recurso literario. En particular, el autor, J. D. Salinger, emplea *goddamn* predominantemente en contextos deslexicalizados y pragmáticos, absteniéndose de su uso abusivo. Esta decisión subraya la intención del autor de restar importancia a la profanidad de la palabra, destacando su utilidad pragmática. Del mismo modo, la decisión del traductor de deslexicalizar *goddamn* en la versión turca refuerza su uso pragmático, en consonancia con las intenciones originales del autor. En conclusión, el estudio ilustra la contextualización matizada de las palabrotas, en particular *goddamn*, en los textos literarios y sus traducciones. Subraya la importancia de tener en cuenta los factores culturales y pragmáticos a la hora de transmitir eficazmente el significado deseado a través de las lenguas, preservando al mismo tiempo la esencia del texto original.
Palabras clave: Palabrotas; *goddamn*; estudios de traducción; palabrotas contextualizadas.
Sumario: Introducción. Palabrotas. Palabrotas contextuales. Las palabrotas como discurso en la comunicación adolescente en el libro *The Catcher in the Rye* de J. D. Salinger. *Goddamn* como palabrota. Traducción de palabrotas para el público destinatario. Métodos, materiales y análisis de datos. Resultados y discusión. Conclusiones.

INTRODUCTION

Swearing, a ubiquitous aspect of human culture, manifests in various forms and contexts, serving purposes ranging from venting frustration to expressing strong emotions, and even to producing comic effects by exaggerating emotions, subverting expectations, or adding a layer of irony and humour to everyday interactions. Swear words are rarely found in textbooks and are hardly included in formal education curricula, being regarded as taboo and offensive words (Jay, "The Utility") because of their denotative and literal meanings (Lafreniere et al. 908). Nevertheless, they serve various discourse functions in teenage conversations. In addition to their discourse devices, they serve to establish in-group membership and

maintain boundaries and social norms for language use (Rayson et al.; Stenström; Love and Stenström). Swearing is also used to communicate one's emotional state to an audience (Jay, "The Utility;" Jay and Janschewitz), although it includes varying degrees of profanity. However, the level of profanity is not equally offensive in all situations (Beers Fägersten, *Who's Swearing Now?*; Johnson and Lewis; Rieber et al.). The discussion of the offensive nature of these words is essential, as they have evolved into a form of emotive language commonly used by many teenagers in their daily social interactions. As with other words, the usage of swear words has evolved over centuries, both in meaning and connotation. Consequently, the perception of swear words has changed substantially, depending on the context in which they are used.

Scholarship on linguistic politeness and impoliteness has also emphasised the discursively negotiated feature of politeness as part of relational work negotiated in interaction (Brown and Levinson; Locher and Watts; Locher and Bousfield; Christie; Jary). Thus, swear words, in the context of impoliteness, may function as solidarity markers in casual contexts, aligning with positive politeness strategies, while in abusive contexts they constitute face-threatening acts. Translators, therefore, must navigate these pragmatic nuances to avoid unintended impoliteness or loss of interpersonal meaning. This relational perspective underscores that translation is not merely linguistic transfer but an act of interpersonal negotiation, where choices impact perceptions of power, distance, and social identity across cultures.

Swear words have become the focus of multidisciplinary studies, including linguistics, which encompasses semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, sociohistorical descriptive linguistics, psycholinguistics, and philosophy of language.[1] However, apart from a few influential works in Translation Studies (TS),[2] there is relatively little research on the intercultural translation of swear words, which remains unexplored in TS (Valdeón, "The Vulgarization Hypothesis" 1).

[1] For a multidisciplinary overview of swearing, see, for example, Goddard, Jay and Janschewitz, and Norrick.

[2] For an overview of swearing in TS, see, for example, Díaz-Pérez ("Translating Swear Words), Díaz Cintas and Remael, Guillot, Santaemilia ("The Translation"), Valdeón ("Swearing;" "The Vulgarization Hypothesis;" "Schemata;" "The (Ab)use"), and Santaemilia ("The Danger(s)").

Within this relatively small body of research, previous studies on the translation of expletives have reported disparate findings, especially regarding the strategies employed to translate swear words to convey pragmatic force. Translators adopt a range of strategies when translating swear words. While certain strands of research strongly argue that translators—particularly in specific contexts—tend to increase the number of swear words in the target text (TT) (Valdeón, "Swearing;" Valdeón, "The Vulgarization Hypothesis"), other seminal scholars take the opposite view, maintaining that translators more commonly omit or attenuate the impact of swear words for various reasons across different language pairs (Giampieri; Díaz-Pérez, "Translating Swear Words").

Regardless of the strategies employed, the primary aim of translators is to convey the pragmatic implications of the original (Pardo 130). This study aims to identify the pragmatic and interpersonal functions of one of the most commonly used swear words, *goddamn*, and scrutinise how its functions are transferred from one culture to another through translation, especially in teenage speech. While some studies have stated that the swear word *damn* and its related lexemes have lost their swearing force (Montagu; McEnery) and are listed at the bottom of the offensive list (McEnery), I believe that they are indispensable for pragmatic implications and should be transferred into another language using certain translation strategies. Thus, I have chosen *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) as a primary text, as it provides fertile ground for exploring teenage language and profanity. The teenage protagonist Holden uses the word *goddamn* (or "goddam" in Holden's usage) 251 times on different occasions. This study investigates the contextual uses of the particular swear word in teenage dialogue in *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) and how these functions are translated and contextualised in Turkish. Considering the issues outlined above, the study addresses the following main research question:

> How is the contextualised use of *goddamn* in *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) rendered into Turkish across abusive, casual, and cathartic contexts through translation?

To answer the research question, three hypotheses were formed as follows:

1. There is no statistically significant difference between the source text (ST) and the TT in the frequency of the casual use of *goddamn*.
2. There is no statistically significant difference between the ST and TT in the frequency of the cathartic use of *goddamn*.
3. There is no statistically significant difference between the ST and TT in the frequency of the abusive use of *goddamn*.

This study employs a mixed qualitative-quantitative methodology to examine the contextualised use and translation of swear words, with a particular focus on the term *goddamn* in *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) and its Turkish translation. Adopting a coupled-pairs analysis approach, the ST and TT are systematically compared to identify translational shifts in meaning, pragmatic force, and contextual function. All instances of *goddamn* are extracted, coded, and categorised according to their pragmatic contexts—abusive, casual, and cathartic—drawing on established classifications in swearing research.

1. SWEAR WORDS

As the use of swear words varies across different speech levels and geographical locations (Dewaele), their definition is subjective and problematic (Valdeón, "The Vulgarization Hypothesis;" McEnery; O'Driscoll) and tends to differ across cultures, languages (Valdeón, "Swearing"), and age groups. Swearing and swear words can be categorised under the term "taboo language" which can be described as the "transgress[ion] of polite social norms" (O'Driscoll 40). They are deemed as offensive, inappropriate, objectionable, or unacceptable in any given social context (Stapleton et al.). When defining swear words, researchers mainly focus on their offensive nature; however, not every offensive word is categorised as a swear word. Ljung presents four primary criteria for utterances to be classified as swear words (1) they contain taboo words; (2) these taboo words are used non-literally; (3) they are expressed in formulaic language; and (4) they are used with emotive language (Ljung). Similar to Ljung, Andersson and Trudgill suggest that swear words refer to: (1) something taboo or stigmatised; (2) words that cannot be interpreted literally; and (3) language loaded with emotive words that convey the speaker's feelings and attitudes towards a person or

situation (195). By definition, this makes it a controversial activity (Debray 145).

Some researchers emphasise the solidarity-promoting features of swearing,[3] while others emphasise its offensive nature (G. Hughes; S. E. Hughes; Montagu) and associated swear words with strong emotional connotations, including the potential for vulgarity, obscenity, profanity, cursing, and blasphemy. G. Hughes and S. E. Hughes connect swearing to the breach of social taboos related to topics such as sex, religion, and the body. McEnery discusses the offensive nature of swearing and other blasphemous, homophobic, racist, and sexist language (2). Stapleton discusses offensive swearing in connection with social or cultural taboos such as sex or bodily functions (289). Stapleton categorises swearing into three areas: (1) excretory/scatological, i.e. referring to bodily parts linked to these functions (e.g., *shit*, *ass*, *arse*); (2) sexual, i.e. referring to sexual intercourse or genitalia (e.g., *fuck*, *dick*, *pussy*, *cunt*, *prick*, *wank*); and (3) profane, that is, religious or blasphemous matters (e.g., *damn*, *goddamn*, *for Christ's sake*) (290).

Based on the definitions of the studies cited above, the concept of swear words encompasses a wide range of expressions, from taboo words with sexual and religious implications to offensive expressions that may lead to stigma in communication. As swear words are culturally specific, and this article focuses on an English ST, it is useful to note McEnery's categorisation of English swear words (Table 1) according to their degree of offensiveness (McEnery 30).

[3] See, for example, Beers Fägersten and Stapleton, Daly et al., Stapleton et al., and Stapleton for discussions of the solidarity-promoting features of swearing.

Table 1. McEnery's scale of offence in the case of English swear words

Severity Level	Terms
Very mild	bird, bloody, crap, damn, goddamn, hell, hussy, idiot, pig, pillock, sod, son-of-a-bitch, tart
Mild	arse, balls, bitch, bugger, Christ, cow, dickhead, git, Jesus, jew, moron, pissed off, screw, shit, slag, slut, sod, tit, tits, tosser
Moderate	arsehole, bastard, bollocks, gay, nigger, piss, paki, poofter, prick, shag, spastic, twat, wanker, whore
Strong	fuck
Very strong	cunt, motherfucker

The examples above clearly and primarily associate swear words with their level of offensiveness, vulgarity, and literal meanings, while ignoring the multifunctionality of swear words. However, swear words are multidimensional, and their vulgarity and offensiveness must be contextualised.

2. CONTEXTUAL SWEAR WORDS

There are circumstances in which swear words are not considered offensive (Jay, *Cursing in America*; Kapoor; Seizer). Recent research has attributed communicative and pragmatic functions to swear words as a means of expressing emotion (Jay and Janschewitz). For example, Ljung describes swear words as "one of the many linguistic devices that speakers use to add extra emphasis to their speech, often in conjunction with other emphasis techniques such as stress, intonation, and tone of voice" (4–5). This emphasises that swear words are inherent and integral parts of languages and cultures.

Profanity is used in daily life. Its offensiveness is highly dependent on the context in which it is used. It fulfils essential communicative functions that other linguistic devices cannot achieve. The meaning of swear words is dynamic, and the function of the same swear words can vary depending on the context in which they are used in (Beers Fägersten, "A Sociolinguistic Analysis;" R. Chen; Jay and Janschewitz).

Several influential studies have highlighted the connotative meanings of swear words in various contexts, including the environment in which

they are used, pragmatics, gender, age, social status, and education, and culture (Allan; Jay, "The Utility;" Jay and Janschewitz; Karjalainen; Spinney). The level of offensiveness can be increased or decreased depending on the context in which the swear word is used. For example, the derogatory term *fucking* has a different emotional impact in the sentence: *the film was fucking good.* There is no doubt that the vulgarity and degree of offence of swear words are compounded and intensified when they are used denotatively (Jay, "The Utility;" Jay and Janschewitz; Kapoor; Rieber et al.). Furthermore, the level of offence is closely related to the relationship between the speaker and the listener. Stenström points out that in a casual context, a phrase like *hello to me, talk to me, you cunt* is not considered an insult when used between close friends.

Although swearing has historically been associated with vernacular discourse linked to working-class backgrounds, lower levels of education, particular socio-economic statuses (S. E. Hughes; McEnery; Love; Macafee; Mulac), and gendered patterns of language use (Romaine 155) in teenage speech it functions as a powerful pragmatic resource for establishing and reinforcing group identity, largely independent of socio-economic or educational background. This is exemplified in the discourse of Holden, the teenage main character in Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.

3. Swearing as a Discourse in Teenage Communication in *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger

J. D. Salinger, the reclusive author of *The Catcher in the Rye*, deliberately avoided publicity and aligned himself with a long-standing American literary tradition of radical individualism and scepticism toward society. This tradition, evident in the works of Henry David Thoreau and Herman Melville and later echoed by figures such as Emily Dickinson, Thomas Pynchon, and Cormac McCarthy, is marked by a distrust of social institutions and a belief in the moral corruption of modern society. Within this context, *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) attracted considerable attention upon its initial publication in the United States, as its critique of social hypocrisy and alienation resonated with a broader cultural and literary discourse that foregrounded individual resistance to conformity.

The Catcher in the Rye (Salinger) was written during a transitional period when capitalism was beginning to emerge as the dominant value in human relations. Money-related concepts such as competitiveness, social

status, and non-detached relationships prevailed over human values. The time in which the book was written coincided with a period of "increasing individualism, in which the trauma of war and the US's shifting social, cultural, and political landscape left many feeling abandoned or betrayed by their country" (Kinane 118).

The Catcher in the Rye (Salinger) is a narrative concerning a disillusioned teenager grappling with the hypocrisy of the adult world, while also struggling to come to terms with his brother's death. On the surface, it is a coming-of-age novel that explores the theme of quest within the context of literary interest. However, it has garnered interest due to its linguistic significance, as the language used by Holden embodies an authentic vernacular teenage language. In conservative circles, the book was harshly criticised as the 17-year-old protagonist questioned the "materialism and hypocrisy of adults" (Schmitz 1). Moreover, Holden's liberal and lavish use of swear words such as *turd, goddam, bastard, sonuvabitch, chrissake, fuck,* and *ass* angered certain circles so much that it was considered "dirty" (Rosen 558). As a result, the book was censored in libraries and removed from high school reading lists. These negative perspectives primarily overlook the fundamental fact that Holden's more vulgar language is used for emotional expression rather than as a tool for insults.

Holden, disillusioned by corrupted values, tries to cling to life by embracing his own set of values, with language being one of them. On many occasions, Holden uses swear words to communicate. He uses them to illustrate how people and the system are corrupted. Holden's use of profanity is viewed as an emotive form of expression rather than a tool for insult. His swear words, which are part of a vernacular that includes localism and social embeddedness (Coupland 284) and his non-standard ways of verbalising seem to serve natural, pragmatic, and interpersonal functions.

In the book, it is evident that Holden's language, a quintessential example of teenage speech, is an attempt to establish or be a part of a counterculture to the corrupted values of adults. For example, in many cultures, *fuck you* is considered the harshest insult, with the words *fuck* and *cunt* being considered the most offensive regardless of context.[4] However, the same term also refers to sexual intercourse, although its meaning has evolved, and it has become almost taboo. In the book, Holden attempts to

[4] See, for example, Christie (153); McEnery (35); and Stone et al. (53).

eliminate this phrase from Phoebe's school, which can be seen as an effort to demonstrate how adult language can disconnect human values and lead people to become hypocritical.

Although Holden Caulfield's language is often characterized as profane, his use of the word *fuck* is highly selective and context dependent. Rather than functioning as casual vulgarity, the term appears in moments of moral unease, most notably when Holden encounters it as graffiti in spaces associated with childhood, such as Phoebe's school and the Museum of Natural History. His distress stems not from the word's obscenity alone but from what it symbolizes: the intrusion of adult sexuality and phoniness into innocent domains. Holden's repeated attempts to erase the graffiti underscore both his protective impulse and his recognition of its futility. Consequently, *fuck* operates as a symbolic marker of threatened innocence, revealing Holden's ethical sensitivity rather than moral corruption. He also uses other swear words such as *for God's sake*, *goddamn*, *for heaven's sake*, *Jesus*, or *Jesus Christ* only when a strong expression is necessary. Holden's language is linguistically significant as it reflects teenage vernacular and colloquial speech, characterised by obscenity and sacrilege. However, the daring, obscene, and blasphemous features of Holden's language, create a comic effect (Costello).

Swearing may be common pragmatic resource in teenage discourse and is often employed to negotiate group identity; however, while expressions such as *you are such an irritable bitch*, *you stupid cow*, or *you cunt* are conventionally classified as highly offensive and are not typically regarded as normative forms of teenage language. However, when such expressions are deployed in specific, mutually recognised peer-group contexts, they may function as in-group markers rather than as abusive language and therefore do not necessarily cause offence among close friends (Stenström 119).

4. *GODDAMN* AS A SWEAR WORD

Swear words have aesthetic, cultural, pragmatic, ideological, and religious implications. The translator may remove, weaken, strengthen, or soften the swear words (Santaemilia, "The Translation"). Swear words are highly context-sensitive rather than referential (Goddard) and thus should be studied within the scope of pragmatics. The implications of *Damn* and *Goddamn* can range from expletive to insulting, serving as emphatic

expressions. However, since *damn* does not contain an explicit religious reference like *goddamn*, it is often perceived as less overtly sacrilegious in many contemporary contexts.

Goddamn has been one of the most widely used swear words in the English language, despite it breaching one of the *Ten Commandments* in Christianity, which states that one should not take God's name in vain (G. Hughes 9). For some religious people, the expletive *goddamn* is offensive because it includes the name of God. However, historically, Christian countries used this term to refer to others with whom they were hostile with, for example., goddamn was mainly used by the French in reference to English people in the fifteenth century (G. Hughes 203).

As with other swear words, *goddamn* is related to the environment, pragmatics, gender, age, social status, education, and culture.

5. Translation of Swear Words for the Target Audience

In TS, the translation of swear words is often discussed in terms of the dichotomy between domestication and foreignization, a concept originally introduced by Schleiermacher and further explored by Berman and Venuti. In TS, several influential studies such as those of Díaz-Pérez, Díaz Cintas and Remael, Santaemilia, and Valdeón have addressed the translation of swear words, with a primary focus on audiovisual translation contexts. Crisafulli studied the translation of taboo language and concluded that neither a ST-based nor a TT-based approach could be adopted when translating non-standard language. Instead, an eclectic approach should be adopted. However, the socio-pragmatic meaning of swear words must be discussed in the context of translation. In *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger), the authenticity of Holden's language shapes his character. As pointed out by Costello, the authentic portrayal of teenage colloquial speech is the book's distinctive feature (172).

Translating American slang from the 1940s into modern language is an extremely difficult challenge for any translator to undertake. Neutralizing and sanitizing the style of the book would undoubtedly diminish its literary distinctiveness, given that Holden's vocabulary embodies his disturbed emotional state (Miller 130). Translating a novel filled with 1940s American slang and swear words for a 21st-century generation poses several challenges for any Turkish translator aiming to bring the book into the current time. There is little doubt that Salinger was highly skilled at capturing the speech patterns of 1940s teenagers, with

goddamn emerging as by far the most frequently used expression in Holden's idiolect.

The Turkish language has a variety of equivalents to *goddamn* that have the potential to replicate the effect for which Salinger aimed. Examples include *Allah kahretsin* (Goddamn it), *Kahrolası* (Goddamn it), *Allah'ın cezası* (God damn it), and *lanet olsun* (God damn it), all of which apply in abusive settings. These swear words are also used in casual and cathartic settings, where they serve as emphatic emphasizers, exemplified by the terms *son derece* (extremely), *tamamiyle* (utterly), and *felaket* (terrific). Therefore, it is essential for Turkish translators to understand the contextual uses of *goddamn* and convey its meaning appropriately.

6. METHODS, MATERIALS, AND DATA ANALYSIS

This study aims to assess and evaluate the contextual usage and appropriateness of swear words, particularly *goddamn*, in the dialogues of Holden, the protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) and its rendition into Turkish. As the study relies on a coupled pair analysis (Toury 115–30), I first analysed *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) and its Turkish translation published by Yapı Kredi Publishing, a company renowned for producing high-quality publications in Turkey and abroad. Aside from their status as a notable publisher, another reason for choosing this particular publication centred on the fact that the translation is based on a version of the ST published by Penguin Books, enabling the analysis of coupled pairs. This particular edition of *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) was translated by Coşkun Yerli in 1997,[5] with its 61st edition appearing in 2019, a testament to its success.

Before this current study, Neydim analysed the Turkish translation by Coşkun Yerli, focusing primarily on the translator's decisions in the translation process, particularly in terms of translation visibility. According to Neydim, Yerli uses a target-based translation approach, which increases the visibility of the translator.

In this study, I analyse the translation of Turkish swear words, particularly *goddamn*, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to understand how the translator contextualised them. This is achieved through a

[5] Before Yerli's translation, the work had already been translated into Turkish by Adnan Benk in 1967.

rigorous notation of all instances of *goddamn*, and categorisation of each instance according to McEnery's scale of offensiveness.

As Wajnryb points out, swearing can be categorised into three types: social connection, catharsis, and aggression. While the first two functions are related to annoyance and social categories, the third function, abusive swearing, has a negative valence and is interpersonally oriented, aiming to directly insult or offend. A comparable taxonomy is proposed by Allan and Burridge, who classify such expressions into four principal categories: social, abusive, stylistic, and expletive. Stapleton, like Wajnryb and Allan and Burridge, pinpoints the purposes of swearing as the following: expressing emotion, verbal emphasis, social bonding, and constructing identity. It can be noted that these functions are content- and context-dependant. In this study, Wajnryb's taxonomy is used as it is more suited for the purpose of the study. Thus, I have contextualised *goddamn* as: (a) *abusive swearing* directed to cause harm with antagonism, hatred, and physical violence (b) *casual swearing* directed at non-living objects, situations, experiences, or individuals with no intention to cause harm; and (c) cathartic, directed to express physical or emotional pain.[6] Some examples are provided below to clarify the scale used in this study.

(1) The film was *goddamn* good. (Casual)
(2) Ha-ha, you are a *goddamn* genius. (Casual)
(3) You are *goddamn* stupid. How did you not solve the problem? (Abusive)
(4) You are a *goddamn* whore. How dare you slap me? (Abusive)
(5) Oh, *goddamn* it! I missed the bus. (Cathartic)

Table 2 provides context for the *goddamn* swear word. I used the same scale for translating *goddamn*.

Table 2. Scale for contextual swear word

Contexts in which *goddamn* is used
abusive ( )
casual ( )
cathartic ( )

[6] See, for example, Kapoor, Pinker, Stephens and Umland, and Stephens et al., for their work on cathartic, abusive and casual swearing.

In comparing the ST with its translation, each occurrence of *goddamn* was coded with an (X) according to whether it functioned in an abusive, casual, or cathartic context. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to analyse the data and derive the findings.

7. Results and Discussion

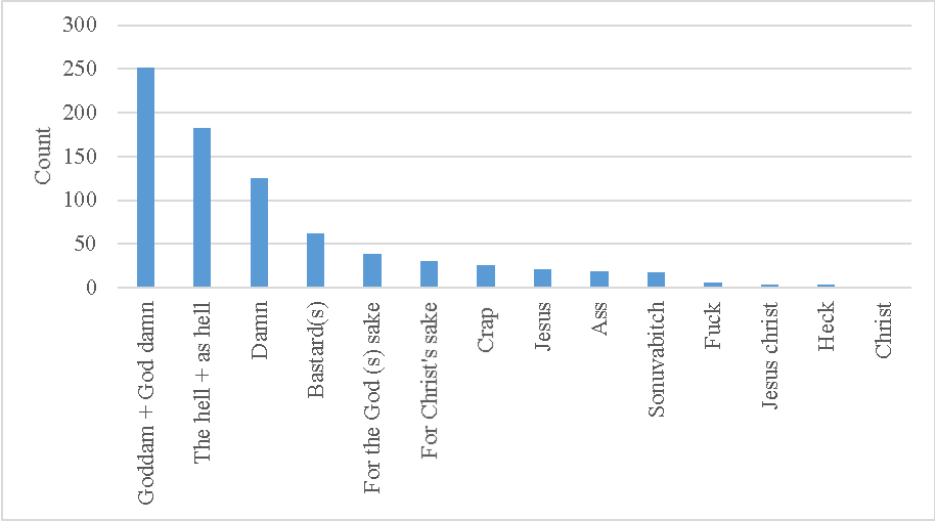
The English text consists of 26 sections, and the distribution of swear words is shown in Table 3 and Fig. 1. The most frequent swear word in *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) is *Goddamn* or *God damn*, which accounts for 31.9% of the total swear words in the book, followed by *hell* or *as hell*, which accounts for 23.1%. The most severe word in English, *fuck*, has one of the lowest usage rates, with only six occurrences (0.8 %). These findings contradict those of other studies that have shown *fuck* to be the most prevalent swear word (Jay, "The Utility" 156). It has also been reported that the use of *fuck* is more frequently associated with male speech patterns[7] (Rayson et al. 136). These findings indicate that the protagonist, Holden, resorts mainly to mild or moderate swear words (McEnery; Thelwall) and his use of mild and strong swear words supports the notion that swearing functions primarily as a means of signalling in-group affiliation rather than as an intention to offend interlocutors (Stenström; Love and Stenström).

[7] See, for example, Díaz-Pérez ("Language and Identity;" "Translating Swear Words") for the rendition of this item from Spanish into English and vice versa in audiovisual translation; see also Leech et al. for word frequencies in written and spoken English.

Table 3. The distribution of swear words in *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger)

Swear word	No.	%
Goddam + God damn	251	31.9%
The hell + as hell	182	23.1%
Damn	125	15.9%
Bastard(s)	62	7.9%
For the God(’s) sake	39	4.9%
For Christ’s sake	30	3.8%
Crap	26	3.3%
Jesus	21	2.7%
Ass	19	2.4%
Sonuvabitch	18	2.3%
Fuck	6	0.8%
Jesus Christ	4	0.5%
Heck	4	0.5%
Christ	1	0.1%

Fig. 1. Frequency of swear words in *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger)



The data indicates that the protagonist, Holden, frequently employs swear words associated with religion, including *Goddam*, *Damn*, *hell* (as in “as hell”), *for God’s sake*, *for Christ’s sake*, *Christ*, and *Jesus Christ*, in

contrast to swear words with sexual connotations, such as *fuck* or *ass*. These findings suggest a significant dominance in the use of swear words with religious origins.

To analyse the occurrences of *goddamn* in both the original book and its translation, I conducted a cross-tabulation statistical analysis, a method commonly employed when analysing categorical variables. Additionally, a Chi-square test and Fisher's Exact test was performed to assess the statistical significance of the data in a cross-tabulation table, which is particularly applicable to categorical variables. In this analysis, I scrutinised and compared the usage of *goddamn* in casual, cathartic, and abusive contexts.

7.1 Goddamn in Casual Settings and Translation Solutions

Casual settings are defined here as settings in which the use of swearing is directed at non-living objects, situations, experiences, or at individuals with no intention to cause harm. Table 4 presents a comparison of the frequencies of the word *goddamn* in the (ST) and (TT). Hypothesis 1 was tested through Chi-square test, and the findings are provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Cross-tabulation table showing the casual use of *goddamn*

			Casual settings in Turkish		Total
			Yes	No	
Casual settings in English	Yes	Count	154	64	**218**
		%	70.6%	29.4%	100.0%
	No	Count	3	30	33
		%	9.1%	90.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	**157**	94	251
		%	62.5%	37.5%	100.0%
Chi-square test $p < .001$					
Fisher's Exact test $p < .001$					

The cross-tabulation analysis of the distribution of the term *goddamn* in the original text and its translation in the translated book provides intriguing insights into the cross-translation of this word. As shown in Table 4, the swear word *goddamn* is predominantly employed in casual

settings, constituting 218 out of 251 occurrences in the ST. This indicates that the use of the term *goddamn* serves a distinct function.

In contrast to the 218 instances in casual settings in the ST, the usage of *goddamn* in the TT drops to 157, revealing a reduction in the use of the term in casual contexts. Specifically in casual settings, *goddamn* was utilised in *both* the ST and the TT in 70.6% of instances, with the translator employing a variety of translation strategies to effectively convey the term's pragmatic function into Turkish, compared to 86.85% in the English ST. Hypothesis 1 was statistically rejected, as a significant difference was found between the ST and TT in the frequency of the casual use of *goddamn* ($p < .001$).

Digging into the nuances of the analysis, Table 5 provides an overview of the different translations and their frequency of use for the term *goddamn* in the TT within casual settings.

Table 5. The pragmatic rendition of *goddamn* in Turkish and their back translations

		Yes	No	Total
words used to render the meaning of *goddamn* into Turkish	*acayip* (strange)	1	0	1
	çılgın (crazy)	1	0	1
	çok haklısın (you are right)	1	0	1
	deli gibi (madly)	1	0	1
	felaket (terrific)	1	0	1
	kıyak (great)	2	0	2
	lanet (goddamn)	147	15	162
	muhteşem (magnificent)	1	0	1
	omitted	64	13	77
	pek de (quite)	1	0	1
	salak (silly)	0	1	1
	Total	218	33	251

As depicted in Table 5, the translator predominantly utilises *lanet*, with other words used infrequently, such as *acayip*, *çılgın*, *çok haklısın*, *deli gibi*, *felaket*, *kıyak*, *muhteşem*, *pek de*, and *salak* to convey the meaning of "goddamn" in casual settings. It is noteworthy that these Turkish words generally lack strong swearing connotations. Except *lanet*, the other terms can function as non-controversial adjectives to intensify meaning.

Interestingly, the data also reveals that in 64 casual-context instances, the translator chooses not to render *goddamn*, leaving it untranslated. In 145 cases—which constitute the majority—the term is translated as *lanet*, a Turkish word meaning "deprived of God's blessing." In Turkish, *lanet* functions as a noun, adjective, or interjection and is used to describe something as terrible, unpleasant, or bad (Turkish Language Association Online Dictionary). Notably, both *goddamn* in English and *lanet* in Turkish carry a clear religious connotation.

In many instances, the translator adeptly endeavours to maintain the pragmatic function of this term by employing a diverse array of lexical items in the TT, as in (6):

(6) a.	*goddamn* autobiography	*lanet* özgeçmişimi
b.	*goddamn* house	*lanet* ev
c.	*goddamn* Cadillac	*lanet* Cadillac
d.	*goddamn* governor	*lanet* Vali
e.	*goddamn* surgeon	*lanet* cerrah
f.	*goddamn* religion	*lanet* din

These instances illustrate that the translator employs *lanet* (goddamn) to re-contextualise the original text for Turkish readers in alignment with the expectations of the new audience. Holden, on numerous occasions, employs *goddamn* as a discourse tool to illustrate the corruption within both people and the system. Disillusioned by corrupted values, Holden endeavours to cling to life through his self-fashioned set of values, and language serves as a prominent component. Repeatedly, Holden utilises this swear word to articulate his frustration with the corrupt organised system or individuals.

Holden's profanity is viewed more as an emotive form of expression than an instrument of insult. Embedded in a vernacular that encompasses localism, social context (Coupland), and non-standard modes of expression (Wolfram and Schilling), Holden's swear words appear to serve natural, pragmatic, and interpersonal functions. His disdain for capitalism and the materialism associated with it is evident in his use of *goddamn* to express his aversion; terms like *Cadillac*, *governor*, *school*, and *professional life* symbolise capitalism, and Holden resorts to *goddamn* to convey his outright disgust.

As readers, we find ourselves more captivated than disturbed by the language Holden employs. *Goddamn* is utilised for emotive utterances

rather than as an instrument of insult. The results corroborate the hypothesis that under certain conditions, swear words like *goddamn* may not be perceived as offensive (Fairman; Jay, *Cursing in America*; Kapoor; Seizer). The findings, on a broader scale, suggest that swearing is more nuanced than merely being taboo or offensive (Hunt et al.).

In the TT, the translator conveys Holden's disillusionment by using *lanet*, preserving almost the same impact through a literal translation. However, in specific instances, the translator opts for a departure from literal translation, choosing instead to intensify the meaning by employing a variety of lexical items as translation solutions, as exemplified in (7).

(7) a. *Goddamn* prince	*kıyak bir herif*[8]
b. *Goddamn* General	*muhteşem General*
c. Cries the g*oddamn* eyes	*deli gibi göz yaşı döken*
d. *Goddamn* long	*felaket uzun*

As demonstrated above, the translator retains his "individual lexical choices" (Mason 23) in the TT. This involves the deliberate exclusion of the harsh tone associated with *goddamn*, leading to a sanitization or toning down of the original meaning in the TT. It is evident that, through these lexical choices, Holden's unrestrained animosity towards phonies has been somewhat subdued. The translator astutely captures Holden's essence by tempering the intensity of the expressions with a gentler and more subdued tone in the TT.

The interplay between context and swearing in the translation reflects Holden's emotional outbursts in the TT. As evidenced by the following examples, the translator, in 64 instances within casual settings, opts to omit *goddamn* altogether, resulting in a nuanced alteration of the linguistic landscape, as in (8).

(8) a. *Goddamn* paper	*kağıdı*[9]

[8] These expressions are back translated as follows:
- a great guy
- a Magnificent General
- cries madly
- terribly long

[9] These expressions are back translated as follows:
- the paper
- my light

b. The *goddamn* light	*ışığımı*
c. *Goddamn* kid	*oğlum*
d. Cut my *goddam*n head off	*suratımı keseyim*

While the specific reasons behind the omissions in these examples remain unclear, it is plausible that the translator identified pragmatic correspondences, leading to varied translation solutions for similar instances. This underscores the translator's discernible influence on the TT. Several studies, such as those by C. Chen, Santamaría Ciordia, Díaz-Pérez ("Translating Swear Words") and Díaz Cintas and Remael, have demonstrated that, as a means of sanitising the ST, translators often resort to omission and "de-swearing," particularly in sub-titled translations as a result of time and space constraints. However, in the translation of novels and short stories, where such limitations may not apply, the reasons for such omissions can differ significantly.

7.2 *Goddamn* in the Cathartic Setting and Translation Solutions

In defining "cathartic swearing," I contend that the pain or frustration experienced by people can lead to cathartic, and an evident by-product of this catharsis is the pronouncement of swear words. Consequently, these words can be viewed as response cries, serving as an adaptation, especially designed to convey the profound impact of the situation we find ourselves in (Vingerhoets et al. 291).

The examples in (9) illustrate how they are used in the TT:

(9) a. God damn it	*Lanet olsun dedi*[10]
b. God damn	*Lanet olsun*
c. God damn	*Lanet olsun*

In casual contexts, Holden most often uses *goddamn* as an adjective; however, in emotionally intense or cathartic moments, a morphological shift occurs, and the expression appears as *god damn.* In this separated

- my son
- let me cut my face

[10] These expressions are back translated as follows**:**

- He said goddamn it.
- God damn
- God damn

form, the swear word is typically used in highly charged situations to convey strong emotions such as shock, frustration, or anger.

The example in (10) from *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) demonstrates this emphatic usage:

(10) "Now, shut up, Holden—God damn it—I'm warning you."

In terms of translation, the translator predominantly opts for a literal correspondence to render this swear word, aligning with the original text, particularly in most casual instances, as we saw in Tables 4 and 5. As depicted in Table 6, *goddamn* is used in 6 cases, with 5 instances in the TT and 1 case where it remains untranslated. Hypothesis 2 was tested through Chi-square test, and the findings are provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Cross-tabulation table showing the cathartic use of *goddamn*

			Cathartic settings in Turkish		Total
			Yes	No	
Cathartic settings in English	Yes	Count	5	1	6
		%	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
	No	Count	0	245	245
		%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	**5**	246	251
		%	2.0%	98.0%	100.0%
Chi-square Tests $p < .001$					
Fisher's Exact Test $p < .001$					

The cross-tabulation indicates a statistically robust association between cathartic settings in the English ST and their representation in the Turkish TT. Hypothesis 2 was statistically rejected, as a significant difference was found between the ST and the TT in the frequency of the cathartic use of *goddamn* ($p < .001$).

7.3 *Goddamn* in Abusive Settings and Translation Solutions

References to abusive contexts in this study specifically allude to instances where *goddamn* is used to cause harm, or to express antagonism, hatred,

or physical violence. Within the context of the abusive use of *goddamn*, the data in Table 7 reveal that, in the original English text, there are 26 instances where *goddamn* is employed in abusive contexts. Hypothesis 3 was tested through Chi-square test, and the findings are provided in Table 7.

Table 7. *Goddamn* in abusive settings in the ST and TT

			Abusive settings in Turkish		Total
			Yes	No	
Abusive settings in English	Yes	Count	12	14	**26**
		%	46.2%	53.8%	100.0%
	No	Count	0	225	225
		%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	**12**	239	251
		%	4.8%	95.2%	100.0%
Chi-square Tests $p < .001$					
Fisher's Exact Test $p < .001$					

Table 7 illustrates that *goddamn* is used in 26 instances in the original text. However, in the TT, it is employed abusively in only 12 cases. This suggests that the translator tends to soften or sanitise the ST for the benefit of new readers. Hypothesis 3 was statistically rejected, as a significant difference was found between the ST and the TT in the frequency of the abusive use of *goddamn* ($p < 0.05$).

The examples of how the translator softens or sanitises the ST are provided below in (11).

(11) a. Split his *goddamn* throat open *Gırtlağına saplayacaktım*[11]
b. He had *goddamn* knees on my chest. *Göğsüme oturmuştu.*

These instances relate to a scene in the text that depicts a relentless and bloody fight between Holden and Stradlater. Holden's strong hatred towards Stradlater is conveyed through the use of *goddamn* as an adjective

[11] These expressions are back translated as follows**:**
- I was going to stab it into his throat.
- He sat on my chest.

in the ST. As readers, we are immersed in the intensity of this scene through the choice of words. However, in the TT, these instances have been omitted. While the reason behind this omission is not clear, the outcome is a neutralised text. The translator might have sought a strong pragmatic equivalence or applied a literal translation solution, as seen in previous cases. Nevertheless, it appears that the decision was made to omit them in the TT.

In the TT, in the 12 abusive cases, the translator seems to prefer using the Turkish word *lanet* to convey the meaning from the ST, as shown in (12).

(12) a. The whole goddam stupid bunch of them *lanet bir budala sürüsü*[12]
b. Goddam funeral *lanet cenaze törenime*

Holden despises the insincere condolences offered by people when his sister, Allie, passes away. He perceives these individuals as lacking genuine sorrow for his sister's death. In the TT, the translator strategically utilises the Turkish word *lanet*, finding a literal correspondence for the relevant portion in the ST. This approach minimises cross-cultural and cross-linguistic disparities between the ST and the TT.

Through a detailed categorization of *goddamn* in casual, cathartic, and abusive contexts, the analysis reveals a consistent pattern of lexical shifts, omissions, and pragmatic adaptations in the TT, which collectively point to the translator's conscious and nuanced mediation of language and culture.

A significant finding is the dominance of religiously rooted swear words in the ST, with *goddamn* emerging as the most frequent, accounting for nearly one-third of all instances. This pattern suggests that Holden's language, while laden with profanity, avoids most taboo sexual terms and instead leans heavily on culturally charged, yet relatively mild, religious expletives.

In translation, the Turkish version reflects both faithfulness and adaptation. The most common solution for rendering *goddamn* is the use of the word *lanet*, a religiously resonant term that echoes the ST's semantic

[12] These expressions are back translated as follows:
- Goddamn stupid bunch of them
- My goddamn funeral

and emotional weight. This lexical choice is particularly effective in preserving the religious connotation and pragmatic function of *goddamn*, maintaining the narrative's stylistic authenticity and Holden's voice. However, the translator also employs a range of creative equivalents (e.g., *felaket*, *kıyak*, *çılgın*, *muhteşem*), which, while lacking the swear word status of *goddamn*, serve to convey intensification or emotional emphasis, consistent with the tone of the ST.

The omission of 64 instances of *goddamn*, particularly in casual settings, is notable. These omissions may reflect deliberate translation strategies of neutralization or de-swearing, often employed to adapt culturally sensitive content or to align with target audience norms. The omission of swearing, particularly when not counterbalanced by an alternative expression of emotional intensity, may lead to a softening of Holden's character, ultimately reducing the authenticity of his rebellious and disaffected voice.

The Chi-square and Fisher's exact test results, all of which show significant values $p < .001$), further reinforce that the observed differences between the ST and TT—especially regarding the use of *goddamn* across various pragmatic contexts—are not incidental. In cathartic uses, the translator tends to preserve the original force of *goddamn* through literal renderings (*lanet olsun*), aligning well with the emotional salience of the source utterances. Here, the translation seems more faithful, preserving the emotive outburst function.

In abusive contexts, the tendency toward toning down or omitting *goddamn* altogether is again observed. Even in scenes of high emotional intensity or physical violence, such as the confrontation with Stradlater, the translator frequently chooses more neutral expressions. This results in a diminished impact in the TT, potentially affecting how readers interpret Holden's psychological state and emotional volatility. The substitution of *lanet* thus may partially neutralise Holden's rage, particularly in scenes where his language underscores emotional trauma or protest against societal hypocrisy.

Taken together, these strategies reveal a translational balancing act: on the one hand, the translator strives to maintain the authenticity of Holden's linguistic idiosyncrasies; while on the other, the translator navigates cultural sensitivities and reader expectations in the target language. The translator's individual lexical choices and selective omissions suggest a pragmatic domestication strategy, where the goal is

not merely linguistic equivalence, but functional and cultural relevance for Turkish readers.

8. Limitations and Future Directions

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of the contextualised use of the swear word *goddamn* in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and its Turkish translation by Coşkun Yerli. It investigates how the functions of *goddamn*—whether abusive, casual, or cathartic—shift across different contexts in both the source and target languages, thereby providing insight into the translation of contextualised swearing. However, the phenomenon has not been examined through the lens of linguistic politeness, which is understood as a discursively negotiated practice rather than a fixed property of utterances (Locher and Watts 9; Locher and Bousfield 3; Culpeper 71). Linguistic politeness itself constitutes a communicative message (Jary 1). It is viewed as a rational, regulated activity rooted in the human need to maintain smooth interaction (Sifianou 23; Watts 44). Politeness and impoliteness exist on a continuum shaped by participants' evaluations and contextual norms rather than by universal rules. Translating swear words therefore involves more than straightforward lexical substitution; it requires careful management of relational work and faces numerous concerns and challenges. For example, *goddamn* may function as a solidarity marker in casual contexts—aligning with positive politeness strategies—while in abusive contexts it becomes a face-threatening act. Translators must navigate such pragmatic nuances to avoid unintended impoliteness or the loss of interpersonal meaning. A relational approach to translation, conceptualised as rapport management, highlights how translational choices influence perceptions of power, distance, and social identity across cultures.

Nevertheless, the present study does not apply linguistic politeness theories to translation, leaving an opportunity for future research to incorporate discursive and stylistic analyses grounded in linguistic politeness frameworks, particularly Brown and Levinson's model, as literary texts may offer a rich site for exploring pragmatic phenomena in TS.

9. Concluding Remarks

When translating a novel such as *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger), which features 1940s American slang and swear words, any translator faces a challenging task of adapting the book for their contemporary readers. J. D. Salinger skilfully portrayed the essence of the 1940s through his teenage character, Holden, making it a challenge to maintain authenticity while ensuring relevance to contemporary audiences. This study conducted a comprehensive examination of the contextualised swear word "goddamn" in *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) and its translation into Turkish. The contextualization of *goddamn* in abusive, casual, and cathartic settings in both the ST and the TT sheds light on how swearing patterns are adapted.

The study has observed that in teenage discourse, the swear word *goddamn* is predominantly employed in casual, abusive and cathartic contexts within the 1940s American slang tradition, suggesting its use as a form of emotional expression. This finding has shown that, in the past too, pragmatic and delexicalised usages of swear words such as *goddamn* were common.

Contrary to other research findings that identify *fuck* as the most common swear word (Jay, "The Utility" 156), *goddamn* accounts for 31.9% of the total swear words in the book, emerging as the most frequently used profanity. Among the 251 instances, 218 involve the use of *goddamn* in casual settings, indicating that it serves as more than an expletive, but rather a pragmatic device revealing Holden's disdain for organised corruption within the system. The translator deploys various translation solutions to convey the pragmatic discourse of the word.

Holden predominantly uses *goddamn* as an emotive utterance in casual settings, and the translator adeptly contextualises it in the TT through diverse translation strategies. Compared to the ST, the translator notably reduces the use of *goddamn* in casual instances, employing it in 154 cases in the TT. In cathartic settings, *goddamn* is employed six times, and the translator employs a literal translation strategy to re-contextualise these instances. In abusive contexts, *goddamn* appears 26 times in the ST, while the translator chooses to use it in just 12 cases in the TT. This pattern suggests a preference for toning down and sanitising the ST for new readers.

The study suggests that swear words primarily function to express one's emotional state rather than to insult. Serving as a mediator between the ST and the target audience, the translator effectively re-contextualises

goddamn in a new language, Turkish. In many instances, the pragmatic value of the 1940s American slang term *goddamn* has been preserved for today's modern Turkish readers.

The broader implication of this study is that swear words are far from universally translatable, as their meanings are deeply embedded in cultural, religious, and social matrices. The translator's choices inevitably reshape the affective tone and interpersonal dynamics of the narrative. These findings affirm prior research such as those by Jay and Janschewitz, McEnery et al., Debray, and Stapleton et al., suggesting that swearing is context-dependent and multidimensional, functioning not solely as a vehicle of offence, but also as a means of identity construction, emotional expression, and social positioning.

The study has sought an answer to the question: How is the contextualised use of *goddamn* in *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) rendered into Turkish across abusive, casual, and cathartic contexts through translation? The findings have shown that the contextualised use of *goddamn* is rendered into Turkish through a combination of linguistic fidelity and cultural adaptation. In casual and cathartic contexts, the translator primarily used the words *lanet* and *lanet olsun* as the appropriate equivalents, enabling the religious and emotive functions of the original expression. The translator skilfully preserves Holden's frustration, irony and emotional intensity while aligning with the norms of Turkish linguistic and cultural expression. However, in some casual situations, *goddamn* was omitted or replaced with some milder Turkish equivalents such as *felaket*, *kıyak*, or *çılğın,* softening Holden's rebellious tone.

In abusive settings, the translator opts for toning down the profanity of the ST. By omitting or replacing *goddamn* with less offensive forms, the translation mitigates Holden's emotional outburst. This approach results in a more culturally acceptable yet less confrontational TT. The translation demonstrates a pragmatic domestication strategy, balancing the preservation of meaning and voice with the sociocultural expectations of Turkish readers. The results show that translating *goddamn* requires not only lexical equivalence, but also negotiation of the words' emotional and cultural resonance. This ultimately shapes how Holden's character and linguistic identity are reconstructed in the Turkish context.

The treatment of *goddamn* in *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger) and its Turkish translation reflects a complex interplay of fidelity, audience sensitivity, and pragmatic nuance. Translators, as cultural mediators, inevitably leave their imprint on the TT, shaping how characters are

perceived and how emotional resonance is achieved across linguistic borders. Furthermore, integrating insights from linguistic politeness theory underscores that translation is not merely linguistic transfer but an act of interpersonal negotiation. Swear words, as salient markers of stance and identity, require translators to balance fidelity with cultural appropriateness, mitigating potential impoliteness while preserving pragmatic force. This relational perspective aligns with current trends in interpersonal pragmatics, which stress the co-construction of meaning and the dynamic evaluation of (im)politeness in interaction. Future research may explore how relational work frameworks can inform translation strategies for taboo language, ensuring that affective and identity-related dimensions are maintained across languages.

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ES Review
SPANISH JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

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Zenón Luis-Martínez, editor. *George Chapman. The Shadow of Night & Ovid's Banquet of Sense.* Modern Humanities Research Association, 2026, Pp. 432. ISBN: 978-1-781889-80-0

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La Modern Humanities Research Asociation (MHRA) ha publicado en este año de 2026 un volumen dedicado a las dos primeras obras de George Chapman, que vieron la luz en 1594 y 1595 respectivamente: *The Shadow of Night* & *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*. La edición se debe al profesor Zenón Luis-Martínez, de la Universidad de Huelva. Se trata del tomo que hace el número 74 dentro de la emblemática colección que la MHRA dedica a la edición crítica de textos.

Estamos, en mi opinión, ante un trabajo excepcionalmente riguroso y exhaustivo que reúne las características de una edición crítica y, además, aporta en su larga introducción un estudio seminal sobre los títulos en cuestión, el contexto de la tradición lírica en que se enmarcan y una contribución personal original del profesor Luis-Martínez que, por su especialización académica, hace difícil pensar en quién más adecuado que él para abordar esta tarea.

Como podemos leer en la contracubierta del volumen, solemos recordar a Chapman, sobre todo, por sus muy exitosas traducciones de la *Ilíada* y la *Odisea* de Homero: imposible no pensar en Keats en este momento y recordar hasta qué punto las opiniones de los Románticos son lugar común que llega hasta nuestros días. Se apunta, también en la contracubierta, que la poesía de Chapman se ha calificado tradicionalmente de *obscure* y las obras contenidas en este libro como algunas de las más difíciles de la lengua inglesa. Utilizo las palabras que aparecen en el volumen que aquí reseñamos porque no pueden ser tildadas de una opinión personal de quien esto suscribe, sino la expresión de un

sentimiento generalizado que bien justifica lo oportuna y necesaria que resulta esta edición.

El editor comienza su introducción (1–111) utilizando como punto de partida una cita de Swinburne que marca bien a las claras la extendida opinión que sobre el estilo de Chapman en sus poemas se apunta en las líneas precedentes: aparecen allí las palabras "pedantry" y "arrogance" entre otras, que le llevan a tildarlos de "the most indigestible food ever served up to the guest of a man of genius by the master of the feast" (1). El estudio concienzudo del significado de "dificultad" y de "oscuridad" son objetivos que Luis-Martínez aborda desde el primer momento porque, como consigue demostrar, son clave en la propia concepción que Chapman tiene de su poesía. Distingue entre dos tipos de oscuridad: una "disabling," la otra "illuminating." En palabras del editor "the poet was convinced that a certain darkness was the surest vehicle to revealing the true force of his inventions" (3). Y el poeta reconoce, con una sinceridad que sorprende (sobre todo, para alguien a quien Swinburne asocia con el término "arrogancia") que no siempre está su creación a la altura del ideal al que aspira. Después de todo, si hasta Homero a veces dormita, ¿cómo no lo iba a hacer Chapman?

Luis-Martínez se propone demostrar que los dos volúmenes de poesía, objeto de la presente edición, son "digestible and enjoyable food" (4) y para hacerlo se vale del trabajo erudito que sobre este material existe, como punto de partida para ofrecer su propia lectura de los textos: la bibliografía que aporta de las páginas 415 a 430 da buena cuenta de esta afirmación.

Sería imposible reseñar de manera pormenorizada las más de cien páginas de densa escritura que Luis-Martínez dedica a hacer de los textos de Chapman "digestible and enjoyable food:" nos limitaremos a seguir el bosquejo de la estructura de su estudio introductorio para que el lector interesado pueda concentrarse en aquellos aspectos de su argumentación que resulten más adecuados a sus objetivos.

1. *Chapman's early poems in context* (6–17): Hitos en la vida de Chapman. El concepto de dificultad partiendo de la conocida distinción de

Steiner entre "underlying clarity" y "obstructed formulation". La relación de Chapman con los círculos literarios de la época (Northumberland, Leicester, Southampton), Shakespeare. Lo esotérico y lo mágico.

2. *Poetics: The Judicial Eye* (17–34): Luis-Martínez subraya el interés de Chapman en la poética: aunque no escribe obra alguna sobre la misma, en los prefacios, epístolas dedicatorias y similares expresa sus opiniones sobre el tema. Hace hincapié en la idea de un artista que lucha para encontrar la expresión adecuada para sus ideas. Me resulta especialmente interesante el paralelismo que establece entre el entrenamiento del ojo en las Bellas Artes (Miguel Ángel) y el del lector en la literatura.

3. *Genre* (34–60): Extensa discusión sobre el género como principio de organización. Para Chapman el género es un instrumento, no un fin en sí mismo. *The Shadow of Night* y la tradición helénica de los himnos. *Ovid's Banquet of Sense y* la tradición de la elegía de Ovidio.

4. "*Sweet Philosophic strains*." *Poetry and Philosophy* (61–85): La idea de que la poesía arroja luz sobre la filosofía iluminando sus espacios más arcanos: poesía como expresión de la belleza de la filosofía. Cuál es la función de la poesía para Chapman. Reescritura del mito de la noche "the nocturnal as the deep search of knowledge" en *SN*, "sensory perception and sensual enjoyment in relation to the intellect" en *OBS*.

5. *Divine Shadows and Heroic Frenzies: The Brunian Mind* (85–108): En este apartado final Luis-Martínez hace uso de sus profundos conocimientos sobre el trabajo de Giordano Bruno en Inglaterra entre 1583 y 1585 para hablar de la influencia del italiano sobre Chapman. Creo que sustancia sus argumentos de manera convincente, sobre todo cuando pensamos que como el mismo editor señala (85) "the sophisticated blend of poetry, myth, emblem and philosophy that made up Bruno's Italian dialogues must have appealed to a writer whose 'absolute' poems are the result of an equally intricate amalgam of elements."

De las líneas que cierran esta introducción (108–11) me gustaría destacar las que se dedican a ilustrar la concepción que de la materialidad del libro tenía el propio Chapman: portada, epígrafes, emblemas, glosas, etc. son todos el resultado de decisiones medidas por el autor. Cuando

pensamos que todavía la creación lírica está pasando en ese momento histórico (fines del XVI) de la circulación en manuscrito a la imprenta no podemos por menos de reseñar la importancia que estos paratextos tuvieron para el isabelino. Un acierto, sin duda, haberlos conservado en la edición que reseñamos.

Desde el punto de vista de la tradición textual, Luis-Martínez sigue las primeras ediciones de *The Shadow of Night* (1594) y *Ovid's Banquet of Sense* (1595). En el cotejo llevado a cabo de distintos ejemplares no se encuentran variantes significativas. Las notas textuales recogen lecturas alternativas, enmiendas y "those cases of spelling regularization that involve significant choices" (113). Tanto la ortografía como la puntuación han sido modernizados, lo que—como puede entenderse—ayuda al lector a la hora de abordar composiciones como las del volumen presente, con elevado grado de complejidades de construcción y concepción.

El editor se apoya en lo que denomina, siguiendo a Steiner, las "contingent difficulties" de los textos de los que se ocupa, para justificar la profusión de notas a pie de página que son de carácter vario: lingüísticas, traducciones de citas en otras lenguas que Chapman incluye en las obras y referencias culturales y literarias. Más información sobre estas últimas aparece en el Comentario, que es exhaustivo (249–403) Visualmente, aparecen bien diferenciadas las glosas de Chapman a los originales y las notas del editor: del volumen total de estas últimas puede darnos una buena idea el que el espacio que ocupan en la página (y lógicamente con un tipo de letra mucho menor) es con frecuencia tan amplio como el dedicado al texto primario.

El Comentario al final del volumen es en sí mismo una mina de información: un intento minucioso de, entre otras cosas, relacionar de manera sistemática fuentes y paralelismos en otros autores. Se trata de 150 páginas dedicadas a arrojar luz sobre la dificultad, que Chapman reclama como uno de los principios estructurales esenciales de su acción poética. Realmente, un gran mérito del editor.

No es el momento en que vivimos precisamente el más propicio para poder apreciar la belleza de la complejidad y el uso de la dificultad como

medio expresivo y constructivo en literatura (más bien en nada). Atreverse a abordar la lectura y edición de *SN* y *OBS* intentando desentrañar las mimbres usadas en su composición me parece tarea hercúlea y Luis-Martínez lo logra de manera sobresaliente. Al hacerlo, recupera dos obras que, creo no equivocarme, son más bien una referencia erudita que un texto leído y estudiado (que no comprendido): si algo puede hacer cambiar esa realidad es una edición como la que la MHRA nos ofrece (por cierto, cuidadísima formalmente). Estamos, en definitiva, ante un ejemplo de lo que la tradición filológica y erudita puesta al día puede hacer y debe hacer. Felicitaciones al profesor Luis-Martínez: creo que Chapman ha encontrado en él el lector ideal de sus dos primeros volúmenes líricos.

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ES Review
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Eusebio de Lorenzo Gómez and Jorge Braga Riera, editors. *Shakespeare and the Representation of Political Power: Readings for the Twenty-First Century*. Kassel, Edition Reichenberger (Europäische Profile 75), 2026. Pp. 166. ISBN: 9783967280647.

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This essay collection joins an ever-lengthening list of "Political Shakespeare" studies, a field given particular impetus by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield's influential volume of that title published in 1985 (with a second edition following in 1994). Over the four decades since, several overlapping factors have contributed to its longevity—not least the "real world" situation, as the editors of this contribution contend. In the theatre the "modern dress" tradition (stretching back a century now) has demonstrated the adaptability of Shakespeare to the contemporary world, how plays might be mapped onto the present, and vice versa. Kenneth Branagh's "Falklands" *Henry V* film ushered in a trend so successful that today theatre audiences are more likely to see King Harry et al. in combat fatigues than in the "medieval" garb popularised in Laurence Olivier's 1944 film (itself nevertheless moulded to fit the times, dedicated unironically to the allied forces landing on the Normandy beaches). In the academy the value of the stage as a site of reinterpretation has been borne out perhaps most significantly in the rise of "Global Shakespeares," a field that in part recuperates historical performance but is concerned principally with the local adaptation (and appropriation) of Shakespeare, rather than—or in addition to—a more traditional, deferential acceptance of the "soft power" Shakespeare has so often represented, not least in Britain's former colonies. Thus stage-focused scholarship has benefitted from the rise of performance studies as an academic discipline, which in turn has fed back into materialist-inflected approaches to Shakespearean drama more broadly.

This modern "reinvention" of Shakespeare (which, as Gary Taylor demonstrated, goes back all the way to the later seventeenth century)

means that Shakespeare has long been "our contemporary," in Jan Kott's famous formulation, cited in the volume under discussion. Consequently, however (re)imagined Shakespeare remains *sui generis*, central to the culture in ways that distinguish him from his long-marginalised contemporary playwrights—or, indeed, any other cultural figure. Ironically, inevitably, attempts to re-read, reinterpret, reorientate Shakespeare—to whichever "political" end (which includes of course avowedly "apolitical" approaches or productions)—contribute to bolstering that status. Recognising that "[t]he problem, of course, is *Shakespeare*—the whole aura of elusive genius and institutionalized profundity." Alan Sinfield famously suggested that since "[t]he underlying pressure is towards deference and inertia" even a radical reworking of Shakespeare by writers such as Bertolt Brecht, Arnold Wesker, or Edward Bond may "still, by its self-conscious irreverence, point back towards Shakespeare as the profound and inclusive originator in whose margins we can doodle only parasitic follies" (178–79). Sinfield was writing in an environment where Shakespeare was either considered to be "above" politics or (as in the oft-quoted words of a leading UK politician at the time, Conservative member of parliament Nigel Lawson) it was simply assumed that "Shakespeare was a Tory" (qtd. in Heinemann 203). The question that arises, then, forty years on, is whether we are in a different place today. Might decades of academic and theatrical endeavours have rescued Shakespeare from the institutional co-optation (in the university, school, and theatre) that Sinfield feared, and the political nature and potentiality of the corpus become available for fresh examination? Have years of "Political Shakespeare" altered the environment in which these initial critical engagements—urgent as they were perceived to be then—emerged? In other words, has the academy's "Political Shakespeare" placed Shakespeare at a different kind of centre, "rescuing" the plays from a cultural zombification against which the cultural materialists of the 1980s railed?

With *Shakespeare and the Representation of Political Power: Readings for the Twenty-First Century*, which appears in the Europäische Profile series published by Edition Reichenberger, the editors, Eusebio de Lorenzo Gómez and Jorge Braga Riera, are in little doubt that Shakespeare speaks in particularly resonant ways to today's world. The present situation, de Lorenzo's introduction reminds us, is one of "persistent

challenges of internal and external threats"—"domestic populism and external geopolitical aggression" respectively (viii). In a lengthy introduction he makes a case for "Shakespeare's role as a foundational figure in Western political thought" (ix), and sets out a framework for what follows.

Shakespeare and the Representation of Political Power brings together six essays, each of which offers a reading of one or more Shakespeare plays. The collection opens with a wide-ranging discussion of Shakespeare's history plays set alongside the textualizing of the New World, most notably in Hakluyt's famous compendium of narratives published in 1589 and (significantly expanded) 1598–1600. In "Tropes for a Renewed Nation: William Shakespeare's History Plays and England's New World Promotion Literature" Francisco J. Borge associates both categories of representation as being concerned with legitimacy, each in complementary ways promoting English nationhood. The second essay, "Winters of Our Discontent: Political Readings of *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar*" by Antonio Ballesteros González, surveys these plays' performance histories from the 1590s to the present. Here the objective is to demonstrate these plays' historical and continuing relevance to the political environments in which these various productions appeared. Following this is an essay by Dámaso López García focusing on *The Tempest*: "*Raison D'État* and Politics in Prospero's Island." Continuing one of the volume's recurring themes, legitimacy, in this reading the play offers "a complete introductory course in Political Theory" (76). The fourth contribution, by Eduardo Valls, "'More of Your Conversation Would Infect My Brain:' Populism and the (Un)Political in *Coriolanus*," approaches this, arguably Shakespeare's most overtly political play, in terms of the rise of populism in the twenty-first century. Consideration of that play's oft-noted political concerns continues with Ana Contreras Elvira's "Reflejos de nuestras miserias: *Hamlet*, *Lear* y *Coriolano* en la escena contemporánea," though here the focus is diffused further, the essay also taking in *Richard II*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*. Although the last of these titles is included in the First Folio among its comedies, it is a helpful reminder that political readings need not be confined to the "usual suspects" among the histories and tragedies. John S. Sanderson brings the volume to a close with "Foreign Location and Political Criticism in Shakespearean Comedy: *Much Ado About*

Nothing and *As You Like It*," where Italian and French settings respectively offer sites of English Elizabethan concerns, which with the opening essay neatly bookends the collection with reminders of the plays' original historical contexts.

The introduction is lengthy and thorough and—on first reading—it feels overdone, since in a series of subsections designated "lessons" Eusebio de Lorenzo sets out in detail how each contribution will fulfil the remit of the subtitle, "Readings for the Twenty-First Century." One wonders about this strategy on the assumption that the essays will make the case for themselves; however, for the most part they do not, rendering the editor's framing of the collection invaluable. Indeed, without it there is a distinct lack of coherence or continuity of purpose. Perhaps the best way to approach this collection, therefore, is to read each essay and its respective section in the introduction together, in sequence.

Certainly, it is for the reader to infer a case for "Shakespeare our contemporary" in the opening essay, which is firmly anchored in early modern England. Drawing on his longstanding work on Richard Hakluyt's role in promoting a national identity, Francisco J. Borge contends that Shakespeare's history plays are doing something rather similar. Reading these plays through six subheadings—legitimacy, corruptibility, language, providentialism, alterity, and religion—he demonstrates a wide knowledge of the canon; inevitably, only so much can be said for each play, and while each of these subheadings is amply illustrated, not all readers would share the view that Shakespeare "advocated a predominantly providentialist view of history which would definitely serve his myth-making enterprise" (7).

Similarly ambitious in scope is Antonio Ballesteros González's performance history of *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar*. The respective accounts of their stage histories are more thorough than would be found in modern editions of the plays, but partly as a consequence it proves difficult to establish a coherent argument. But when Ballesteros asks, rhetorically "Which side is Shakespeare on?" one or two other contributors to the collection might take note of his wholly sensible answer: "We do not know" (46). Here (and in the previous essay) use might be made of the printing history of plays, specifically *Richard III* (*Julius Caesar* only appearing the 1623 First Folio) as one indicator of political significance.

Dámaso López sets out his stall with an excessively long review of Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman's 2019 Norton edition of *The Tempest*, the result rather sapping the essay's narrative momentum. When he does tackle the play's politics, he ably demonstrates how "Shakespeare points out scenarios in which political actions always take place following a pre-established model" (75). Personally, I am not keen on modernising that licences scholars to label Ariel as "chief of police on the island" (73), but much better for this reviewer is how López traces the successive transfers of power, from the pre-play scenario to the denouement, and the play's exploration of perhaps its central concern, legitimacy.

Eduardo Valls's reading of *Coriolanus* is the most sophisticated and densely argued essay of the six, and it is here that its overarching remit is most directly addressed. Approached in the light of early twenty-first-century populism, he argues, the play "reveals the *theatrical* construction of modern populist subjectivity" (88, italics added). He is surely right in remarking that "[t]he play arguably speaks across the political spectrum I would say, indifferently" (88), for that word safely exonerates Shakespeare from any putative endorsement of any one "faction"—even if such a position were possible. (Lawson [qtd. in Heinemann 203] had opined that this play is "written from a Tory [Conservative] point of view.") Valls finds that *Coriolanus* is not only (as is conventionally accepted) a play about politics as performance (*Julius Caesar* and *Richard II*, among other plays, invite similar approaches), but also portrays "the performance of the 'unpolitical'" (102)—that is, of populism. In the currency of our time, all forms of politics are performative.

The title notwithstanding, Ana Contreras's contribution ranges far and wide, doubling the number of stated plays she considers in what is, for this reviewer, a rather eccentric piece whose bold claims undermine its scholarship. Identifying allusions to contemporary persons or events carries with it the risk of overstating the case, where speculation hardens into fact. In this essay the plays are taken to speak for and to particular political ends, which Contreras therefore traces back to the playwright; but there is no evidence to support the claim that, for example, *King Lear* is Shakespeare's expression of his own views about King James's plan to unite the kingdoms (and not only the crowns) of Scotland and England (114–15). Seeking precise historical coordinates for plays, so that text fits neatly into context, is reductive and unsupportable: allusions to real events

and people are sometimes plausible but no more than that. The methodology here, which might be glossed as the quest for a key to unlock the play, is flawed. This is a pity, because when the essay shifts gear in the final section to discuss a 2018 production of *Coriolano* in Craiova directed by the author herself we read of an interesting, theatrically-innovative street performance that deployed a medley of Shakespearean material in the form of a spoken manifesto. In alluding to the 15M movement of fifteen years ago, Contreras offers a telling contemporary analogy for a political Shakespeare today.

Finally, John D. Sanderson's shows how foreign locales are underlaid with recognizably English contexts in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*, the function of which is to resolve problems in Italy and France respectively. In *As You Like It* (c.1598–1600) Shakespeare adds a contemporary dimension to pastoral by evoking the practice of enclosure—the seizing and collectivising of land, and the removal of tenants, to maximise economic yield through sheep farming; Sanderson cites a Richard Wilson essay in support of the view that here the play glances at the Enclosure Riots in Oxfordshire in 1596. While historically the land-owning aristocracy caused the socio-economic problem, Sanderson remarks that in the play "Shakespeare avoided this issue and blamed everything on the change of the evoked Elizabethan order" (140). While at times one feels there is a faultline running through these essays, where the distinction between dramatist and text is blurred, in the case of enclosure in *As You Like It* a biographical detail is perhaps not irrelevant. Surviving documents indicate that Shakespeare himself became caught up in a controversy over enclosure in Stratford. His apparent acquiescence in, or lack of resistance to, a plan hatched by Stratford neighbours to enclose land is the subject of Edward Bond's play *Bingo*. That these traces of Shakespeare's behaviour yield only ambiguity and uncertainty about what actually occurred is not inappropriate, given the multifarious ways the texts he produced can be reinterpreted to serve quite distinctive turns.

In the 1980s the question/statement "Political Shakespeare" posited a starting point into exploring the ideology at work in the teaching and staging and writing about Shakespeare. Fast forward forty years and the "political" in the equation in this collection would seem to mean something much narrower, namely modern neo-liberal democracy (Valls' use of Althusser and Gramsci apart). There is a lack of interrogation of

wider questions precisely because the parameters have been established at the outset, and the interest is in "the Representation of Political Power" rather than its origins and legitimacy (notwithstanding the significance of the latter in the Borge, Ballesteros, and López pieces). That is a pity, not only for readers who might hope for a more open remit, or even the airing of the possibility of alternatives to a (Western) system whose failings are obvious, but because such an approach would be in the spirit of enquiry, rather than solution. Modern appropriations such as "Shakespeare for Business" or "Shakespeare and Leadership" mine the plays for useful, applicable scenarios; at times one feels that the volume runs the risk of presenting readers with "Shakespeare for Politics."

Nevertheless, Shakespeare scholars and postgraduates will find much of interest here, with coverage of a significant number of plays providing variety; in the spirit of debate, readers will find a good deal to wrangle with. Essay collections are typically uneven, and while several essays are rigorous in terms of structure and argument, a little more quality control would improve the form of one or two others. There is a marked gender imbalance, which is surprising—not least in a volume foregrounding political matter—and it is a little odd that one essay appears in Spanish while the rest are in English: it would seem logical to have undertaken to have Ana Contreras's contribution translated. A minor quibble is the frequency with which a new paragraph is signalled immediately following an offset quotation, even where this material is then discussed, but this may be house style. The index seems to be confined to titles, events, and proper names, so there is no entry for a key word such as "legitimacy," though we can find the current incumbent of the White House in the company of Richard III and Julius Caesar.

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Fatma Akçay. *Transnational African Identities in Contemporary Urban Fiction: Community, Hospitality and Friendship.* Routledge, 2027. Pp. 248. ISBN: 9781041328896.

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Fatma Akçay's *Transnational African Identities in Contemporary Urban Fiction: Community, Hospitality and Friendship*, by exploring narratives of African migrants, delves into how the identities of characters are negotiated through their cultural, communitarian and relational realities. Published by Routledge in 2026 as part of the *Routledge Studies in Comparative Literature* series, Akçay's work focuses on four major literary works: J. M. Coetzee's *Youth* and Zoë Wicomb's *The One That Got Away*—to explore South African migrants in the United Kingdom; and Teju Cole's *Open City* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*—to look at Nigerians experiences in various cities, including countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Belgium. The central concern of this monograph is to elucidate how these novels explore belonging and hospitality through said narratives of migration. Akçay showcases how the protagonists move through new host cities and cultures while still psychologically and affectively connected to their places of origin.

The author's analysis highlights how the different geographical settings function as spaces in which identity is tested, negotiated, imposed and/or transformed through the lenses of hospitality, community and affect theory (through ideas of friendship). The arguments and analysis of the book are built around much well-established research throughout various fields. First, Luc Nancy's operative and inoperative communities, along with Ferdinand Tönnies and Zygmunt Bauman's conceptualisations of isolation and economic inequality constitute one of the pillars of Akçay's work: a critical understanding of the idea of community. She notes how it is not an inherently positive idea: while it can provide solidarity, recognition and emotional support, at the same time, it can impose boundaries and conformity. Adding to it, this work also draws on Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality and the ethical encounter with the stranger,

which complicates the phenomenon as not always being as positive as it might appear to be. Such framework is employed in Akçay's work to explore how the systems of inclusion and exclusion can be sustained through valuable interpersonal relations, utilizing the selected novels to elucidate what lies behind the failure or success of such relationships.

One of the book's most important additions to the field is its understanding of transnational African identity as relational rather than merely geographical. Migration studies frequently deal with issues of family, kinship, ethnicity, diaspora and national identity. This work moves into a more specific territory by focusing specifically on friendship and community more prominently. Unlike identities based on nationality or ethnicity, friendship can emerge through relationships of our choice and be based on common believes, ethics and/or tastes. And, to further this idea, the study also relies on Kristeva's work to look at the characters estrangement from their own cultural identity and community.

Following an introduction and theoretical-methodological chapter, Akçay devotes individual chapters to each of the case studies. Chapter 3 focuses on J. M. Coetzee's *Youth*. This novel deals with the only case throughout the present work that deals with a white character migratory experience and that is located in the 1960s' (as opposed to the other novels set in the 21st century). The protagonist in this fictionalized memoir is incapable of maintaining friendships or reciprocating hospitality, which isolates him. The author argues how, in his quest to develop his artistic career, John finds his pervasive South African background as "an oppressive and suffocating force" (76). The analysis shows that despite trying to distance himself from a culturally particular community, which the protagonist perceives as a provincial attitude, he never manages to do so. This novel presents the least hopeful example among the corpus regarding the possibility of community creation and hospitality.

Chapter 4 presents an exploration of Zoë Wicomb's *The One That Got Away*, expanding the exploration of the interconnectedness between South Africa and Scotland. Since the collection includes twelve stories that showcase multiple specific experiences and directionality between the cities of Cape Town and Glasgow, Akçay chooses to focus on five stories that deal with Capetonians experiences in the aforementioned Scottish city. Ideas of provincialism appear in this chapter, with the author highlighting the impact of Wicomb's "redefinition of cosmopolitanism" (102) as more than simply a form of contesting nationalism. What this

particular case study elucidates, thanks to Akçay's insights, is the dislocation of identity that is caused by a sense of alienation in hostile urban environments that trump the establishment of communities as well as communication. The author notes how Wicomb rejects an essentialist view of identity as well as community, providing a useful vision of how the disorientation felt by experiencing confusion in an unfamiliar city, mixed with how the colonial past defines how the colonized are perceived.

The monograph's next chapter shifts to the Nigerian experience with Teju Cole's *Open City*, whose protagonist, Julius, defines the novel's perspective through his distrust of community "formed around aspects of identity such as race, skin colour, ethnicity, place of origin and ideology" (135) due to their exclusionary nature. The guest cities (New York and Brussels) are represented as global, inhabited by people from different backgrounds. However, Akçay notes that this does not frame them as fully welcoming spaces, and analyses their representation by emphasizing how the urban spaces for migrants are shaped by persistent power dynamics. As shown through a close reading of various passages, Julius' point of departure in terms of community is also contrary to traditional formations of communitarian relations in his home country. Even though he manages to find self-constructed bonds with others, "his relationships, based primarily on intellectual interest, do not last long enough to provide him with meaningful support or shield him from his profound isolation." Thus, Akçay argues, Derrida's notion of unconditional hospitality "remains unattainable" (149). This section continues with two detailed subsections delving on each of the cities.

In Chapter 6, which examines Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, Akçay explores Ifemelu's experiences foregrounding race, gender, class, love, language and privilege-centred power. The author notes how the novel serves as an example of the way in which society is structured "creating social boundaries that keep certain groups in specific spaces while marginalizing others" (175). Ifemelu's relationship with both Nigeria and the United States complicates any straightforward account of diaspora. Beyond the protagonists, Adichie's narrative also enables Akçay to examine how identity changes across cities and social contexts. The chapter also delves into the pressures of assimilation and the effects of internalized racism, particularly through language (how it is spoken), hair (which the protagonist straightens) and social customs (for example, her behaviour in the classroom). Akçay highlights these markers of identity as

playing a key role in Adichie's work, revealing the dynamics of racial division and, therefore, act as motivators for inclusion and exclusion. At the same time, the transnational experience disrupts "rigid conceptions of race and racial characteristics" (179), opening space for a more fluid understanding of identity that resonates with Chielozona Eze's concept of "Afropolitan identity." The book also notes how the character of Obinze offers a different perspective and experience, with his narrative "[resisting the] exclusionary logic" (186). The author delves into how the narrative here pays attention to the urban environment and to the established friendships and romantic relationships of the character, albeit in less detail than Ifemelu's.

Akçay's achievement through this publication is to shift attention from a simplistic understanding of the migratory experience and identity as being "between" two nations (or more) toward a questioning of who migrants inhabit the cities "with," who welcomes them and how those relationships are the basis of their belonging. Ultimately, this model of inclusion through community provides alternatives to understanding cultural identities as merely based on race, ethnicity and nationality. The book's greatest strength is its theoretical and argumentative coherence, despite focus on two distinct experiences (South African in the UK and Nigerian in the US), and analysing four novels, which might at first seem like too broad of an enterprise. In Akçay's work the frameworks of community, hospitality and friendship are not three unrelated concepts placed beside one another but rather, they form a progression: community asks how people belong together, hospitality asks how communities respond to outsiders and, finally, friendship serve to delve into what kinds of voluntary relationships can emerge between people who do not n

Transnational African Identities in Contemporary Urban Fiction: Community, Hospitality and Friendship is a substantial and intellectually ambitious study that makes an original contribution to contemporary African literary criticism. This is undoubtedly an illuminating work for scholars of African literature, migration and diaspora studies, comparative literature, urban cultural studies and critical theory, and definitely a timely contribution given current sociopolitical trends and outlooks on immigrations throughout the world and specially in the US. Akçay demonstrates that the most revealing question posed by transnational fiction may not be where migrants (can) belong, but how they (can) relate to those around them.

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